

Home Is Where the Art Is

Carefully selected works of Filipino modern masters as well as contemporary Filipino artists adorn this spectacular house, writes **ASTRA C ALEGRE**

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ART HAVEN

Paintings, sculptures, and art books fill the living room



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Ventura, Elmer Borlongan, John Santos, etc.," Antonio remarks.

A monumental Elmer Borlongan piece, measuring 7.5 feet by 15 feet, titled *Pag-ahon*, is the first artwork you notice as soon as you enter the living room. It depicts 10 brawny men hauling in a large *banca* from the sea to shore. The background is a deep orange with strokes of grey, suggesting a fiery sunset. You can't help but gaze at the contemporary Filipino painter's artwork for an extended period of time as the piece simply draws you in. Guests often think that the work was commissioned, but the reality is, the wall was built specifically for the artwork. It is the only permanently installed artwork in the house. It is also the only Borlongan in the house, "for now," says its owner.

Right below it is a 1978 wooden bench by National Artist Napoleon Abueva, which was directly acquired from the Abueva family a few years ago. Guests are welcome to sit on it, as it is a functional piece after all.

On another wall of the living room are three works by Ronald Ventura, who is known for his multi-layered paintings. His artworks in the house definitely show the evolution of his style, from greyscale to colour, his latest works being mostly in colour. The first of the three artworks on the wall, which was painted in 2005, is of a man on horseback, with another man walking bent over beside him. It is done in all-grey. The work in the middle, which was done in 2006, is dominated by a bright yellow background which fills the canvas, broken only by the image of a fallen man carrying a cross. In the third artwork, which was painted in 2007, Pinocchio is done in full colour.

Art books are thoughtfully placed throughout the house, in shelves and on table tops, with titles such as *Art in Focus*, *A Century of Realism in Philippine*

TRULY IMPRESSIVE *Pag-ahon* by Elmer Borlongan and a Napoleon Abueva bench

A TRANQUIL SPOT The lanai offers a great view of the garden outside

IN THE USUAL sequence of events, first you have your house built. Then, if you are an art lover, you acquire artworks to decorate your house. However, in this case, an extensive private art collection came first, and then the house was designed and built around it. It is the family's second house, designed by architect Ramon Antonio, who also designed their first house 12 years ago.

The couple had always been impressed by the work of Antonio. "We have always worked well with Ramon. We like his clean and elegant style, and we admire his

passion. 12 years ago, my wife and I saw a house we liked and discovered it was by Ramon. He built our first house soon after that. He kept in touch, which is typical Ramon, and we became good friends as we watched him create one masterpiece after another. We decided early on that he will make our second home, which he gladly did," says the man of the house.

"My inspiration for the house basically was the couple's extensive amount of outstanding Philippine Art, from grand masters like Amorsolo, Magsaysay Ho, Zobel, Manansala, and Legaspi, to sought-after contemporary artists, like Ronald



