

How the high-rise Horizon Homes suite gets its wow factor
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When Francesca Muzio visited the Philippines for the first time last year, the architect was so struck with what the country could offer design-wise that she promptly fired up an e-mail to her business partner, interior designer Maria Silvia Orlandini, containing photos she had taken during visits to furniture workshops in Cebu.

“She went crazy!” recalls Orlandini with a laugh.

Being Italians with a remarkable portfolio of high-end design projects all over the world, the founding partners of FM Architettura d’Interni—a firm based in the Marche region of Italy—the duo isn’t the kind that’s easily impressed. They have, after all, seen everything.

The jaunt was to familiarize Muzio with the country, its culture and peoples, as their Italian firm had been tapped to design the four-bedroom, 418-square meter show suite of Horizon Homes in Shangri-La at the Fort, the luxury apartment complex at the uppermost levels of the just-opened 61-floor high-rise at Bonifacio Global City (BGC).

“I was here to be inspired, because our philosophy is to interpret the style and the spirit of the people,” Muzio says.

She went away with more than just inspiration, as she found objects and furniture that she thought would be integral to the look of the Horizon Homes unit.

Super yachts

In the marathon viewings last week of the finished project, on the skyscraper’s 43rd floor, the duo pointed out the items handpicked during Muzio’s Cebu trip that were incorporated in the suite.

A large coffee-table top in the main salon has a checkerboard-pattern shagreen with glittery finish. It was the shagreen and fish skin leather of Cebu that so thrilled the Italian on her first visit.

Before their high-rise projects, Muzio and Orlandini were known mostly for designing super yachts, so that they're used to marine-sourced materials. But these materials are so expensive in Europe that only the owners of super yachts can afford.

"The [Cebuanos] are also very good because it's not easy to achieve that kind of quality," Orlandini notes.

Pointing at the pair of console tables made of laminated fish skin from Cebu, Muzio adds: "You can't duplicate that pattern. It's really nature. We looked to nature a lot for the designs here."

Among these is the leaf-pattern crystal chandelier from the Czech Republic that mirrors the much larger one at the hotel's lobby below.

Cobonpue

All the furniture pieces in the suite are bespoke, made in the firm's Italian workshop, from the large sofas to the beds.

The duo have added select pieces by Kenneth Cobonpue, like his Oasis lounge chair, in a section of the panoramic veranda that overlooks Laguna de Bay in the distance.

There's also a pair of Cobonpue Rapunzel easy armchairs, the fabric customized by Muzio and Orlandini, at the center of the veranda.

By the entryway is an Italian bespoke marble-top console table rendered in wood with an inlay of carved Carrara marble, right beneath a painting by a Filipino artist, one of several displayed in the unit.

While the designers had to maintain the five-star environment typical of a Shangri-La, "it's a home, so it should have a homey feel," Muzio says. "The owners should feel like they're not in a hotel room. The ambience is elegant but cozy. It's not intimidating or stiff... Still, it should feel like you're buying a piece of Shangri-La."

The duo also designed the presidential suite of the Shangri-La at The Shard in London, and two other Shangri-La properties in China, in Nanjing and Jing'an in Shanghai.

Beiges and creams

The color theme of the entire flat is neutral, in calming shades of beiges and creams, and warm earth tones, with subtle accents of luster here and there, in the form of the bespoke wallpapers, for instance, or the sheen of a velvet headboard, or contrast patterned pillows, all of custom Italian fabrics. The carpeting is also custom-designed.

A wall by the formal dining area is a silver-leaf panel of bolivar wood, rendered in champagne gold, its leaf pattern mimicking the chandelier across.

The 12-seat rectangular dining table is, in fact, roundish, to encourage conversation. All the bigger pieces of furniture—the beds, sofas, dining table—are designed to look like they're floating, with bases of stainless steel covered in leather.

The flat is a tale in textures, with the designers' use of various woods, Italian fabrics and silk-to-touch leathers. It has a tactility that invites guests to touch the objects, to run their fingers along the fine hides of the furniture.

“That’s a good sign when people want to touch it,” says Muzio, her smile triumphant.

The home has both marble and hardwood flooring. The ceiling in the main salon is painted Venetian stucco-style, to give it a cloudy effect.

With its all-leather furniture, the master bedroom itself is enveloped with the rich aroma of leather, mixed with the heady fragrance of Diptyque Baies candles.

About 250 sqm of calfskin was used for the entire flat.

A family room leads to the bedrooms, and features an L-shaped velvety couch in muted blue-gray shade, a trio of Cebu-sourced coffee tables, and a lone Parchment armchair by Cobonpue.

A heavy wood divider, also from Cebu, dominates the hallway in the family area. Solihiya barstools are also used in the bar by the show kitchen. It has two kitchens.

All Horizon Homes flats, which start at 207 sqm (two-bedroom unit), come with Sub-Zero and Miele appliance units, its kitchens rendered in white marble with steel finishes. (Call 8419681 or visit www.shangri-la.com/manila/shangrilaatthefort)

Veranda

The secondary bedroom adjacent to the master suite is done in similar creamy tones, with grayish undertones in the form of the speckled wallpaper, furniture and upholstery.

The headboard is customized using various patterned fabrics.

All the linens are by Pratesi.

Like in the master bed, the walk-in closet is by Italian company Poliform.

Both rooms have a view of the Manila Golf and Country Club. The master suite has a sweeping view of Laguna de Bay.

There's also a smaller, twin room, and a guest bedroom in the opposite end of the flat, also done in complementary neutral tones. All have en suite shower; the master and guest suites both have baths.

There were some structural challenges that the designers turned into opportunity, like an unsightly pillar by the master suite that was turned into a small work area with a framed window.

The ersatz veranda by the main salon, sectioned by fixed louvred frames, was also a result of a structural issue turned into two cozy multipurpose nooks with picturesque views, and another work area-slash-desk at one end.

It's Muzio's favorite area, where she says one can "dream of many situations": "You can read a book, have coffee, talk. It's not a real veranda, but it has a view."

"Our job is a contamination of cultures," adds Muzio. "We travel a lot all over the world. I've loved Asia ever since I was a child. I used to travel with my parents. I love the décor and craftsmanship. We learn something always, and that's the most important and most interesting."

And the way they designed the Horizon Homes suite is how they always work, she adds.

“It’s very detailed in design. Nothing is from a catalog. And there’s personal care, just like when you’re a guest at a Shangri-La.”