

The green apple

AFTER YEARS IN NEW YORK CITY, AN ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS ARCHITECT AND HER FAMILY MOVE BACK TO THE PHILIPPINES AND INTO AN EXEMPLARY HOME

BY CHINO DELA TORRE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY WILLIAM ONG

Living area of the Crago apartment allows dramatic views of the city skyline. The coffee table is made from recycled wood. Natural light is maximized to reduce electrical costs. But glass is tinted to keep out heat.



AFTER 13 YEARS of living in New York City, Liza Morales Crespo and her family decided to return to the Philippines. It was inevitable that in re-creating the family's home here, she would use her years of experience working as a green architect for an important firm in the Big Apple.

Liza has worked on numerous projects cited for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED-certified, and she herself is an accredited LEED AP Sustainable Design consultant. "I want to improve how we build things here," says Liza, "especially now that I have children. I want to do my part in maximizing our world's resources by creating sustainable designs." There was no better place to start than at home, a 350-sqm, two-story penthouse at the heart of Ortigas Center, shared with husband Robert and children Joaquin and Francesca.

The expansive apartment resembles a New York loft. The walls are bare and white save for select art pieces that echo the owners' previous life. One such conspicuous piece is a large photo of the Empire State building that greets you upon entry of the unit. "It's one of my personal favorites," says Liza. "I used to work there before. There's another photo that shows New York in winter. We're sentimental that way."

Liza used white terrazzo tiles made from recycled marble chips for most of the common areas and bamboo flooring for most of the second floor. Liza chose bamboo for its durability. "Bamboo grows back quicker so it's a more sustainable material," says Liza.

Ample naturally ventilated service areas on both floors of the apartment provide substantial crosswind and allow less reliance on air conditioning. ABOVE: In the scabbing area, at the end of a large foyer, a Le Corbusier sofa given by Liza's old firm in NYC. Adjacent are two chairs from Japanese used office furniture store, Office Busters. Red accents are distributed throughout the unit. Circles painting by New York-based Art Zamora.



Customized dining furniture made from sustainably harvested wood from Naaka Village, Bul Trigu, nested another on platform.



On the lower level, kitchen, dining, and living areas all flow into each other, emphasizing the luxury of space. "A lot of walls were knocked down and the stairs were relocated near the peripheral windows, contributing to a bigger open space," explains Liza.

There is a play in floor level. Part of the common space was elevated like a stage, and what remained underneath was smartly converted into a storage cabinet. "Having a raised floor makes the space a lot more interesting," explains Liza. "Just recently, we hosted a party and the band was situated there. We're thinking of putting a baby grand piano there in the future."

Natural sunlight

The integration of wood veneer in the kitchen cabinetry and accent walls, as well as the use of *andrawe* as the material for the dining set, give the space a warmer feel. "The wood used to build the dining set is reclaimed wood from Nueva Vizcaya," says Liza. "Most of our wood furniture is sourced the same way. Even the steps of our staircase came from old railroad tracks from the 1930s or '40s."

The loft has a bright and inviting atmosphere. Every corner seems

to be bathed in sunlight. "We made sure that sunlight is accessible in all areas of our home when we designed the layout," says Liza. "Even if all our light fixtures use CFLs (compact fluorescent lamp), we hardly turn any on during the day. It's a great way to save energy."

A logical concern, however, would be the amount of heat generated by sunlight, Liza quickly responds. "We integrated cross ventilation in our layout, too. We made sure wind can circulate throughout the unit. The breeze cools down the place. Of course, having a Big Aas fan helps too." No pun intended. Liza is part of Philippine GeoGreen Inc., the exclusive distributor of Big Aas Fans which are definitely eye-catchers with their sleek industrial appearance and a wingspan of over three meters wide. Liza's Big Aas fan is strategically placed above the open staircase which improves the movement of air between the first and second floors.

The staircase, with its metal handrails and wire balusters, leads to a cozy study area, one of Liza's favorite places in the condo. It is not unusual for her to bring her work home. The study area is also a place for her to interact with her kids when they do their homework or use the computer. A second-hand study table from a Japanese surplus

OPPOSITE PAGE LEFT: Superakita counter tops by South Pacific Marble in the kitchen facing the dining area. OPPOSITE PAGE RIGHT: Between living and dining areas a powder room. Dual flush water closet, Shand 2 by Duravit, and Sunami sink by Scarabeo

ABOVE: Refurbished office table from Office Buttons matched with red stackable chairs and trash can from Ikea. Over the stairwell is a Big Aas fan with a wing span of three meters.



TOP LEFT: Daughter's bedroom features a wall mural of silhouettes and sconces in the shape of flowers. **LEFT:** Master bathroom sink integrated in the bathroom counter is by South Pacific marble. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Master bed with concealed storage made from sustainably harvested wood from Nueva Vizcaya. Plant boxes in raw cement finish are from Manila Seedling Bank, Quezon City.

store was resourcefully converted into a work table, which neatly tucks in the cables of their electronics. "Nice furniture doesn't need to cost an arm and a leg anymore," says Liza. "You can buy inexpensive ones and get a little creative. My kitchen island is actually from a Japan surplus store, too. I just added white granite on top for it to blend well with the kitchen aesthetics."

Stunning sky view

The study area connects to a hallway accessed by the master and children's bedrooms. Following the theme of the unit, the design for the kids' rooms is subtle. The rooms are generally white, but have the right touches of color and design elements that make them very charming. The girl's room has pink and citron colored curtains by Percy Ocharan, a mural of silhouettes on one wall and flower-shaped wall lights. Liza explains that it would be easier for her daughter to redecorate the room

when she gets a little older, and a change of curtains and accent wall would do the job.

Across her daughter's room is the master bedroom. It has a relaxed look as everything is kept neutral. Stark white cotton sheets complement the masculine solid wood frame of the bed. It is low and inviting and positioned to face the floor-to-ceiling windows. Liza says, "Once in a while we get lucky to find the sky so clear that you get to see Manila Bay in the horizon and be amazed by the beautiful sunset."

Asked for her best tip for making a home sustainable, Liza responds, "You just have to ask, ask, ask. The supplies aren't as accessible here as in the US where vendors are aplenty. But we do have them. It doesn't have to be expensive either." Liza admits that her home is still a work in progress. She expects its interiors to evolve as her family grows. From the looks of it, she and her family have already arrived on greener pastures. **PH**