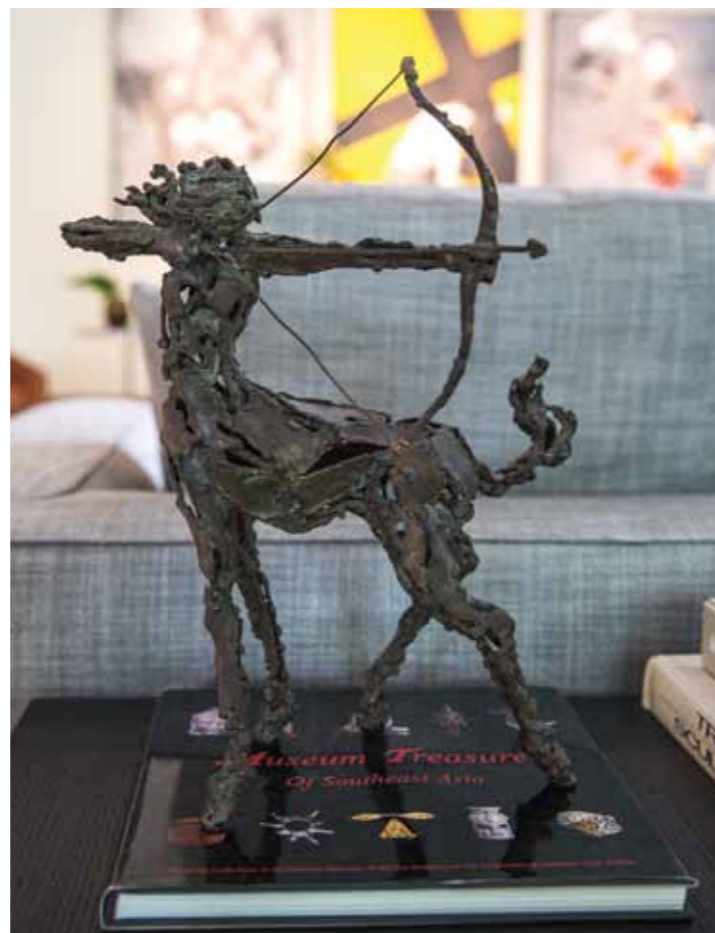


Art, *Bencab* by Krip Yuson and Cid Reyes, *Museum Treasures of Southeast Asia*, *Masterpieces of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, *The Prado*, *Tapestry*, and *Antique Maps*, among others. The books, which serve as reference material, also indicate the wide range of the owners' appreciation of different kinds of art.

The room nearest the main entrance is the den. The space is quite cosy and the kids spend time watching TV here. In this room also hangs the very first Ang Kiukok creation that the man of the house acquired. It is a small 1991 painting of a window which opens to the sky outside, done in blue, which happens to be the owner's favourite colour. Ironically, he is colour blind. He explains, "I can't distinguish certain shades of yellow, green, red, and brown."

Another notable work hanging on the wall is the 1979 painting of screaming figures titled *Shout*, also by Kiukok. In one corner of the den, sitting quietly on an easel is a 1910 oil painting titled *El Borracho* by Fabian de la Rosa, the uncle and mentor of National Artist Fernando Amorsolo.

A 2000 Cory Aquino flower painting, which was a wedding gift to the couple by the



late president, rests just below the television, nestled among art books and other artefacts. Even the small powder room in the den has a piece of artwork, a framed 1966 watercolour by Carlos "Botong" Francisco.

The man of the house, a financial advisor, likes sitting in the living room, as it is the best spot to enjoy looking at his favourite art pieces. For the lady of the house, who manages the family-owned children's clothes and toys business, her favourite spot is the lanai, as she finds it the

most relaxing place to be in. From there, she can view the garden and enjoy the sound of water from the koi pond.

"We were fortunate to find a property that we really liked," says the man of the house. "Aside from being located in a quiet street, it had this very large fruit-bearing mango tree that we fell in love with immediately after we saw it."

"My favourite area of the house is the squarish living room, which branches out

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A PLETHORA OF ART (from top) The hall downstairs; *The Finisher* by Mark Justiniani

THE MASTERS (from top) The dining room with the paintings from Anita Magsaysay Ho and Fernando Amorsolo; a sculpture by Solomon Saprid

HOMES

both to the dining room and open lanai,” says Antonio. “All three rooms face the garden.” The couple love having meals with their four boys on the kitchen dining table. With the floor-to-ceiling windows, they have an unobstructed view of the landscaped garden.

In the dining room are more artworks by the masters. The 1972 Vicente Manansala oil painting, *Chismosa*, came from the owner’s grandmother—Manansala happens to be the owner’s favourite artist. The work beside it is a 1975 Anita Magsaysay-Ho from her green period. The modernist painter is well-known for her paintings depicting ordinary women going about their everyday chores. On the opposite wall are two 1940s paintings by Fernando Amorsolo, the “Grand Old Man of Philippine Art” who is well-known for his paintings of rural Philippine landscapes.

The kitchen by Varenna sports a streamlined industrial look, with glossy countertops, a spacious island in the middle, and a white marble table, which perfectly fits six white chairs. In one corner, are works by Pam Yan-Santos,



OBJECTS OF BEAUTY (clockwise from top) *El Borrocho* by Fabian de la Rosa; the library with the Lyle Buencamino artwork; *Push and Pull* by John Santos; the guest bedroom with the four-poster Ah Tay bed



which were acquired when she was still very affordable and relatively undiscovered. On another side is an artwork by Pacita Abad.

