



Sayher Heffernan

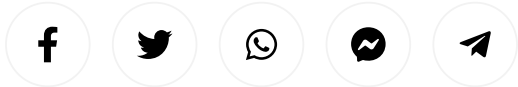
INTERIORS

## Inside Sunny Han's Singapore family home inspired by the Italian countryside

BY LUO JINGMEI

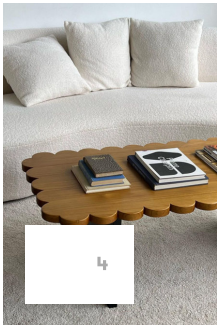
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The abode of Sunny Han and Junny Lee charms with its distinct Italian inflection and bravura celebration of food and family



When she was young, Sunny Han did not take math or swimming classes like her friends. Her childhood was deeply intertwined with the universes of gastronomy and design. “My mum, who was influential in my upbringing, was a chef and owner of several restaurants and interior design shops in Seoul. And so I was brought up in an environment where everything revolved around food and design; extracurricular time was spent in those restaurants and design shops. While my friends went on beach and ski holidays, mine were spent accompanying mum on food and design shows around Europe,” shares the founder of the popular Instagram account @sunnyskitchen.

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The attic bar mixes vintage pieces with two Ralph Lauren armchairs from the couple's former home, and a bespoke screen with stained glass inserts Han brought back from Sydney.

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Han is also the creative director of high-end co-working space provider The Work Project, which she runs together with her husband Junny Lee from their Singapore base. But it is her culinary obsessions that preoccupy her most. In her kitchen, food is elevated to the level of craft. The processes involved—planning, sourcing, prepping, setting, texture, taste-testing and embellishing—are part technical, part intuitive. Food becomes more than sustenance; it is art, experiment, passion. It is also friendship, kinship and emotion, often shared with good pals and sacrosanct in family routines.

Han is most enamoured with Italian cooking. “Italian cooking looks simple but it can actually be very technical in order to do it correctly,” enthuses Han, who spent two years at the Culinary Institute of America in Napa Valley, California, after initial studies in hospitality management at Cornell University, New York.



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The marriage of peach and turquoise on the second storey is a riff on the tonality downstairs.

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This Italian obsession sees Han and Lee travelling to the country two or three times a year, including a summer stretch where the couple spend languid days in the Italian countryside with their two young boys, having many an *aperitivo* under the setting sun that turns the sky into an ombre painting. Here, Han peruses the local markets with joy and concocts meals with fresh finds, celebrating the seasonality of that time of the year.

“She’s really dedicated. Just to give you an idea of how much—Sunny hand-carries her *matarello* (a large pasta rolling pin) on the plane ride to Italy. Pretty nuts, but how can I complain when I know I’ll be well-fed?” muses Lee, who whips up the memory of an octopus ragu that is “to die for—a hearty dish with refreshing bursts of flavour from some of the best fresh capers and olives I’ve ever had.”



In the kitchen, stained oak cabinetry and a butler's sink from Rocky Mountain Hardware provide a rustic feel.

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It is no wonder that when it came to designing their new house, Han looked to Italian villas for ideas, drawn to their sophisticated medley of clear proportions, bold colouration and distinctive materiality. “I get inspired by the Italian colour palette whenever I travel to Italy, getting inspiration from interior design to fashion, and even food and the bounty of seasonal ingredients. Italians are geniuses in mixing and matching colours. They do it so naturally and I wanted to have that in our new home,” says Han.

Home for the past seven years was an apartment in town. “With two boys, it was starting to get a bit tight,” laughs Lee. “We were looking around for quite some time and the park next door sold it. There are beautiful trees there. We love the neighbourhood, which is quiet,” he says about the detached house they found in a suburban estate in Singapore. They looked for designers who could translate the neoclassical principles of classical Italian architecture into a cosy home and found Colombian husband-and-wife team Diego Molina and Maria Arango. The couple, who were then at Ong&Ong Pte Ltd (the architect of record), continued as the project’s design consultants after leaving to set up their own company ArMo Design Studio.





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Han's penchant for timeless home decor extends to her fashion taste, which includes Chanel jackets and earrings from vintage stores in Paris or Tokyo.

