

MODERN



MAGAZINE

DESIGN

DECORATIVE ARTS

ARCHITECTURE

www.idealmodern.com

FALL 2010


\$8.00 US

€7 £6 ¥750

BRL 14 DKK 44



A tatami room, part of the third-floor master suite, is serviced by a dumbwaiter to the kitchen. The owners found the low chairs in a local antiques store.

A photograph of a room with a large window and a wooden chair. The window looks out onto a cityscape with buildings and greenery. A wooden chair with a red cushion is in the foreground. The room has a wooden floor and a white wall.

Radiant Cool

*Designing
the interiors
of a Hong
Kong house,
Johanna
Grawunder*

*creates an
atmosphere
at once suave
and luminous*

by

Gregory
Cerio



Wood, stone, bricks and mortar, concrete, steel, and more—all are staple building materials in the architect's toolbox. But ask architect and designer Johanna Grawunder what she considers the key component in the creation of a built environment and she will answer: "Light." Light creates spaces, explains Grawunder, who spent the early years in her career honing her talents in the offices of the late, limitlessly inventive Milan-based architect Ettore Sottsass Jr.: "Throughout the history of architecture, one of the central aims of architecture has been the control of natural light—via windows, porticos, courtyards, skylights, and such." After nightfall, the distribution of light was left to other means, from torches to lamps. "But when I was with Sottsass, we began to look into the idea of integrated lighting—of incorporating lighting into the architecture."

In the interior design of the Fung residence in Hong Kong, commissioned by a local business executive and his wife, Grawunder was given unusual leave to explore ideas of integrated lighting and other lighting concepts. The results are both sublime and bravura.

When she and her team arrived on the project site, the three-story courtyard house was basically a concrete shell. "The goal was to make the place livable, warmer, and, hopefully, charming," says Grawunder. "I tried to keep the furniture designs very minimal and not too idiosyncratic, as the clients would later add many layers of antiques, Chinese paintings, and other objects. So we concentrated on making large color fields of lacquer or wood—or mirror or crystal—to form the backdrop for their lives."

Walls in the master suite, for example, are sheathed in polished burlwood. The suite occupies the entire third floor and includes such amenities as a tatami room, with a low table and cushioned floor seating for breakfast or tea. "There's a dumbwaiter to the kitchen," Grawunder says. "The Fungs could spend all their time there if they liked."

Much of the furniture—both freestanding and built-in—was custom made in Italy. Some of Grawunder's pieces have what might be called a dignified dynamism, such as a pair of Macassar ebony sideboards with brushed stainless-steel tops in the large living and dining room. (There is

The walls of the master bedroom are faced in polished burlwood. Grawunder designed the bed as well as the carpet. Its pattern is an exaggerated rendition of traditional English florals. In one guest bathroom, opposite page, Grawunder's "Wedge" mirror for Boffi hangs above a Ferrari red lacquer washstand.



