

expat

# LIVING

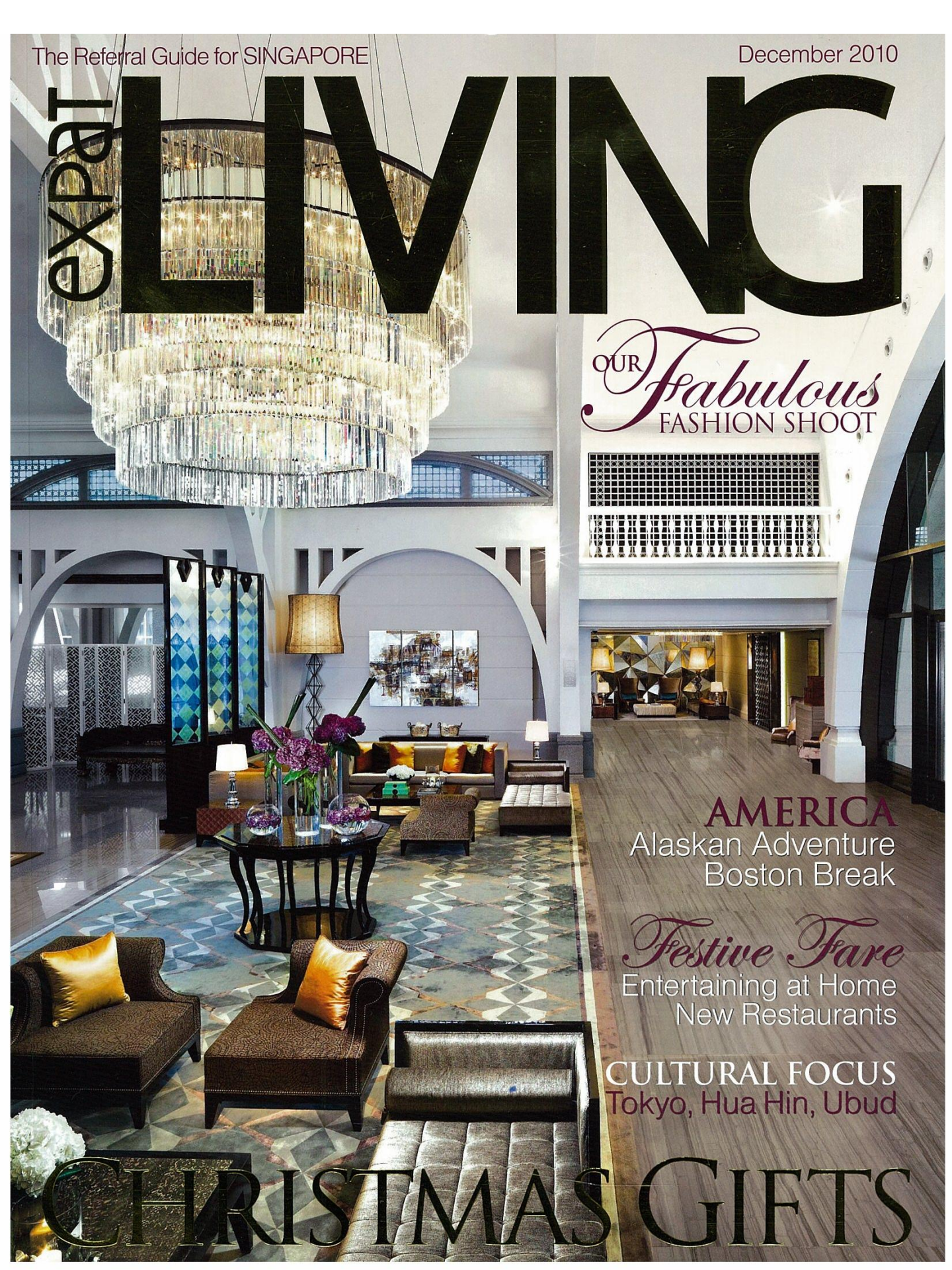
OUR *Fabulous*  
FASHION SHOOT

**AMERICA**  
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# CHRISTMAS GIFTS



Wendy Smith's house is tucked in a tiny lane off East Coast Road – so tiny that I fear for the sides of my little car (and others) as I winkle my way down it. The chic, lime-green mosaic steps up to the front door are instant confirmation that I'm at the right place.



