

L I F E

By Grace Cain

A N D

Where does the creative director of Jimmy Choo kick up her feet? In a home that's every bit as stylish as her famous shoes. *Sandra Choi* invites us inside

S O L E S



*Jimmy Choo's Sandra Choi
reveling in her small – but
much-loved – London garden*

Interview

Let's begin by stating the obvious: yes, Sandra Choi has a lot of shoes. It's an occupational hazard when you're the creative director of Jimmy Choo. A large portion of her sizeable collection is neatly boxed, meticulously labelled, and stored in a warehouse deep in the English countryside. Lately, however, she's found cause to revisit some of her old favourites. As the brand approaches its 25th anniversary, Choi says she has "reignited her relationship" with her *Sex and the City*-era designs. "A quarter of a century, and it's gone past like... zoom!" She snaps her fingers.

Zoom also describes the medium through which we are communicating, Choi from her white-walled studio in London. She has just come off the phone with her husband, artist Tamburlaine Gorst. "I finish my meetings at work, and then I have meetings at home about decorating the house," she says, with a wry smile. "He's the head guy in that department because I spend most of my time at Jimmy Choo. Plus, he's got a keen eye for design. But if it were all up to him, we'd have an art collection the size of a football pitch."

Choi describes the refurbished Victorian house that she and Gorst share with their two daughters in London as "eclectic, with a sense of warmth". Filled with art and quirky objets, every room reflects the couple's love of anything vintage – an interest that they indulge at local antique markets, as well as on their travels. "I want to feel relaxed when I'm at home, so there are lots of personal touches," says Choi. "Like mementos from my business trips, or special pieces that belonged to my husband's late parents."

One such treasure, a bronze eagle, watches over the kitchen from its perch atop the fridge. A fixture in Choi's childhood, it once held court beside the desk in her father's office. "I grew up looking at it, and it was always looking back," she recalls. When her parents moved house, the eagle ended up in Choi's care. "I'm not into real birds at all," she says, looking mildly horrified at the thought. "But this one reminds me of my family home. To me, it represents freedom and success."

Ornithology may not be Choi's scene, but botany is an entirely different matter. "My house is like a rainforest," she says, very seriously. "I like the idea of the outside being inside, so I try to incorporate plants and lots of natural materials, such as wood." She cites the kitchen as her favourite room ("I love food," she says, chuckling), largely thanks to the floor-to-ceiling window that overlooks the garden. "It's only a tiny outdoor space in the middle of London, but it almost extends the room. And I love to see the sky."

Gorst's own paintings naturally make up the bulk of the couple's art collection, but it's a piece by contemporary Iraqi artist Hanaa Malallah that takes centre stage in the living room – "above the fireplace that we never use", Choi notes. Pieced together using burnt bandages, the work is a poignant reflection on the devastation of war. "It's a very emotional piece," Choi explains. "It's a reminder of tragedy, but I think there is also a sense of hope in the conviction that it should never happen again."

Meanwhile, amid all the eclecticism of the hallway, a minimalist flourish appears in the form of a striking canvas by South Korean artist Lee Bae. "It's just one huge circular stroke." Choi swirls her arm as though she's signing the air. "I love how there's a sense of freedom, but also a certain precision. It's very bold to make a single mark and call it finished." So is Choi more of a minimalist than her antique-market habit suggests? "I would like to be," she laughs. "I haven't quite got there yet." >

Courtesy of Sandra Choi



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Nowhere is this statement truer than in her wardrobe. “I’m very mindful of my own style, but the nature of my job means that I am constantly aware of trends. Fashion is like a sport, and I’m always in training.” Contrarily, however, Choi emphasises that her exercises in shopping are rarely rooted in a desire to feel or look on-trend. “I’m very strange. When I buy something new, I never wear it straight away. I worry that I might bump into someone else who is wearing the same thing.” Instead, she stores additions until she deems the time to be right. “I buy things because I like them, not because I’m gagging to wear them.”

It will come as no surprise that accessories make up much of Choi’s collection. What you might not expect is that, along with her personal Jimmy Choo archive, she has amassed a compendium of Converse. “In the late 1990s and early 2000s, I was obsessed,” she says. “Now, I bulk buy the high-tops in white and then collect the limited-edition releases.”

Aside from footwear, Choi’s passion is vintage and antique jewellery. “I’m like a magpie,” she confesses. “I’m naturally drawn to anything shiny, but I also love that jewellery can be so meaningful regardless of its material value. I really believe that when you love something, it doesn’t matter if it costs 50p or £500.”

Suffice to say, then, her wardrobes hold more than just that impressive array of shoes. “Indeed,” says Choi, coyly. “My husband used to be a fashion designer, so he also has racks of clothes. The two of us together... it’s quite unbelievable.” But the need for adequate storage space has at least given them an excuse to use an otherwise neglected part of the house – the gym. “Well, it does have a big mirror,” Choi shrugs. “Like I said, fashion is a sport!” □

From left: Choi likes to incorporate plants and natural materials into her decorating scheme; the home is also filled with quirky objets, including decorative shoe lasts

10 QUICK QUESTIONS

Who are your design icons?

I’d say sculptor Constantin Brâncuși, furniture designer Arne Jacobsen, interior designer Axel Vervoordt and fashion genius Alexander McQueen.

And your fashion icons?

You can see how I reference Tina Chow!

What’s the first thing you do in the morning?

Check the weather.

Whereabouts in the world do you find inspiration?

Japan. It’s different from anywhere else.

Which beauty product could you not live without?

Chantecaille Radiance Gel Bronzer.

What’s your most-used app?

Ocado. I’m a mum!

Do you use social media?

I don’t have time for it.

What’s your go-to comfort food?

Roast chicken with all the trimmings.

What does luxury mean to you?

Time. You can’t rush when you are creating the best of the best. Then again, sometimes the greatest luxury is to be able to get anything you want in no time at all.

Can you give us one piece of advice?

Whatever you do, make it beautiful.