

# LIFE



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**LIFESTYLE INTERIORS & LIVING**

## Upcycling is the way forward for award-winning designers

Award-winning interior design company One Plus Partnership upcycled old furniture and materials from their move to decorate a new studio, writes Kylie Knott

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A delightful mixture of blue and grey, the patchwork couch adds a subtle splash of colour to the office. But it won't be found anywhere else. It's a one-off item made from scrap materials, one of the many upcycled items in what's arguably the city's coolest office decorated with ... rubbish.

"We made the couch from fabric swatches sent as sample squares from suppliers," says Virginia Lung Wai-ki, one-half of the couple behind the interior design firm, One Plus Partnership. "We had so many, it seemed a waste to throw them away. So we sewed them together to create a new look for an old couch."

Waste is a dirty word for Lung, and she has no time for purists who might frown at a designer chair getting the firm's treatment:

"Oh, I don't really care what they think!"

As music hums in the background, Lung wanders the office with her partner Ajax Law Ling-kit, both pointing out (at times in unison) the green features of the office.

One Plus is hidden in a labyrinth of rooms on the 16th floor of an industrial building in Quarry Bay, an area with all the hallmarks of becoming the next "cool spot".

The trend for sustainability is reflected in [our] designs for the future

AJAX LAW, INTERIOR DESIGNER



The One Plus Partnership office in Quarry Bay.

The sustainable theme of their practice is evident everywhere, from the cement walls and flooring, to leftover fabrics and recycled designer pieces.

"When we moved our office recently, we didn't want to throw away our furniture just because it didn't fit the colour scheme or texture - the mood - of our new office. It made me think about how we could refashion the furniture to fit our new 'mood'," Lung says. "As interior designers, we waste a lot of material, so we thought of ways to make use of it."

The "conference room", which houses an intriguingly adapted Charles Eames chair, is the best showcase for the upcycled theme.

"This Charles Eames chair was bright orange, but it didn't suit the new office. So we covered it in elastic bands we found in Sham Shui Po," Lung says. Other chairs are covered in plastic straps and greenhouse sunscreen netting: "We tested a lot of different finishes," she says, pointing to another redesigned chair.

"That's actually made from a material that's used to cover roads. It's really rough and durable. We spent a lot of time in Mong Kok and Sham Shui Po," Lung says, laughing.

The overhead light, inspired by a praying mantis, is made from waste wood and stretches out over the chairs. A cluster of mushroom-like tables below can be shifted to cater to the number of people in the room.

"This allows for different combinations, providing flexibility and easy adaptation for different use," Lung says.

"This set-up allows clients to feel relaxed and comfortable - we wanted to simulate a cafe environment."

Floors, as well as the low partition walls and worktops, are rendered in raw concrete.

The old closets are another example of upcycling. Once destined for the dump, they now proudly show their age with weathered scratches and washed-away paint. New metal shelves were varnished to prevent rusting, but their original rough edges were deliberately retained.

"This whole grungy junkyard concept is designed to demonstrate the potential of putting waste material to stylish use," says Law. "Sustainability is the hottest topic around the world, and the trend is reflected in designs for the future."

Their eco-commitment even extends to lighting. Chandeliers are LED lit, and gradually brighten when switched on. Adjustable, flexible track lights are also designed to save energy.

The firm's portfolio and reputation are as impressive as the office. A trophy case in the entrance holds more than 100 awards and certificates. The prestigious Andrew Martin Interior Design Award, considered the Oscar of the design industry, is among them.

A forlorn-looking chair in the corner catches the eye just before I leave - a plastic designer chair covered in strips of bubble wrap that has been knotted together. The bubble wrap was left over after their move.

"The chair is a prototype. We really love it, but the tone didn't match our new office. We wanted a raw look and this is quite girly," Lung says. "It took a couple of days to cover it and it's very comfortable."

A quick test proves her right and fighting the urge not to pop the plastic bubbles is futile.

With waste such a big issue in Hong Kong, the upcycled trend is one that will hopefully take off. "We're making use of something that would have been thrown away. We're bringing new life to it," says Lung.