# DESIGNING *Woman*

by Yerne Maree, photography by Hart Tan of Tomato Photo



To introduce a light, airy feeling in the living room – in contrast to the cosy clubbiness of the basement den – Wendy white-lacquered the coffee table and topped it with glass. Two striking portraits by Capetonian Ryan Hewitt dominate the room; Wendy bought them in Franschhoek and confesses to a passion for South African art.

## Background

Though I've heard glowing reports of Wendy's interior design work from a number of friends and acquaintances over the years, it's taken me surprisingly long to meet her. Apart from her obvious talent and flair, you can soon tell what makes Wendy so popular: her down-to-earth, no airs-and-graces manner and genuine friendliness.

A little less friendly, however, than the crotch-high labradoodle who makes me wish I'd worn trousers instead of a short skirt as I levitate six inches off the floor. She's pooch-sitting Titus for a friend, explains Wendy with apologetic giggles; her own two "children" – a pug called Miss Havisham and a King Charles spaniel called Rembrandt – are far better behaved. And closer to the ground.

In 1998, living in London and "a bit burnt-out", she confesses, Wendy and her husband Nishan took up a job offer here. He came ahead to start work and find a home, and by the time Wendy arrived he'd signed the lease for an Orchard condo. At first quite keen on trying the condo life, it wasn't long before Wendy was at the offices of the Far East Organization, begging for release from the contract.

"I'm a private sort of person, and I realised that condo life wasn't for me," she concludes. "More importantly, it took me only two weeks to know that I loved Singapore and had no intention of leaving. Having a home like this makes me feel that I really live here."





*A pair of Rajasthani pillars dominates the dining room; the dining table is made from old Indonesian railway sleepers, incredibly heavy.*

"I found a huge old 6,000-square-foot house in the Devonshire Road area and negotiated with its owner – a vegetarian convent! – for a five-year lease on reasonable terms. I did it up and then started doing up houses, first for friends of friends, and then established a business of my own.

"It's been interesting to do up conservation houses, as you have to work around all sorts of regulations. Fortunately, the regulatory body is efficient, pragmatic and fair: a sensible appeal will win the day. There is so little older housing left in Singapore, and it seems that mainly expats are interested in it.

"We completed the building of this house in August 2009, which we did at the same time as another one down the street. It's been a huge project, but a fabulous experience, and I've learnt such a lot. My training was in fashion design, not interiors, and in any case, it's difficult to do something for someone else that you haven't already done for yourself."

In her years as a design consultant with Design Intervention, Wendy has naturally developed a great network of service providers. "What tends to happen is that when Nikki [Hunt] and I find someone who is good, we bring them into the company!"

**“I’m a bit of a drama queen. I love strong statements, and I’m quite brave. I say to my clients: “Don’t buy six little things; buy just one big thing.””**

### Her House

Before the land reclamation that preceded the establishment of East Coast Park, this 1931 Peranakan terrace just behind Beach Road was very close to the sea. Its basement, Wendy explains, would have been awash with seawater during the flooding season.