“This home is a modern interpretation of that, with classical proportions and elements but also the functionality of modern living,” says Arango. Textured coating gives subtle tactility to the exterior of the two-and-a-half-storey house, external doors and windows are made robust with stone thresholds and simple cornices give elegance to edges. Interior walls are coated in Marmorino stucco—a finish that has been used in Venetian palaces for centuries—while a formal division of rooms lends a sense of spatial layering, procession and discovery. Symmetry is also a device used to bring about order.

In the entrance vestibule, a moment of grandeur is found with a curved staircase. A hollow in the composition is the first tangible introduction to Han's love of celebrating the seasons, showcased through changing floral exhibits. On the second storey, the library and bedrooms ring around this atrium, while an arched doorway leads to the couple's private suite in the attic that incorporates a bar decked in walnut timber, green Marmorino stucco paint and a gridded glass screen.



In the living room, the doorways to the dining area are clad in Verdi Alpi marble and the faux fireplace lined with red travertine.

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A key creative partner is Matthew Shang of interior design firm MSDO, whose projects include the recently renovated Summer Palace at Conrad Singapore Orchard. “Matthew designed our first apartment and since then, we’ve become close friends. He is immensely gifted and has a special ability for creating timeless drama in interior spaces,” says Lee, who shares that Shang has also designed many of their co-working offices.

Here, Shang decorated the walls of the living and dining rooms with teal and artichoke-green silk panelling, and poised an antique-finished mirror as a focal point above the faux fireplace. The latter is clad in red travertine—a material commonly used in Italian interiors. Olive and lemon trees in the garden evocative of Mediterranean holidays and framed in picture windows bring delight with their forms and fruit.

***“Part of the prerequisite for this house was to have a mix of curves and straight lines; that’s very Italian”***

Han and Lee’s keen design eye also contributed to the decor, which includes a series of shapely wall scones in the living room—petit glass sculptures with artful expressions. “These are vintage Venetian lights made from Murano glass that I bought online through an auction,” says Han. Many

pieces, either found on travels or at auctions, reflect her penchant for timeless, storied ‘artefacts’ rather than the trendy and new.

A custom piece is a cream sofa whose darling loops along the back frame converses with the curves of a Palma sofa from Pierre Frey across the living room. “Part of the prerequisite for this house was to have a mix of curves and straight lines; that’s very Italian,” says Han, who references Villa Necchi Campiglio in Milan regarding this. The use of terracotta, blue and green tones throughout the home also came from this precedent.



Lee and Han in their living room; in the foreground, the pouf is from Pierre Frey and the coffee table is custom-made.

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Needless to say, the kitchen is the high point of the home. “In their previous apartment, the two spaces that were loved and used were the kitchen and bar zone,” Shang remarks. “With the luxury of having a custom-designed house, these spaces were enlarged and given pride of place. The bar has been elevated to the attic floor but is still intimate, with a dedicated bar counter and views out to the adjacent park. The kitchen is a generous space on the ground floor for both working and dining—a wonderful combination of utility and homeliness.”

This being her ‘workshop’, the kitchen was designed to great detail. “Sunny has an extensive collection of fine plateware and silverware, cookbooks and equipment. She cooks with grace and ease (it seems) but that means things need to be placed correctly,” Shang elaborates. The kitchen



can be accessed through the trajectory of portals that passes through the living and formal dining rooms. A secondary access is via a private corridor where shelves hold some of Han’s cookbooks. Along this path is what Lee terms a “party closet”, where lacquered cabinets the colour of burnt sienna stretch to the ceiling.



An arched doorway leads to the home’s bathroom.

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Han pulls out drawers and opens the glass cabinet doors to show me her extensive collection of silver cutlery, linen, candle holders, crystal cups, vases and so on. This is surely an anomaly in most homes but for Han, it brings her joy as she loves not only to cook but “host in style”. The born connoisseur explains: “I don’t necessarily think I learnt it from anywhere; it just came to me naturally through experiences. Since my dinner parties are in a home setting, I try to make them more personalised, doing things that my guests can never experience at a restaurant such as making hand-painted menus, designing a tablecloth using vintage fabrics, self-arranging flowers for the centrepieces, etc. These small gestures add uniqueness, making the setting extra personal, one-of-a-kind and beautifully ‘overdressed’.”

