



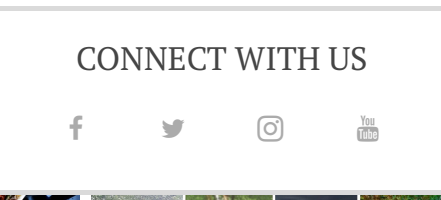
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Inside North Syquia: How the Spirit of Carlos Celdran Lives on in His Former Apartment

The space is masterfully transformed by its new Italian tenant, but the influence of the cultural artist can still be felt in the details.

 By **DEVI DEVYRA** | Feb 13, 2020



IMAGE JILSON TIU

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Barely an hour into his first day back in Manila, Italian **Luca Bombeccari** found himself walking along McKinley Road—barefoot—with his friend, the late

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“That was actually hilarious,” Luca says, “We were participants in a performance art (‘The Nazareno de McKinley’ by Ian Madrigal) for Manila Biennale, the art festival where Carlos served as executive director.”

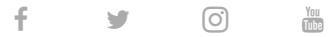
Italian fashion and graphic designer Luca Bombeccari is the current master of this unit in North Syquia Apartments; the red chair in the living room is from Tesa Celdran's art practice, The Chair Project.



PHOTO BY JILSON TIU.

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departure for Spain in January of 2019. "I took over the master's bedroom when he left," Luca explains, "which was very different then. I moved the furniture around and introduced colors to make it more interesting, and made it my bedroom."

Luca's revamp didn't happen in one go, but in random installments that depended on the triggers that would inspire the bedroom's new master. A visit to the National Museum's newly painted galleries, for example, sparked the idea for the intense red color of the bathroom, its fiery character amplified with the addition of a lamp from nearby Chinatown. The blue mood lighting came to Luca after a night out at one of Manila's bars. "I liked the idea of blue light against a blue wall, because the monochromatic effect was just so cool. I already have the blue wall and a lamp, so I just went out to buy a blue bulb."

Luca redecorated the master bedroom to express his personal taste, balancing the old-world vibe with pop graphics.

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He added the white line drawings on the wall, as well as the assemblage of Fornasetti's iconic face illustrations mounted on a panel to simulate the bed's headboard.

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PHOTO BY JILSON TIU.

Originally, the Italian wanted to add frames to the walls to break the blue expanse, but decided on painting white lines instead, describing them as “some sort of fake moldings.” Liking the effect, Luca, a freelance fashion and graphic designer, continued the line story on another wall, giving the room a strong focal point.

Later on, he found a perfect space for asserting his Italian roots—the tall panel which simulated a headboard where photographs from the iconic Fornasetti

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Blue light amplifies the monochromatic color story, while plants invigorate the space and complement the warmth of the wooden floors and furniture.

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PHOTO BY JILSON TIU.

The bathroom's red palette was inspired by the newly painted gallery walls of the National Museum; a lamp from nearby Chinatown intensifies the color scheme.



PHOTO BY JILSON TIU.

Though the makeover didn't cost much, the outcome certainly looks polished and feels cozy at the same time. "I believe that it doesn't have to be expensive to look expensive," Luca explains. "It's just a matter of being efficient and creative with whatever you have."

Tesa built the bar and kitchen counter, which she adorned with old wooden parquet tiles that echo the chevron pattern of the floor; the sculpture behind the bar is by Carlos Celdran.

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PHOTO BY JILSON TIU.

A huge mirror adds depth and brightens the room in the daytime. It also reflects the words 'but what is filipino,' which was written across a beam to immortalize Carlos' search for identity.

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North Syquia's elegant scale and spectacular views evoked the old-world glam that appealed to the Italian who says he "feels rich, without being rich" living in unit 24. "It's just so fancy." The generous spaces in the combined living-dining area also made it perfect for entertaining. "I'm a very homey person," Luca admits, "so I like asking friends over. That's why this apartment is perfect for me. And I really just like the mood."

Tesa Celdran. “I don’t remember exactly when we took over the lease from the previous tenant,” Tesa admits. “Maybe it was around 2008 or 2009. I started to renovate the kitchen when I moved in sometime in 2016.”

She continues: “Because I lived there, I knew how to live with the space. Like, when I enter, I wanted a bar. We also always have guests over, so I created ventilation in the kitchen, otherwise, it’s just too hot.”

The open layout, with the bar flowing to the dining and living areas, makes the space ideal for intimate gatherings.



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A wall traces the lives of the unit's past tenants, starting with the hat most identified with Carlos, next to a poster designed by Kenny Tai for the late artist's own festival. Below the hat is a portrait of Carlos' widow, Tesa, by Johann Espiritu, accompanied by a black and white photo that shows the couple kissing by Eddieboy Escudero.

