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Palette cleanser

Colour, art and decorative detail create character in a Kazakhstan new-build

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Ask any creative what inspires them, and it's likely that they will respond with a plethora of sources – everything that surrounds them, every detail they notice, including in their daily life. Case in point: the colour scheme for this project was defined while designer Elina Mussakulova from Kazakhstan's Sdelaemremont.kz Interior Bureau was on her way to the supermarket with her husband. "I noticed how good he looked in our beige car seat with his sky-coloured cotton shirt and pale green jeans," Mussakulova says. "So these three tones became the palette for this apartment."

After moving around multiple times within Kazakhstan, the couple who live here, Erzhan and Nazym, decided to leave behind their nomadic life and settle down in Almaty, the country's largest city. They purchased their home in a newly built three-storey building that borders a mountain river that is described by Mussakulova as "really fast and furious, but the with a very relaxing sound."

Having found their ideal environment, the couple approached Sdelaemremont.kz Interior Bureau, asking them for a complete design solution that would help realise their dream home. "We weren't ready to take this on because our standard process is that we never immediately sign up for a complete project with new clients," says Mussakulova. Instead,

the designer and her team prefer to start by creating a layout plan, a first step that gives the opportunity for the studio and the client explore the relationship and find out whether they speak the same language. "If everything goes right and we get along, then we move on to the end-to-end phase." However, with such open-minded and enthusiastic homeowners, a connection was quickly made and the designer realised their collaboration had the potential to be very successful.

When the designers from Sdelaemremont.kz Interior Bureau first visited the apartment, they immediately loved the high ceiling and large windows. "The space was airy and promising," remembers Mussakulova. "There were no interior walls at all, so we had a lot of flexibility to organise the different areas."

In addition to the living room, kitchen, bedroom and bathroom, the homeowners wanted an office space, a second bathroom with a shower, and a laundry room. With windows on only one side of the building, it took the designers several weeks to define the right layout. After envisioning a few options, they came up with an uncommon idea: to make the home office adjacent to the kitchen instead of the more traditional approach of including it in a bedroom or a living room. To Mussakulova it makes sense: "That way, if one

Facing page
Graphic artwork by Evelina Kroon
hangs in the dining area, alongside
Gubi's C-Chair dining chairs

Previous page
The layout is arranged as an enfilade,
with all the doors lining up to create
sight-lines all the way through



Above
The kitchen island extends to create an informal seating area, surrounded by tall bentwood stools by Ton

Facing page
In the living room, the mint green paint is a custom shade, paired with an off-the-shelf blue by Sherwin-Williams



of the homeowners needs to work, the other one can sleep or watch TV without being disturbed,” she explains.

The apartment became a space arranged as an enfilade – that is, with all the rooms in a row, and sight-lines all the way through. Glazed internal doors transfer the abundance of natural light coming through the windows into all the living spaces. For Mussakulova, the doors play an important role in the design: “We decorated them with beautiful crown [mouldings], making the ceiling look even higher,” she says. Instead of being completely open, the kitchen can be closed if needed, which helps to protect the rest of the home from any cooking noises and smells.

While one of the original structural columns in the apartment has been concealed within a built-in cupboard, the other was treated almost as a piece of art, by cladding it with rectangular mirrored panels. Erzhan and Nazym were not initially on board with this idea, as they feared their home would look like a Kazakh restaurant (where loadbearing columns are traditionally covered with mirrors). After some hesitation, the couple ultimately trusted Mussakulova — and they don’t regret it. “When you enter the living room, you don’t immediately notice it, but once you do you cannot take your eyes off it,” says the designer.

Throughout, the combination of paint colours (a bespoke light green, and Niebla Azul, a grey-blue shade by Sherwin-Williams) creates a fresh and cheerful atmosphere. The apartment incorporates pieces of furniture and lighting by Louis Poulsen, Hay, Gubi, Fritz Hansen, 101 Copenhagen and Anthropologie, among others. Volakas marble has been used in the bathrooms and the Naturel beige paint (also by Sherwin-Williams) covers the walls of the office – while the main bedroom features Mussakulova’s favourite colour, orange. “I never really thought of using it for this type of space as it is such an energetic tone and not necessarily relaxing,” she says. “But when I came across Ferm Living’s striped wallpaper, I decided that I would use it for a bedroom one day.” Luckily, her clients agreed.

Convincing the couple, however, was not always easy. “They confirmed a very detailed design project, but as we moved into the realisation stage, they became hesitant about everything,” Mussakulova recalls. “I had to persuade them to move along with the original concept. Eventually everything turned out to be so beautiful, the clients couldn’t be happier.” From the colours and finishes of the materials to the furniture, all the elements were carefully considered and challenged by the inhabitants. As a result – and as a tribute to Mussakulova’s persistence – this home feels highly personal.

Facing page
Carving some space
off the kitchen gave the
homeowners the office
they needed, separated
by glazed doors

“There were no interior walls at all, so we had a lot of flexibility to organise the different areas”



Above
Left to right: Tones of white and beige make the bathroom one of the apartment's more serene rooms; tall decorative doors lend grandeur and character to the new-build

Facing page
Ferm Living's Thin Lines wallpaper in orange was the starting point for the design scheme in the bedroom



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