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DESIGN MARIANNE FRIESE
LOCATION BEIJING | CHINA
PROJECT MARIANNE'S
APARTMENT

MAISONNETTE BEIJING

GERMAN-BORN FURNITURE DESIGNER
MARIANNE FRIESE INJECTS SOME INDIVIDUALITY
INTO A BEIJING APARTMENT

Beijing is a city of contrasts and surprising contradictions. Since the turn of the century it has witnessed a proliferation of residential and mixed-use developments with catchy names like SOHO and Upper East Side, many by prominent international architects. In the spirit of its emerging new Zeitgeist, China's unrestrained embrace of all things western and commercial has seen its cities peppered with condominiums, offices and villas, designed for a captive audience with an appetite for a fusion lifestyle.

Then there are areas like ZuoJiaZhuang. This unremarkable neighbourhood in the city's north east is characterised by ubiquitous low-rise apartment blocks; boxy workers' accommodation the likes of which propagated Beijing's urban sprawl during the 1990s period of rapid economic growth. A perennial patina of dust and pollution dates the buildings well beyond their years. Working class locals, their extended families and pensioned ex-employees of a factory once occupying the site, make up the social fabric of this network of alleys and building units, all living in communal rapport in the shadows of one of the city's aging Exhibition Centres.



OPPOSITE Marianne Friese at home on her roof terrace with one of her creations

ABOVE The eclectic street frontage of the compound at ZuoJiaZhuang, Beijing

“I think the locals find it intriguing that a westerner can embed herself into this neighbourhood”

MARIANNE FRIESE

Walk past the game of ping-pong, the elderly ladies playing mahjong and up six flights of stairs littered with the detritus of neighbours (there is no lift) and you reach the home of Marianne Friese, one of the two *laowei* (foreign) residents of the compound. She refers in good humour to the “rough diamond that became a maisonette penthouse” – originally two side-by-side apartments joined in a two-phase renovation – as her base station, a place that facilitates the very *un-Chinese* practice of living, working and entertaining under one roof. “I think the locals find it intriguing that a westerner can embed herself into this neighbourhood”, says Marianne, “but I don’t think they understand it”.

The first apartment was re-fitted then occupied by Marianne for over two years before the second became available. The apartments were originally contracted under two separate lease agreements and, while the owner was amenable to the renovations to each of them, structural intervention was minimised so that they may be individually reinstated at a later date. On both levels a wide opening penetrates the party wall, filtering light and allowing access through the spaces. On the ground floor one kitchen was completely re-modelled (the other converted to a storage room), both staircases were retained, and the compact living and dining areas of each apartment became one larger space for each purpose. Small enclosed balconies typical of Beijing apartments became two reading alcoves, their floors raised to afford seated views through waist-height windows.

Upstairs, two first floor bedrooms have been converted into a single loft-style sitting area, and a small bathroom into a dressing room. Centrally featured on this level, a Victorian-style claw foot bath was also raised off the floor to take advantage of an elevated picture window, taking the place of a previously ambiguous space used for clothes drying and storage. An additional loft-style studio was created from an existing bedroom, where a generous custom made bed with integral storage and built-in bookshelves was constructed to fill the width of the room.

The studio sits above the living space of an adjacent apartment – testament to the prevailing precepts of efficiency and economy of space with which these buildings were constructed; the result a three dimensional puzzle of interlocking boxes. The design of the



BELOW A dramatic gold-leaf is used as one of two wall finishes
OPPOSITE Malilian furniture is displayed in Marianne’s home, which doubles as a showroom for her work





OPPOSITE Hand-crafted Malilian furniture is made contemporary in the loft-style master bedroom
LEFT A Victorian claw-foot bath elevated to capitalise on views

“The uniqueness of each piece excludes any notion of assembly”

MARIANNE FRIESE

apartment is a product of Marianne’s vision which evolved in characteristically Chinese fashion through a series of in situ conversations with the builder, punctuated with expressive gesticulation and brought to life with the assistance of a translator.

The apartment is also a showroom for Marianne’s furniture range. ‘Malilian’ (the Chinese translation of her name) is a sideline to her primary business – a strategic communications agency – that has seen the evolution of her passion for design into a successful enterprise. Malilian is an extensive seating collection of one-off pieces with quirky names like ‘Touch Me’ – a melange of pink fox fur, silk and paisley; and ‘Lazy Grazing’ – in homage to the Mongolian grasslands, the source of its felt upholstery. Marianne combines fabrics, materials and textures from around the world with an alchemist’s imagination, creating whimsical and tactile pieces that chronicle their cross-cultural origins. “The uniqueness of each piece excludes any notion of assembly,” says Marianne, an ardent campaigner against product piracy who in 2007 spear-headed ‘Pro-Original’, a campaign in her native Germany to combat financial losses to the engineering industry through counterfeiting.