Many were passed down from her grandmother to her mother, who in turn handed them over to Han. “These spoons are 100 percent silver. Some of them, my grandmother used to serve past presidents of South Korea,” Han shares. Han’s grandfather was the first navy admiral in South Korea and served in President Park Chung Hee’s



cabinet. They hosted dignitaries and her grandmother was known to be President Park’s favourite chef. Elucidates Lee: “She was very cool; she was the Sunny’s Kitchen of her day. She wrote recipe books, which we still have.”



On the lemon trees in the backyard, Han comments: “They grow so well, it’s overwhelming.”

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Meals with friends are often planned along seasonal produce. “We love Singapore but one thing we miss is the seasons. Growing up in Korea, when the seasons change, the wardrobe changes, the food changes. So we create seasons on the dinner table,” says Lee. For example, 1 January is Seollal in Korea, which is celebrated with a massive branch that ends with Tteokguk (a rice cake soup in a beef stock simmered for up to six hours),” Lee describes.

In the kitchen, timber floors demarcate a dining area where the family have their regular meals, and red travertine tiles define the cooking zone with a handsome red La Cornue stove testifying to Han’s culinary virtuosity. “The heart of this kitchen is the large island counter where a lot of the preparation and presentation takes place. Often, the eating happens here too!” Shang points out, observing that the home’s European references do not only influence the physicality of the materials, “but also the lifestyle associated with it: the joy of cooking and the gathering of family”.

***“While I cook in the kitchen, Junny and the kids play at the pool next to the kitchen. I open a bottle of wine, have a glass and sit in the pool with the kids while the roast is in the oven”***

Overhead, the red travertine—this time in a matte finish—spreads into the backyard and clads the pool. “I have always wanted a pool in front of the kitchen; that was my dream,” says Han. This outdoor area’s scenery involves the crowns of the adjacent park’s trees—the result of an

ingenious idea to shift the original driveway to another part of the plot.

Glass doors wash daylight into the kitchen and let Han see her children when they are outside and she is prepping meals indoors—particularly on Sundays. “On Sundays, I always prepare a roast for the family. I also bake focaccia, which Junny and the kids love. While I cook in the kitchen, Junny and the kids play at the pool next to the kitchen. I open a bottle of wine, have a glass and sit in the pool with the kids while the roast is in the oven. When the meal is ready, we sit around the table, say grace and enjoy the food,” Han narrates on this local version of their Italian summer.



The white walls at the informal dining area are from Riccardo Barthel.

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While it is “just dinner” at home with the kids, Sunny pulls out the special stuff for this weekly event—good ingredients, good wine, candles, flowers, plates and glassware. “We have a very simple routine, but within that, we take things to the next level. You can’t help but be inspired by the effort and attention to detail [put in by Sunny]; it silently sets the tone for what kind of effort is expected from each of us in our daily lives for the upcoming week,” Lee emphasises with palpable admiration and affection for his wife. “The soul of the house really comes from Sunny.”

**Photography** Sayher Heffernan

**Styling** Jasmine Ashvinkumar



**Hair and make-up** Hazel Tan/Makeup Entourage using Keune Haircosmetics and Charlotte Tilbury  
**Stylist’s assistant** Nicholas See