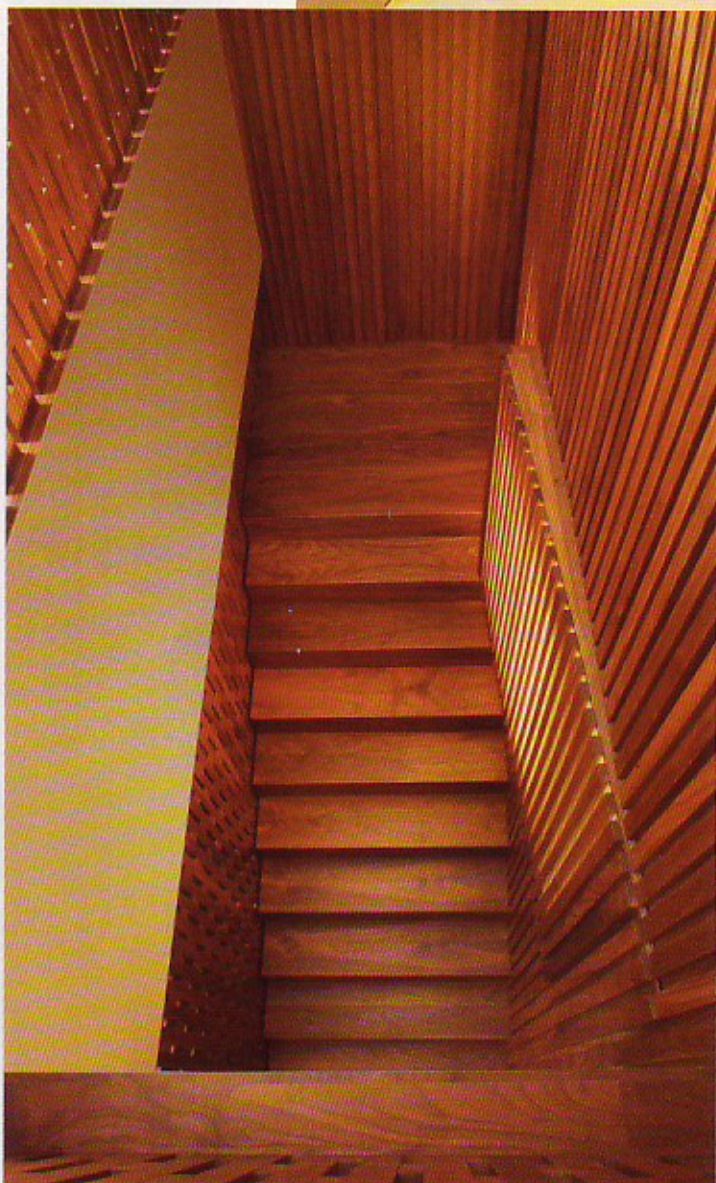
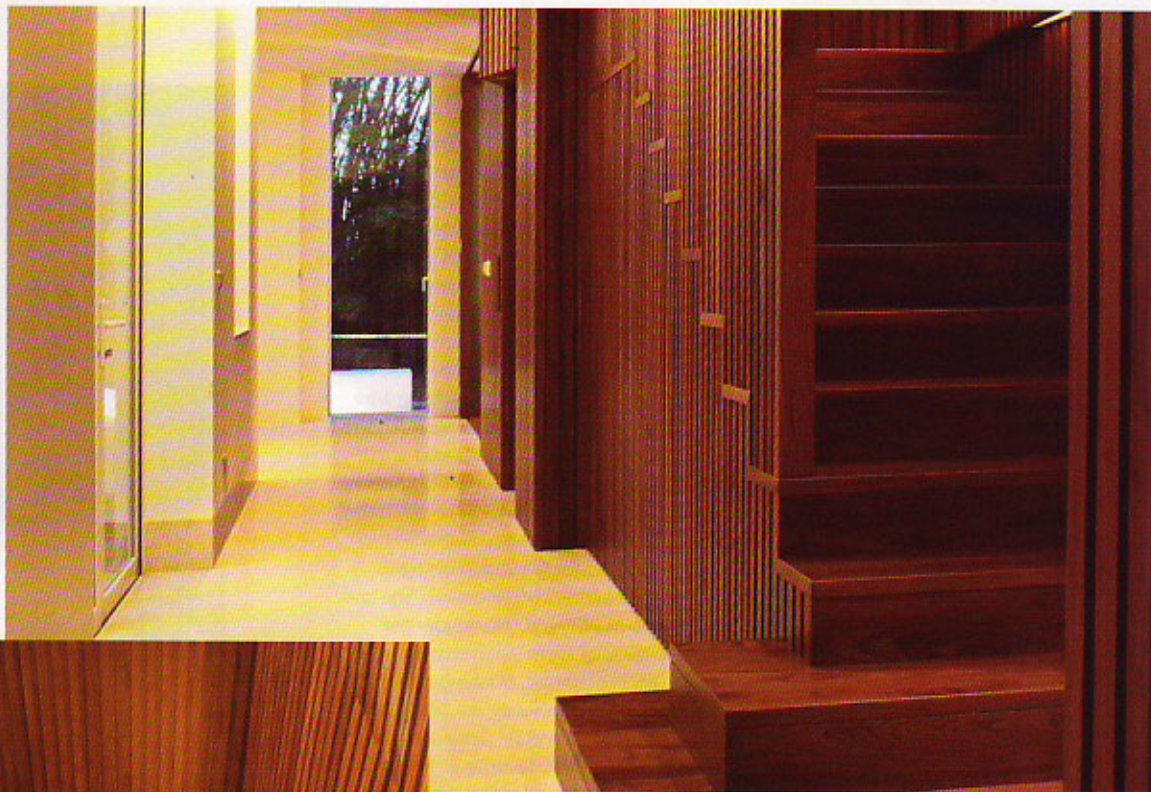