Marianne’s eccentric designs sit in easy contrast with Chinese classics and modern icons against a backdrop of whitewashed and gold-leaf walls, their sensual shapes and materials striking an interesting dialogue with the stoic lines of Eileen Gray side tables and Artemide lamps. The apartment houses an eclectic accumulation of furniture and objects, collected from the far reaches of the globe and displayed with an intuitive eye. “It’s a matter of finding pieces you like and making sure they can live and breathe together”, she says.

‘Art for living’ is her catchphrase. “To own a Malilian is to welcome a handcrafted original, a functional piece of art, into your home” she says. This passion for individuality and diversity permeates her home and her work. She celebrates the incongruity of other circumstances and has affirmed her sense of place in a domain of replication and mass-production.

Julie Martin is a Beijing based interior designer and freelance writer on architecture and design.

MARIANNE'S APARTMENT**DESIGN** Marianne Friese**BUILDER** Beijing Zhongshi Decoration and
JOINERS Beijing Zhongshi Decoration and
Beijing Lidu Tengda Furniture Factory**TIME TO COMPLETE** 22 weeks**MALILIAN FURNITURE**

(86 1) 5869 7160 malilian.de

FURNITURE Living room sofa, cocktail chairs in bedroom and reading chairs throughout by Malilian. Chinese cabinets from Lily's Antiques. In living and sitting rooms, "Eio27" side tables by Eileen Gray (available in Australia from Anibou). In dining room, "Olly Tango" chairs by Philippe Starck with customised finish (available in Australia from Space). In bedroom, custom-built bed

by Beijing Lidu Tengda Furniture Factory. Storage systems throughout by USM Haller (available in Australia from ECC).

LIGHTING In dining room, chandelier by Guangdong Zhongshan Guzhen Virgin Forest Lighting Factory. In stairwell, chandelier by ZhongShan Anchises Lighting and "Jimken" pendant light by Ingo Maurer. Chandeliers in sitting room and entry by ZhongShan Guzhen Qinmei Lighting Factory. In living and sitting rooms, "Tolomeo" floor lamps by Artemide. In bedroom, wall lights from Zhongshan Dierte Lighting Factory. In bedroom and bathroom, recessed downlights from Beijing Zhongshi Jiaye Decoration. Acrylic wall sconces in reading alcove and landing from Zhanghuayuan Lighting.**FINISHES** Fabric on guest bedroom wall by Malilian. Slate in kitchen, hand-applied gold leaf and painted concrete tiles throughout by Beijing Zhongshi Jiaye Decoration.**FIXED & FITTED** In bathroom, claw-foot bath and floor standing tapset by Beijing Chengdawei Sanitary Ware. In kitchen, refrigerator by Haier, gas stovetop by Beijing BaiYe electronics and custom built stainless steel shelving by Beijing Jingshunxida Stainless Steel Products. In living room, wood fired stove by Laowan. Custom built-in shelves in sitting room and bedroom by Beijing Zhongshi Jiaye Decoration.**ARTWORK** In office, photograph by Maryatta Wegerif. In dining room, painting by Shijian Guo.

Anibou (61 2) 9319 0655 anibou.com.au Artemide (86 21 61223408 artemide.com Beijing BaiYe Electronic bjbaiye.net Beijing Chengdawei Sanitary Ware (86 757) 2331 2866 luckybaths.com Beijing Zhongshi Jiaye Decoration (86 10) 5201 1587 zhongshijiaye.com ECC Lighting + Furniture (61 2) 9380 7922 ecc.com.au Haier (86 532) 8893 9999 haier.com Ingo Maurer (49 8) 9381 6060 ingo-maurer.com Laowan laowan.com Lily's Antiques (86 10) 8579 2458 lily-antiques.com/en Malilian (86 10) 5869 7160 malilian.de Maryatta Wegerif wegerif.de Space (61 2) 8339 7588 spacefurniture.com.au USM Haller usm.com ZhongShan Anchises Lighting zsanchises.com/en

BELOW Chinese classics and Malilian sofas are displayed in whitewashed simplicity in the living area



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