



IN THE RAW

A mix of reclaimed furniture and collected kitsch create a home that's simple, stylish and utterly fun

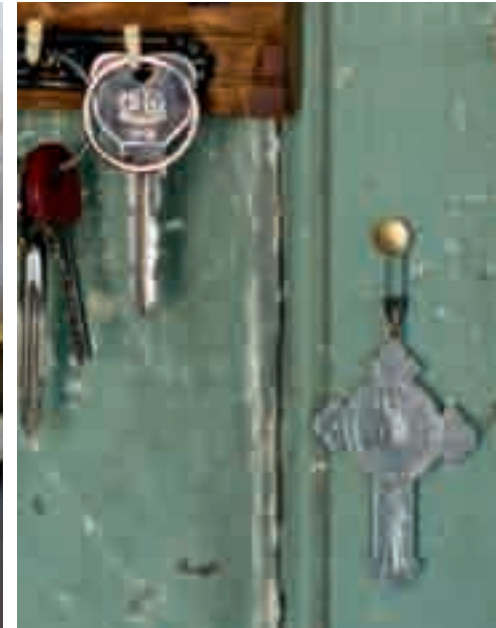
Words EMILY BROOKS Pictures LUC ROYMANS



Kitchen Once a wall in a neighbour's garage, the wood used to construct the kitchen cabinets was saved from being chucked out. 'All I did was clean it with water,' says owner Leo (seated below). 'There was exactly enough for the whole kitchen'

Living area The sofa is made out of floorboards and decorated with rice sacks collected in India, China and the US. 'It is comfortable but then I don't have the obsession with comfort that some people have,' says Leo. 'If you want comfort, go to bed!' ➤

Living area The rug in front of the sofa is a piece of canvas used by the military to drape over vehicles in war zones to avoid friendly fire. Throughout the house are ten mismatched chairs which Leo the owner picked up on his travels: 'They all have to be different, I believe.' The ceramic hanging light was covered in fake banknotes from Asia by the owner



Personal touches The owner's collection of kitsch (including plastic Virgin Mary holy water bottles, a gnome light and Chinese paper lanterns) makes a fun and colourful contrast to the rough, whitewashed walls and bare floorboards. Owner Leo says 'I like the culture clash of good taste meets bad taste. I just love a cheap thrill!' The illuminated Krishna was rescued from a friend: 'Someone from India gave it to her, but she thought it was really ugly and chucked it under her bed - where I found it' ➤

There are two kinds of recycled products: the kind that is unrecognisably transformed ('Did that really used to be a tyre/bottle/plastic bag?') and the kind that bears the mark of its previous incarnation with pride. Photographer Leo Ribbens is only interested in the second kind. His Antwerp home is full of reclaimed objects that wear their heart on their sleeve (think tables made from pallets and floorboards and kitchen units crafted from scrap wood that was heading for landfill) with every scuff and dent on show.

Leo is no eco-warrior, more a man on a mission against homogenous design: 'I'm not that ecological, but I like things to look man-made and functional,' he says. 'I get frustrated and bored by the things you see in stores - they are too over-designed, too polished, too fake.'

He made much of his furniture himself to complement the house - a raw shell with exposed brickwork and concrete floors. 'I wanted a loft, but I got fed up of looking,' he says, so when he found this Fifties house with a warren-like collection of rooms, he asked an architect friend to draw up plans to strip it to its bones and then did the physical work himself with friends' help.

The interior was influenced by the surrounding cityscape of early-20th century industrial buildings, visible from the terrace. It has an almost military colour scheme - the bathroom, coated with a grey-green polyester resin, looks like something from a Cold War submarine, but it was actually inspired by a Fifties Citroën van.

Leo's home may be removed from traditional notions of comfort, but it has a pleasing informality: nothing is pristine, there are places to put your feet up and the interplay of unusual textures means the eye is never bored. Any austerity is tempered by Leo's collections of the colourful and the kitsch, from religious iconography to Chinese lanterns. He calls it 'rubbish' but it's fun and intensely personal. 'I collect Jesus figures and I collect dogs... there's no connection between them, though,' he says with a smile. ➤





Main bedroom The striking wood wall hides a set of wardrobes (above and bottom left). I couldn't find any scrap wood with marks on,' says Leo the owner, 'so I got the stencils from my sister who works in a packaging firm and did them myself. It looks like one vast wall - you have to kick the doors to open the catch. I hope they become as dirty as possible'

Bedroom/bathroom The rusty table, the bench-like guest bed and the 'Type 75' Anglepoise lamp (which was a surprise find in a box of bric-a-brac) are all second-hand buys. The low, gun-metal cabinet (right) belonged to Leo's father, and is exactly the same age as Leo: 'When I was born, my father believed that since my mother had a child, he should have something as well - so he bought the cabinet!' The functional feel extends to the bathroom, which was inspired by a Fifties Citroën van that Leo admires for 'its colour, its shape, the form of the windows, the way it had only practicality, nothing fancy and nothing classically beautiful' **DECO**



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