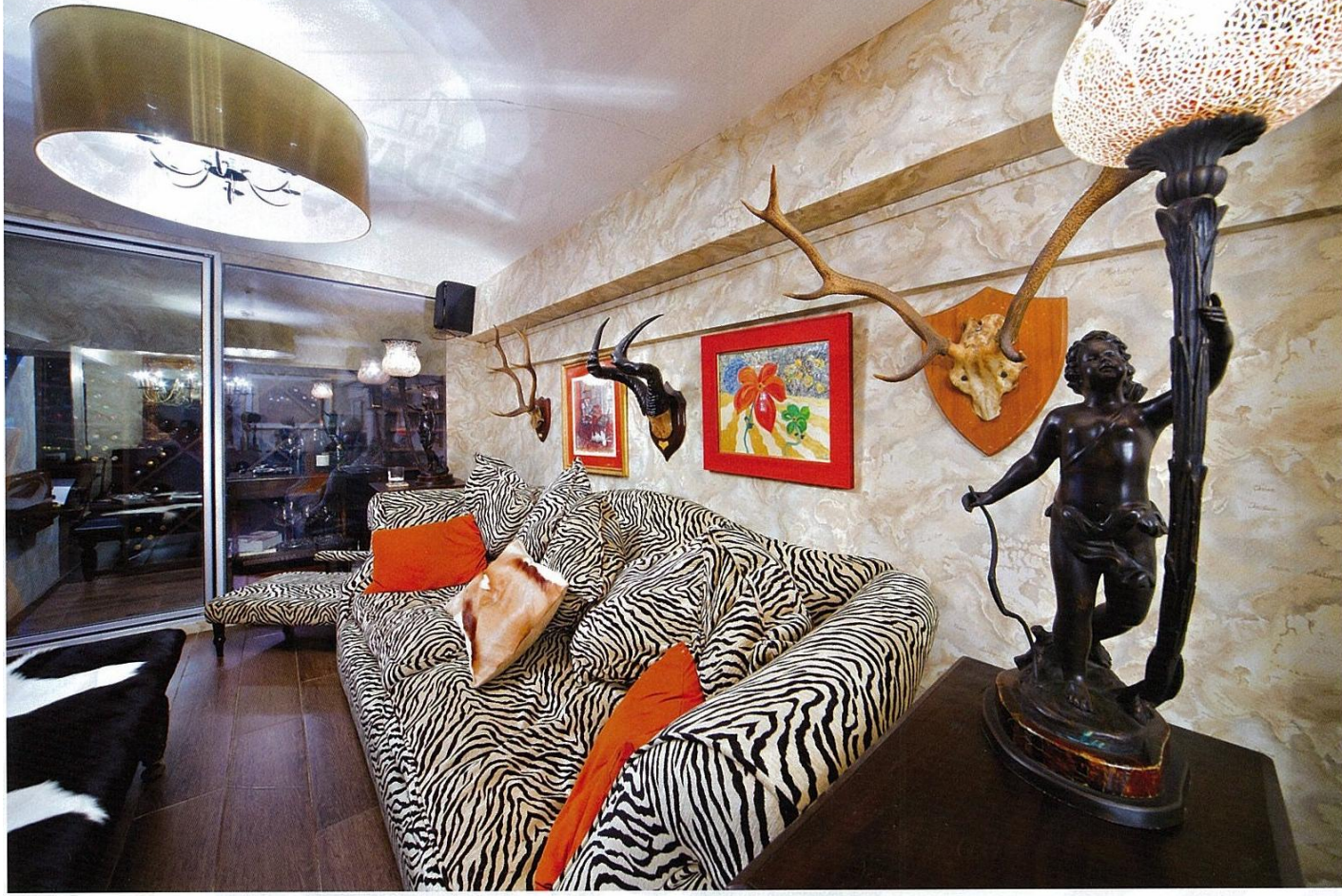
“My neighbour, Mrs Lucy Lu, has lived here since the terrace was built, and her house is still completely original. She comes over for tea, and shows me old photographs.”

Looking at the wealth of varied furniture, accessories and knickknacks that could be family heirlooms, I’m surprised to hear that Wendy and Nishan came here with just two suitcases. But as she points out, you can find anything in Singapore, including at auctions. “My parents used to drag me to auctions at old estates and manor houses in Wales, and it seeped into my blood.”