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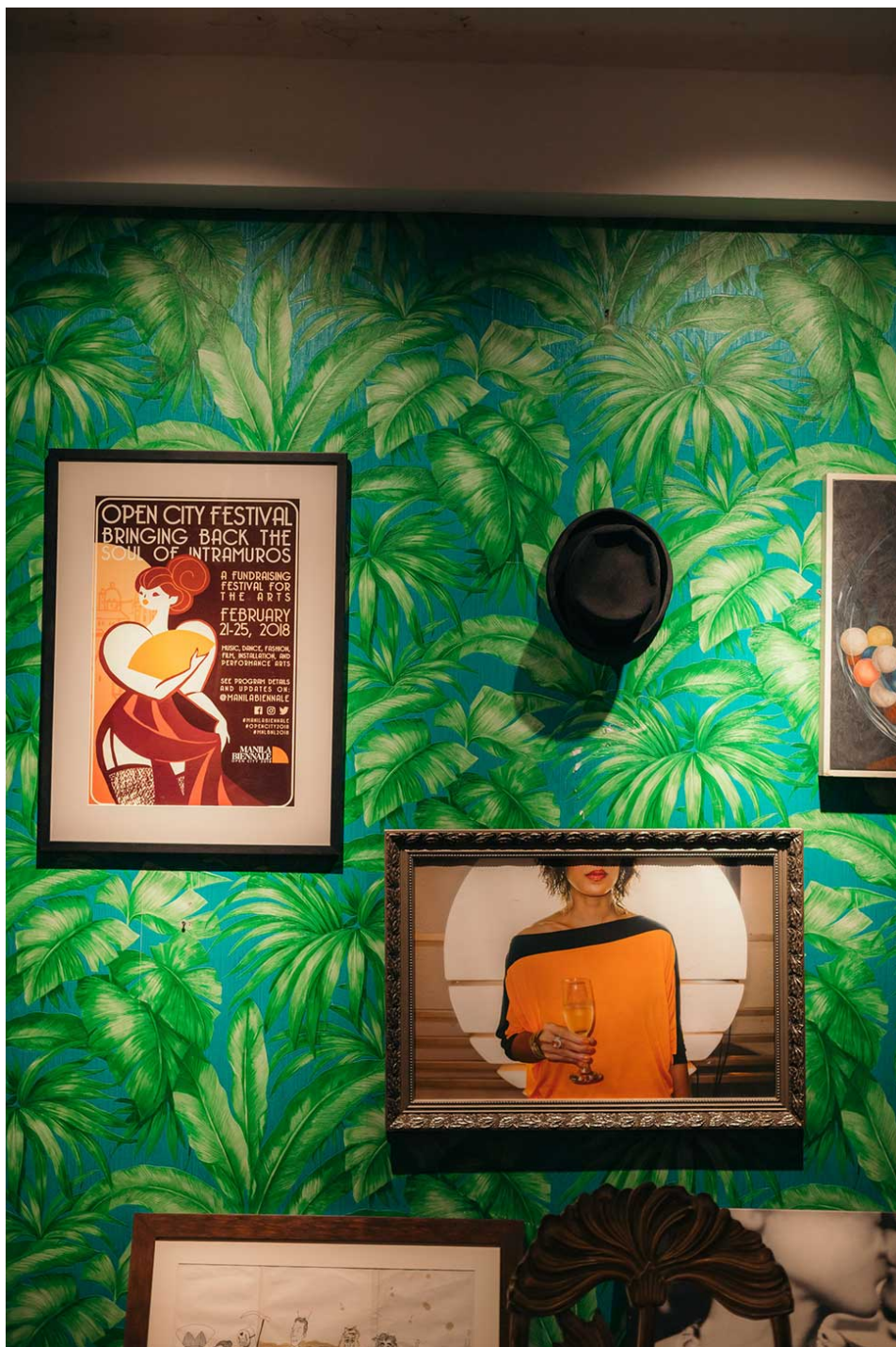


PHOTO BY JILSON TIU.

Though not a decorator or interior designer by profession, Tesa has an intuitive knack for style and a meticulous eye for details. She also knew exactly what she

Everyone who has seen the place will agree that Tesa's bar is the room's bravura piece, its panels lined with old parquet tiles that echo the floor's vivid black and white chevron patterns. "I found the wooden flooring while driving around," Tesa recalls, "in a house that was being demolished." She ordered the Versace wallpaper, which was used for accent walls and as interior lining for the cabinetry.

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The intimate light of Manila asserts itself in the corners of the historic apartment.





PHOTO BY JILSON TIU.

“Carlos was the one who really wanted to move to North Syquia,” Tesa says, “because it seems to be a rite of passage for an artist.” She too liked the space. “My God, the 10-foot ceilings, hello? Wrought iron details, poured concrete walls, the view... you can’t go wrong with that. And also the community, when you’re part of them, and you feel protected.”

Carlos’ passing in October of 2019 left a void in the cultural landscape, but his presence is felt in unit 24. Reflected in the mirror by the entrance are the words

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