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HOME WITH THE Chowdhurys

When you're passionate about art, your collection can stretch from street art to famous pieces, and even artworks done by your own family members. We take a look at the Chowdhurys' impressive home gallery.

BY KEL FLANDERS PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL BERNABE

Who lives here: Asif, Sharmeen, Rayan (13) and Farhana (21) Chowdhury

Time in Singapore: Five years

Size and type of home: Three-storey landed home with four bedrooms

Décor style: An ode to Asian art

“We’ve tried to maintain our American-style living room. After dinner (we cook a lot), we transform our living room into a movie theatre,” says Sharmeen.

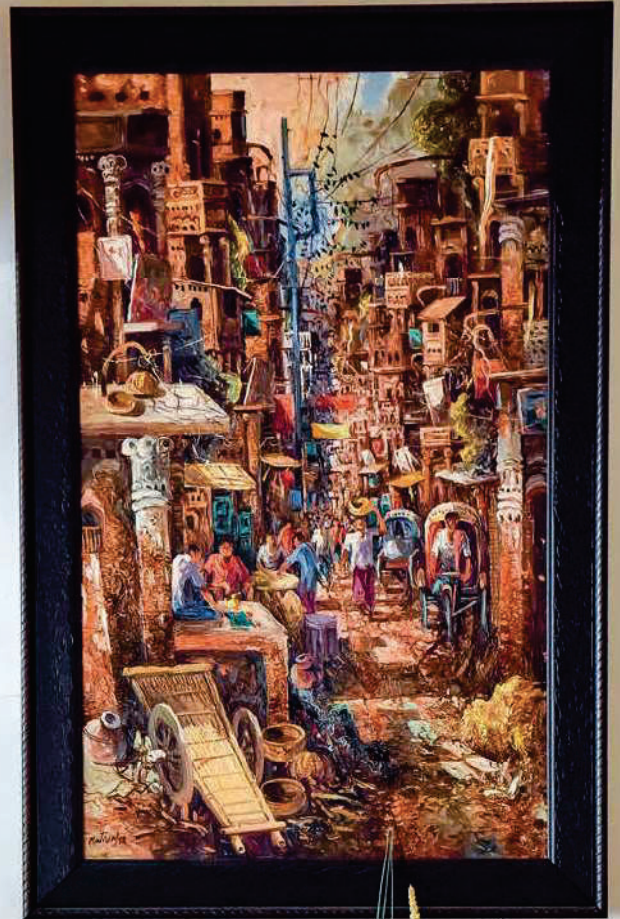


From Bangkok’s famous floating market, painted by a father and sold by his son.



“We saw this antique Chinese door turned into a table at Lee’s Antiques, and Laura, the owner, let us take it home so we could try it out; they even took away our old table! We love it and it’s such a conversation starter at dinner parties,” says Asif.

One of the few pieces the Chowdhurys have from their birth country of Bangladesh, brought with them when they moved from the US.



A Family Home

“Suburban living in urban Singapore” – that’s how Americans Asif and Sharmeen Chowdhury describe their home in Kranji. The large three-storey house is at the end of a quiet family-focused cul-de-sac, complete with children playing soccer and dogs being walked. There’s a minimalist exterior to the home, but thanks to the preview photos I’ve seen, I expect it to reveal itself like a geode, with a spectacular and colourful collection of art and artefacts inside. I’m not disappointed.

The couple open the door and warmly welcome me into a mesmerising space. There are paintings, drawings and beautiful lamps everywhere. My gaze eventually falls, and remains, on a huge black-and-white drawing of two elephants, hung next to the staircase.

