

Town & Country

PHILIPPINE EDITION

**GRETCHEN
COJUANGCO**
HER PLACE
IN THE SUN

**THE LUXURY
OF TIME**

**GILDA CORDERO
FERNANDO:
TASTING THE SKY**

**PLUS:
T&C's FIRST
ANNIVERSARY
LUXURY
SURVEY**

SEPTEMBER 2008

P195



ISSN 1908-7675



TOWN AND COUNTRY

Gretchen Cojuangco
in Paul Cab

The Balance of Home



An example of how team work, lots of love
and just being true to yourself can help transform
a penthouse apartment into a place called home.

By Sunshine Lichauco de Leon

Photographs by *At Maculangan*

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HEN YOU WALK INTO THE PENTHOUSE apartment of Zelda and Max Kienle, you are surrounded by such an abundance of space and light that your mind, no matter its previous frame, instantly brightens. Perhaps it's the high ceilings that greet you, or the unobstructed panoramic view of Metro Manila and the Pasig River, but there is something extraordinarily welcoming about the Kienle home. It is an apartment with the energy of a house, and there is so much natural light coming from every direction that you could very well still be outside.

Max and Zelda fell in love with the asymmetrical space the moment they first saw it eight years ago, as they easily started to imagine what it could become. With rounded corners, a balcony curved on one side yet straight on the other, and a rectangular living room, the possibilities were endless. The space also met both their basic needs—Zelda wanted a bright place with a view and her husband wanted somewhere high up where he could open the windows and go outside.



The entrance foyer.



The versatile shelves in the family lounge are a signature design of the Kienles' furniture company.

When the Kienles first saw the bare concrete space of the main floor, it was divided into different rooms by walls that were soon destroyed to meet their need for one big open living space. "We have a very small family and did not need all these rooms," Zelda explains. "In our last home, the children were still young and we used to pretty much live in our rooms. Since this is a big apartment, I wanted to really live in and enjoy every part of it." A main goal was to have enough shared entertaining space so that their daughters—Jessica, then 11, and Stephanie, then 13—could have their friends over while she and Max entertained their own friends and each could feel separate yet part of a whole.


Zelda explains that instead of using walls, they divided the main living space into zones, each with a distinct decorative theme. "The living room is oriental, the family 'lounging' area is more modern and contemporary and the foyer and dining room more traditional. I was at first afraid to mix everything within what is really just one gigantic room, but the space turned out to be big enough."

Every decision that went into creating the Kienles' home was a real team effort, with each detail being attended to by either one or both of them. The sense of balance and harmony that the apartment exudes reflects the wonderful synchronicity of their relationship. The fact that this creative duo runs a furniture



Home for the Kienles reflects exactly who they are and it is filled with what they love.



A woman with long brown hair, wearing a blue and purple patterned sleeveless dress with a large bow at the waist and black strappy heels, stands in a bright dining room. She is leaning her right hand on the back of a wooden chair with a light-colored upholstered seat. The room features a wooden dining table, a large potted plant on the left, and a window in the background. A framed abstract painting is on the wall to the left.

While her husband Max took the lead in designing the furniture, all interior decorating decisions were left to Zelda Kienle's careful consideration.

HAIR BY TONY DUSICH FOR L'ORÉAL TECHNIQUE. MAKEUP BY HAROLD SANTOS FOR MAYBELLINE NEW YORK.

On a Parisian holiday, she met Yves Saint Laurent and was one of the first American women to wear his *Le Smoking* tuxedo jacket. Fifty years my senior, she was still passionate about life. I had much to learn.

My experience at the Golden Door was more significant than a fleeting caprice. It was a turning point. Until then, life seemed like a maze of demands that left me with no sense of self. I began to ask questions.

In the spring of 1980, my life changed entirely, and in a most unexpected way. It was traumatic and wrenching and glorious, but it changed. I separated from my husband of 19 years and moved to New York, the capital of the world where people went to reinvent themselves, reexamine their beliefs and live out their dreams. Jewelry designer Angela Cummings, who had migrated from Germany as a young woman, understood this direction. Her advice was straightforward: "In this city, the only sin is to be boring. Don't try to be like everyone else. You're a modern Asian, and that's intriguing."

Life comes in seasons and from the outset, I was aware that this was a season of luxury in the broadest sense of the word. How long it would last I could not know. But this gift was in my hands, this gift of utter freedom with children settled in schools, a terrific Polish housekeeper, and no one to please.

The first thing I did was to go hang-gliding. I learned to fly. With a kite for wings, I felt like a bird surrendering to the god of the wind. The glider had no mechanical device of any kind. It swayed to shifting waves and currents, wandering up and down, to and fro, as though playing to a silent beat of its own. Success and safety depended on instinct, timing and sheer guts.