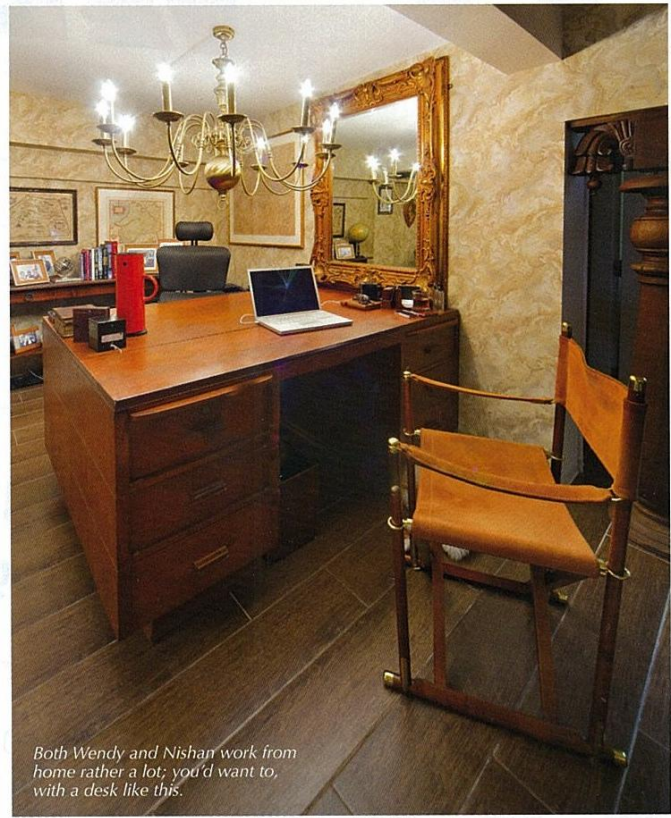
*"Eden" is the name of the beautiful wallpaper in the master bedroom. It's made by an old company called De Gourney, and you can order this range through Design Intervention, customised to fit your room plan and colour palette. Wendy's favourite lime green here creates a restful haven, and she thanks Monsieur Louboutin for making a pair of heels in the same shade.*





The basement room has the feeling of a gentleman's club – classical wallpaper, a restrained desk, oversized sofas and an enviable walk-in wine fridge – with wild touches such as a round vermillion chair and a plush chaise longue. She has two of these deliciously decadent recliners; the other is in her bedroom. It's not surprising that exquisite upholstery features in every room, from the deep-buttoned luxury of the chaises longues and the living-room sofa to elegantly simple white cushion covers; it's something that Design Intervention is famous for.

I ask Wendy about the trend back to wallpaper, and she says she's delighted to see something so 60s and 70s coming back. "Wallpaper suits the shift we've seen in recent years, away from the minimalism of the 80s and 90s and towards Modern Baroque style. Even better, they've improved the glue so that it no longer perishes in the heat and humidity, and you can still strip it off easily when the time comes."



*Both Wendy and Nishan work from home rather a lot; you'd want to, with a desk like this.*



## HOME SHOWCASE

*This kitchen-floor mosaic of Aphrodite's face is one of a range that Design Intervention orders directly from China according to your own design. In this case, it's the ideal way to add detail to a floor where a rug would be impractical.*



*The roof terrace catches the East Coast breezes.*



## Her Style

How does Wendy describe her own style?

"I'm a bit of a drama queen. I love strong statements, and I'm quite brave. I say to my clients: "Don't buy six little things; buy just one big thing."

I'm disappointed when she asks not to be photographed for this article, especially as she is wearing a stunning silk shift in an exquisite fabric. "I bought the fabric overseas, as I often do," she tells me, "and had Carol Randall at Cayen make it up for me. Carol understands real women's bodies and is great to work with."

## The Future

"I think I have another few houses in me yet. In the end, though, I'm looking for somewhere to settle, and Singapore is a good option. One thing I find we have in common with all the friends we have made here – be they Korean, Australian or Indian – is that we are all open-minded, and that helps to create a great community.

"Singaporeans, too, are very open, and I think that the upcoming generation of young Singaporeans is going to surprise us." 📸

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Cayen – Carol Randall  
54A Club Street  
6227 6187  
[www.cayen.com](http://www.cayen.com)

Design Intervention  
75E Loewen Road  
6506 0920  
[www.designintervention.com.sg](http://www.designintervention.com.sg)

Hugo Kitchen – Stephanie  
#01-22/23 Park Mall  
6336 8898  
[www.hugo-kitchen.com](http://www.hugo-kitchen.com)

# Home



Wendy Smith's home, photo by Hart Tan, Tomato Photo