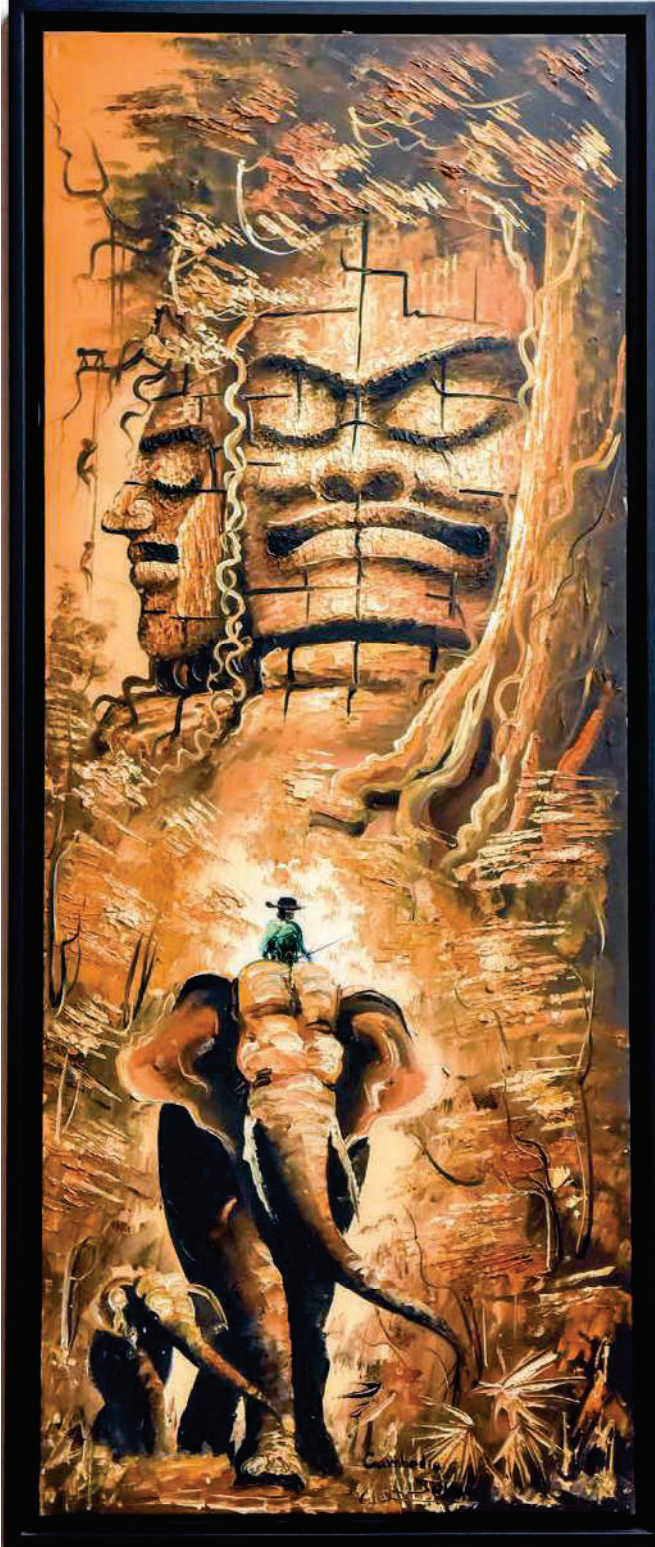


This is from a rural village in Vietnam, painted by the father of the seller. “I love the perspective and colour,” says Asif.



Sharmeen loves this technique of creating flowers with the dried and painted husks of sweetcorn.

“We got this from Angkor Wat. It’s such a perfect depiction of the area. It was sold by a couple of teenage boys and painted by their father. It was the first piece we brought and framed when we moved here,” explains Asif.



“I painted this one especially for my daughter,” says Sharmeen.



“Bought from Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, I call this one The Bridge to Nowhere!” laughs Asif.

Oriental-style painting by Sharmeen, inspired by a piece she saw at a friend's house



We sit down and I ask how their impressive collection started. “We’ve always been interested in supporting local artists,” Asif starts to explain. “We used to do it in the US. After coming to Singapore, we started collecting pieces from artists in the region as we travelled around.”

The family moved from Boston five years ago, but they’ve also lived in Tokyo for four years, and Seoul for three. This is where their love for oriental art and furniture began, starting with an antique step chest (which is in their home in Boston).

Artists-in-residence

Asif is passionate about art. “We really believe in supporting artists directly rather than the galleries they display their work in. So, we try to visit them and get to know them. And now, our home shows their art.”

The Chowdhury family boasts its own “in-house” artists, too, in Sharmeen and Farhana. Sharmeen shows me a few of the incredible pieces she has created – and I’m assured there are dozens more in storage! She only started painting her Oriental-style art when the family moved to Singapore. “I enjoyed painting, and tried to help my daughter with her own art studies, but I wasn’t perfect enough for her!” Farhana, the couple’s 21-year-old daughter, is now in her final year of a mechanical engineering degree at Purdue University in Indiana, and visits twice a year.

Sharmeen continues: “I was then helping out at my son’s class at school and was asked if I could help paint and decorate the room. One of the mothers suggested I take up Chinese painting, so I said ‘OK’. After I started doing it, I realised how much I loved this style of painting. Now, Asif tells me what he would like and I just paint it!”

Lamp Lovers

Asif enthusiastically tells me about his collection of lamps, which are spread throughout the house. “I found a store at Holland Village that will take any vase and turn it into a lamp. I love them.” Sharmeen then adds with a laugh, “And, as you can see, he has them *everywhere!*”

I love the Chowdhurys’ passion for art and for the artist that created each piece. To them, every picture is a memory postcard from a time and a trip that means so much. The paintings bring them unmeasurable joy, and this is happily shared with anyone who visits their love-filled home. *ei*



"We also bought this in Vietnam – from a little hole in the wall in Hanoi. We asked to meet the artist and waited for 30 minutes for him to arrive on a motorbike so he could sign it for us!"



Recommendations:

HOME

Vista & Co. ("The father is the one who converts vases into lamps, but he's getting older and will only agree to do one if the vase isn't too big!")
#02-30, Holland Village Shopping Centre
211 Holland Avenue | 6466 6276

Wing Ngai
#03-16, Tanglin Mall
163 Tanglin Road
6235 9896

WINE & DINE

CÉ LA VI ("our favourite bar and restaurant – we like to take first-time visitors here")
Marina Bay Sands, Tower 3
1 Bayfront Avenue
6508 2188 | celavi.com

Samy's Curry Restaurant
("great for local food")
25 Dempsey Road
6472 2080 | samyscurry.com

Culina at COMO Dempsey
15 Dempsey Road
6474 7338 | culina.com.sg

Coriander Leaf @ Chijmes
#02-01 Chijmes, 30 Victoria Street
6837 0142 | corianderleaf.com

Canopy Garden Dining
1382 Ang Mo Kio Avenue 1
Bishan Park 2
6556 1533 | canopygardendining.com.sg

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