In retrospect, I see that gliding was so much out of character; it must have been a blinding burst of recklessness. Still it was the means of opening the doorway to my freedom. Walls that hemmed me in were shattered forever. I arrived at a whole new world of thinking and being, more disparate than anything I had ever known.

It prepared me for the next stage I had to handle: the Empty Nest Syndrome. My older children were in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and now it was time for the youngest to leave home. I was deluged with every word of warning, and decided to grieve in style.

As my son prepared for his departure, I prepared for my arrival, for that startling instant when I would return to my apartment. Alone. I set an exquisite table for one, using my finest china, sterling and crystal. Long white candles were ready to be lit; Dom Perignon was being chilled. To create a festive air, there were flowers in every room, including a sumptuous arrangement by floral artist Ronaldo Maia who was the rage at the time. Classical music played.

The drive to Andover was filled with anticipation. I settled my son, conferred with the headmaster and, fully reassured, headed for home. As soon as I glimpsed the Manhattan skyline, feelings of lightness and joy welled in my heart, catching me by surprise. It was the last thing I expected. Fear and apprehension began to fade. I became deeply happy, luxuriously free. Why, my dance with Life could begin!

I would dance with the arrogant, irreverent, eloquent, elegant, brilliant, creative, compelling, curious people of New York. The very thought was intoxicating.

I became a foreign visitor in the Cosmopolitan Club, a volunteer at the Asia Society, a member of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the MoMA, the Whitney, and the Film Society of Lincoln Center. Previews of New Directors/New Films were particularly interesting because after each screening, the director spoke and took questions from the floor. On one occasion, there was an intense discussion about symbolism in the film. The director threw up his arms and said, "When I was making the picture, none of your ideas even occurred to me. Don't put meaning into everything, don't over-analyze. Enjoy life. Feel it and hold it. That's all you need to do."

Teddy Abueva was one New Yorker who knew how to hold life. He gave scintillating dinners and achieved the art of mixing diverse people together. It was here that I met Nancy Graves, an extraordinary artist who did prints, paintings, installations, sculptures, and films. She broke away from formulas and created wild explosions of form and color, much like strong dreams that stayed in the subconscious long after they were seen. A contrast to her radical art, she loved to dress like a Victorian lady with antique jewelry, stylish hat, ruffled lace blouse and long flowing skirt. Life was her play.

Involvement in the arts invariably meant fund raising. And New York thrived on being extreme. At a benefit ball of the Metropolitan Museum, I stepped into a world at once resplendent and restrained. A full orchestra performed in the grand entry hall, and string quintets played in open galleries throughout the museum. Lavish buffets were served in smaller exhibition rooms, giving the ball a feeling of intimacy. Dancing was held in the Temple of Dendur where nothing was spared to make it breathtakingly beautiful. Amid a whirl of music and art and dazzling finery, it was a scene suspended in illusion.

Time moves and yet one may not sense its movement. In New York, it felt as though time had come to a standstill if only for me to stop running and to pause, to seize the moment and to become. I learned that life is a point of view, and that one needs silence to discern its language. To recognize one's season is a gift. To be present for it, and to delight in its subtleties, is having the luxury of time. ✕



The living room is the bright place with a view that the Klenes had wanted all along.



A sculpture by a close friend of Max serves as a playful bookend.

manufacturing and retail business gave them the perfect tools to make their ideas a reality.

"Part of the fun was putting things together," Zelda says. "We played with things we already had, got new things and put things together." The couple would just visualize what would be best in one area and once they fit a piece to a space, they would see what they needed to fit the next space.

Although Max designed most of the wood and rattan furniture created specifically for the apartment, Zelda provided him with ideas of what she would like to see developed. Max explains, "One day she said she needed a bar so I drew a sketch, and sent it to the factory to make a one off piece. Other times, however, we just modified the designs on our existing line of furniture."

Whereas her husband may have taken the lead on furniture design, all interior decorating decisions were left to Zelda's careful consideration. She describes her well-thought-out solution to the challenge presented by the mainly cement, metal and glass space. "If not balanced correctly with other elements, the space could have given off a very cold feeling. The only wood was the flooring and this was not enough. I was determined to make it warmer by bringing the outside inside. I brought nature inside in order to tie everything together."

The plant life and fresh flower arrangements spread throughout the home provide the color that brings the space to life. The potted plant-filled terrace, strategically located between the dining and living areas, has been turned into a garden and the ability to see it from anywhere you sit is refreshing and relaxing.

Zelda chose a spectrum of earth tones and woven fabrics because she feels they are warm and best suited to living in the tropics. "If I lived in Paris, I would furnish my home differently," she says. The couple's ingenuity is evidenced by both the use of mirrors under the staircase to provide more depth and continuity to the area and the jungle-themed Chinese screen enclosed in


a specially made wooden frame and hung on a second-storey wall which overlooks the living room.