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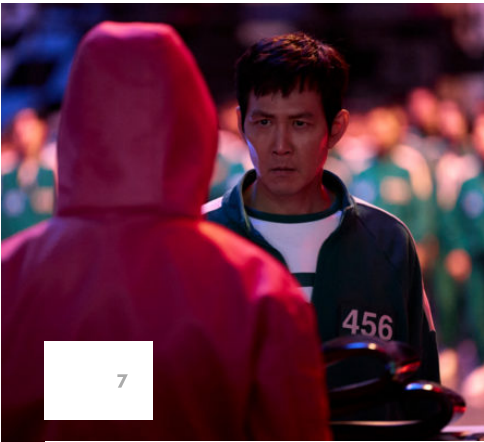
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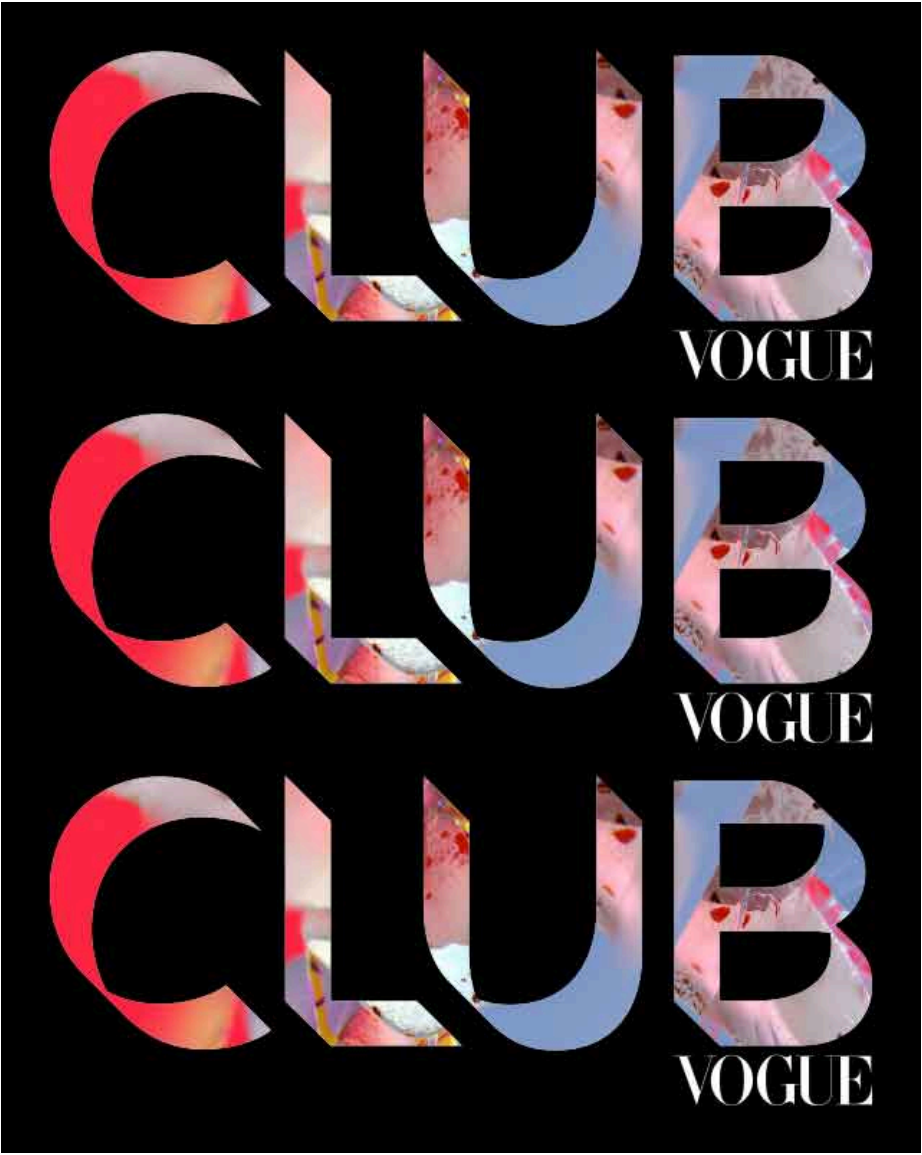


## The 'Resolution' Issue

A turn of the page. A clean slate. Embracing 2025 with open arms is Academy Award-nominated actress Stephanie Hsu, who graces the cover of *Vogue* Singapore’s January/February ‘Resolution’ issue. Fresh off headlining this year's edition of NEXT IN VOGUE in Singapore, where the star delved into film and fashion’s role in driving inclusivity, Hsu is psyched for the new year. “I’m excited to plug back into that wildness, gut feeling, pure creativity and impulse,” the actress tells *Vogue* Singapore.

Hsu shares more on breaking new ground, her latest rom com series 'Laid', as well her mantra for the new year.

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