"I tried to keep the furniture designs minimal and not too idiosyncratic," says Grawunder
"We concentrated on forming a backdrop for the clients' lives"

Two views of the scrollwork wrought-iron partition and banister that Grawunder designed for one of the two stairwells in the house. Note the recessed lighting in the house. Note the recessed lighting in the stair treads.



Solid walnut slats—spaced two inches apart—line the other stairwell. Lights embedded in the walls shine through the interstices, creating a warm glow.



a bar made of the same materials in a separate clubroom.) Lacquer is everywhere, in furnishings ranging from cabinetry to the dining table, which has a removable lazy Susan. "It's a nod to Chinese furniture and technique, but in forms with a sleek Italian spin," the designer says.

Naturally, Grawunder had to make some adjustments to her plans. The clients wanted buffed stone floors in the public rooms, but decided on carpeted floors for the upper stories. Grawunder and her associates designed "a series of custom carpets, which are sort of take-offs on traditional English carpets—flowers and tartans. We exaggerated the patterns, and used very strong colors," the designer says. "I especially love the flowered carpets. They are crazy."

The house has two stairwells, though one was conceived for service use and was to be left unadorned. But traffic patterns soon revealed that the second staircase would see plenty of use, so the clients decided to spiff it up. Mrs. Fung is fond of wrought iron, so Grawunder devised a partition and banister composed of oversized scrolls—baroque-moderne—and the pieces were fabricated by a local craftsman.

In the primary stairwell Grawunder executed one of her masterstrokes. Integrated lighting is used throughout the house—in valance lights, incorporated into built-ins, in recessed floor spots—but nowhere to such sublime effect as in that staircase. The designer lined the space with long

one-and-a-half-inch thick square shafts, crafted from solid American walnut in Italy. She had the local contractor, Permasteelisa Interiors Pacific, array the shafts at two-inch intervals, in front of a wall with inset lights. "To soften up all that concrete, wood seemed to be the way to go," Grawunder says. "It's really like a three-story piece of furniture, which glows in the evening from the lantern-like protrusions in the walls."

The most dazzling lighting effect, however, was achieved almost by accident. Mrs. Fung was avid to have a classic crystal chandelier in the living room. To a diehard modernist, this was anathema—yet Grawunder managed to make the scheme her own. She consulted with lighting makers in Italy and they referred her to, of all places, Plattsburgh, New York—home of Schonbek, a venerable lighting company that specializes in chandeliers. She and Mrs. Fung selected a model, and Grawunder persuaded her to buy three of them. Each chandelier was enormous: eight feet in diameter, "Oldenburg-ish" in scale, Grawunder jokes. "In this way, we were able to cover the ceiling entirely in crystal," Grawunder says. "It created a 'light ceiling'—my favorite form of lighting installation." In the evening it is like sitting beneath a trio of galaxies. It is lovely, exhilarating, and a tribute to Grawunder's, so to speak, light touch. **M**

Three mammoth crystal chandeliers by Schonbek of Plattsburgh, New York, are grouped to breathtaking effect in the living and dining room. Grawunder designed the steel-topped Macassar ebony sideboards, as well as the lacquer dining table. The chairs are by the Italian firm Sawaya & Moroni. Grawunder also devised the backyard lap pool and terrace. The floor of the pool is lined with glass-ceramic tiles, while the terrace and the pool surround are made of Chinese lava stone.