The Kienle family travels twice every year and the majority of decorative elements scattered strategically throughout the house, from primitive art statues to a Ramon Orlina glass sculpture, are representations of these journeys. Max says, "There is nothing really of great monetary value in our home. It's more filled with things which remind us of where we have been, or are gifts from loved ones."

Every object is a memento of a special meaning or a story, and Max relates the history behind one such piece. In 2002, he joined the "Paris-Dakar" race, known as the "mother of all races", a 12,000 km, 21-day motorcycle competition through the desert, which starts in France and ends up in Senegal. "When I finished it," Max says, "my good friend, who was a sculptor in Zurich, made me a beautiful sculpture of a motorcycle." Zelda provides a finishing touch to the story: "He then joined the race a second time but crashed, so the same friend made a second sculpture but this one resembled a bent-up motorcycle which had been in an accident."



Fresh flowers spread in every corner provide color and bring the space to life.


A woman with long, wavy brown hair, wearing a light-colored sleeveless top and dark pants, is sitting on a light-colored sofa. She is smiling at the camera. In the background, there is a dining table with wooden chairs and a tall wooden cabinet with various items on top.

Zelda speaks clearly of the inspiration behind it all: "I want people to feel at home when they visit."

The collection of antique ceramic Chinese vases, which Zelda painstakingly pieced over the years, is what she treasures most dearly. "I love the shapes and their sense of history—the fact that each one has an incredible story, dating back to the 10th century and that they are still intact after all that time."

The Kienles just celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary, and the story of how their life together began reinforces the notion that sometimes you can find love in the most unexpected places. Max, a Swiss-German engineer who spent the first adventurous 15 years of his life in Zaire, had been sent to the Philippines to work for an American company; he soon became so enamored with the country that he decided to set up his own business involving luxury handicrafts. Max spotted the 19-year-old Zelda one night when she was out with friends at Q disco, a 1980s nightspot. "I was sitting at the bar when she walked to the comfort room," he recalls with a smile. "Luckily, the way the place was designed meant she had to pass the bar on the way. I stopped her and asked her to dance. She said no."

Zelda glances at her husband with a quiet smile and then enters the story as if on cue. "I had the typical conservative Filipina

A view of an open terrace with a wooden floor. In the foreground, there are two dark wooden chairs and a small wooden table with a lamp and some potted plants. The terrace is enclosed by a glass railing, and beyond it, there is a large garden filled with various potted plants. In the background, a city skyline is visible through the glass.

The open terrace with its garden of potted plants is a refreshing sight from anywhere in the apartment.



The dining room (bottom left) is done in traditional style but with Zelda's contemporary touch of plain cut grass centerpieces.

upbringing and of course was wary of any man I had not been properly introduced to. But he then came over to where I was sitting and asked again, this time looking me in the eye and saying 'It's now or never.' Everything was history from that point on. After that first dance, we never quit."

Max and Zelda have worked well as business partners since they first met, perhaps because they each have their own domain. "We have a good balance actually," says Max. "Zelda is in charge of marketing and I oversee production, and although sometimes we don't agree, we have learned to understand each others' jobs well enough to reach a compromise."

Max describes their taste as "*Halo-halo*," and speaks of the ease with which they work together. "Although we come from different cultures, we surprisingly have the same tastes," he says. "If you showed us a few choices, we would pick the same thing. She rarely shows me something I don't like." With her arm affectionately draped across her husband's shoulder, Zelda adds fondly, "I guess we grew into each other."

When asked what the secret is to working so closely with a spouse on so many projects, the Kienles' answers are as clear as the transparent walls in their home. "First of all, you really have to be in love with someone, in that special way that you can't describe," says Zelda. "There is a lot of respect and understanding. I have always said that he is a companion, friend, business partner, husband, and father of my children. This keeps our marriage

so strong." She pauses, her demeanor serene yet full of feeling. "He is everything to me, and consistently from Day One it has always been like that."

Max adds, "It is a little work daily. If you don't communicate your differences every day, it builds up until the time where you can't make up for the difference so it's best not to let the gap happen."

Perhaps the most striking feature about what they have created together is simply that their home reflects exactly who they are and it is filled with what they love. "We are not sophisticated," Max contends. "We are simple and natural. We do not do anything to impress or have any artificial elements. We just do something or choose something because we feel like it."

Zelda speaks clearly of the inspiration behind it all: "I want people to feel at home when they visit. I don't like anything stiff. People should feel free to throw a pillow around and sit wherever. When I invite friends over to chat, it's always casual. A home is for living in, enjoying and most of all a place to 'be well' in!" ✕

