



Real Estate

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House call

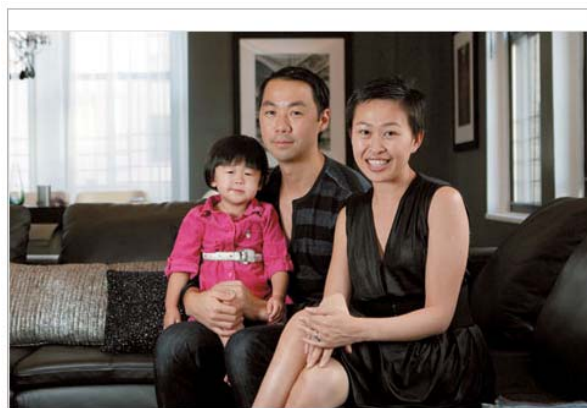
2BR Flatiron District

A furniture-selling couple takes a minimalistic approach to living. By Lisa Freedman

Like most couples, Shaokao and Niki Cheng needed to upgrade to a larger space once they had their first child, Cienna. So the duo, who own eight franchises of the ultramodern furniture store BoConcept, packed up their 700-square-foot Murray Hill apartment and headed for greener pastures—2,200 square feet—in the Flatiron District. Only, after living in their starter home for eight years, they had a hard time leaving it behind. “We continued to stay there a few weeks, even after we moved all of our stuff,” remembers Niki. Once they finally made the plunge, all three of them shared one room because the new massive space was too off-putting. “In the old place I could see Cienna no matter where she was,” Niki says. “Here, I’ll turn around and it takes a while to find her.” It’s a conundrum that most city dwellers wish they had the chance to experience.

Something that many New Yorkers *are* familiar with, however, is renovations. And the Chengs spent about a year refurbishing the space—plus a year before that getting the board’s approval to build. “It used to belong to a steel sculptor, and it was a total dump,” Niki laughs. “It was very dirty and there were two offices with storage units installed in very weird places.” The Chengs gutted the entire space (“Well, Niki did all the planning,” Shaokao confesses), moved the kitchen, added a bedroom wall, and reinstalled and redecorated everything.

Now the sixth-floor condo looks like a showroom for their sleek wares. “That’s because everything in here was, at one point, a floor sample in one of the eight stores,” admits Niki. Their apartment is modular, sleek and clutter-free—just like the BoConcept line. “The more possessions you have, the more they weigh you down,” says Shaokao. “I don’t save anything.” To which his wife adds: “He has a much higher standard of neatness than I do.” The couple agrees that Shaokao’s tidy tendencies are a good thing for such a large, open space, because even the slightest item out of place is noticeable.



Although they display very few decorative items, the ones on view are chosen for their exquisiteness. The glass chandelier over the dining room table was pieced together with various strands of beads to lend it a more classic look (Niki thought the room looked too modern without it). The couple is obsessed with Danish goods—“They have the best eye for design,” says Niki of the Danes. “Even the cups in their cafés are pretty.”—and a multistemmed, adjustable candleholder by designer Piet Hein sits in the kitchen, which is fitted with glossy white cabinets by Danish brand HTH. When it comes to artwork, they prefer the work by travel-, fashion-, and portrait-centric photographer Frédéric Lagrange. “We saw his work in a magazine and fell in love with his pieces,” Shaokao says while pointing out that all of their artwork is exclusively by Lagrange.

Each room has been so carefully curated, some may view their space as too cold or uninviting, but the couple would disagree. “Too many things have sentimental value. We try to limit that,” explains Shaokao. However, they might get on board when it comes to their bedroom. “We need to warm it up a bit,” Niki says surveying the space. “We considered hanging a TV, but that cancels out the serenity of a bedroom.” They do, however, have a television in both bathrooms.

Why Flatiron Distric?

“We chose this neighborhood because it’s convenient to all eight of our stores,” they explain. In addition to the location advantage, they love Madison Square Park and point out the growing number of families in the area.

Favorite restaurants

[Lan 56](#) Third Ave between 10th and 11th Sts (212-254-1959, [lan-nyc.com](#)) “The menu is full of imaginative nouveau sushi.”

[Basta Pasta](#) 37 W 17th St between Fifth and Sixth Aves (212-366-0888, [bastapastanyc.com](#)) “It’s Japanese-Italian cuisine. So innovative!”
[artisanalbistro.com](#)) “They have the best fondue in town.”

Favorite takeout

[Tina's](#) 179 Madison Ave between 33rd and 34th Sts (212-679-3500) “You really can’t beat the price and taste of this Cuban fast-food joint.”

[BonChon](#) 314 Fifth Ave between 31st and 32nd Sts (212-221-2222, [bonchon.com](#)) “Super tasty Korean fried chicken.”

[Waldy's Pizza](#) 800 Sixth Ave between 27th and 28th Sts (212-213-5042, [waldypizza.com](#)) “Delicious thin-crust pizza.”

Favorite shops

[apple seeds](#) 10 W 25th St between Broadway and Sixth Ave (212-792-7590, [appleseedsnyc.com](#)) “This shop has a nice collection of baby necessities, and it keeps Cienna happy.”



[BCBG MaxAzria](#) 168 Fifth Ave between 21st and 22nd Sts (212-989-7307, [bcbg.com](#)) “You can’t go wrong with anything from BCBG.”

[Sample-sale storefront](#) 260 Fifth Ave between 28th and 29th Sts (212-725-5400) “No matter what designers they’re featuring, they always have the best deals.”