There are a number of sculptures in the house, including a couple of pieces from Arturo Luz’s Circus series and his Paperclip series. Outside, near the wall lined with Japanese bamboo, is one of his “paperclip” sculptures. Several works by Solomon Saprid, such as his *Don Quixote* and *Lady Godiva* are displayed right before the dining room.

The biggest sculpture in the house is one of the 13 monumental cathedrals made by Jose Tence Ruiz. Ruiz is one of the two artists chosen for the Philippines’ second participation in the Venice Biennale in 2015.

At the top of the staircase is a mother and child painting by Ang Kiukok. His paintings comprise the biggest part of the couple’s collection. In the hallway, hanging on top of a wooden



Justiniani. In the library is a display wall shelf filled with books, a black couch, a zebra hide bought during a trip to South Africa, as well as a black and white work titled *You Are Your Worst Critic* by Lyle Buencamino. Another room, with books and computers, is the study where the kids do their homework and occasionally play computer games.

The couple's four boys, whose ages range from 5 to 12, have grown up exposed to art

surrounding them. They know they're not supposed to play near the artworks.

The two older boys share a bedroom while the two younger boys share another. There's a guest bedroom where a 19th century Ah Tay four-poster bed welcomes their guests, as well as works by Benedicto "BenCab" Cabrera, Kawayan de Guia, and Victorio Edades are found. The owner has been a big fan of BenCab's works even

cabinet is John Santos' *Push and Pull*. Also on the wall is a triumvirate of a circa 1960 Arturo Luz and Oscar Zalameda and a 1962 "white on white" Jose Joya. At the far end of the hallway is a small altar with a collection of saints.

Hanging in the family room are *The Arrows of Saint Sebastian* and *Say Hello to Charlie*, both by contemporary visual artist Geraldine Javier, as well as a piece by Mark



The couple's wish list included rooms for their four boys to play and study in, enough walls for their growing art collection, and at the same time, enough large windows to allow them to enjoy the natural light

before he knew about the artist. As a kid, he saw a work by BenCab and he immediately liked it.

The most prominent work of art in the master bedroom is *The Finisher* by Mark Justiniani. "It reminds me of my high school and college years as a member of the Ateneo Track and Field Team," the man of the house shares.

"Whenever I conceive a prospective plan for a client, I consider the lifestyle of the individual or couple based on their extensive wish list," says Antonio. The couple's wish list included rooms for their four boys to play and study in, enough walls for their growing art collection, and at the same time, enough large windows to allow them to enjoy the natural light.

ALL SAINTS DAY (from top) The powder room in the den; the sleek kitchen; a collection of artefacts

A DIVERSE COLLECTION (from top) The upstairs family room; Kawayan de Guia works



A VIEW FROM OUTSIDE
(from top)
The house glows at night; a relaxing spot in the lanai



The house gives off a light and airy vibe during the daytime. With all the trees and plants surrounding the house, the owners, as well as their visitors, feel cool, refreshed, and in tune with nature. At night, when all the lights are on, the house simply glows and gives off a sophisticated yet relaxed ambience.

The couple occasionally host dinners for their families and friends, and once held an art event with more than 40 guests. The man of the house says, “Most people who have been to our house compliment us for our art collection and how well this Ramon Antonio house shows it to its best advantage.”

The artworks were collected in a steady pace over a 20-year period. The man of the house says, “When I made money in the stock market, I added to our art collection. I only buy works that speak to me, that I can relate to, and that I enjoy looking at.” His father advised him to collect Filipino artists, telling him that it will be his way of promoting the country while showing his nationalism. With all the art in the house, one would wonder if the owner is still interested in acquiring more works. To this query, the man of the house quickly replies,

“Yes, although nowadays I have become even more selective.” Right now he is focused on looking for works that will fill the gaps in their collection or enhance it.

“The final outcome of the home was just as I had envisioned it. I was pleased with the choice of artworks for certain areas. The couple personally selected, with my consent, which pieces were intended for specific areas,” says Antonio. “My biggest challenge was how to create a warm yet neutral palette to harmonise well with subtle as well as powerful colours of the extensive art collection.” Indeed, the house, with all its artworks, still feels like a home and not a museum. All the pieces in the house blend harmoniously—the furniture, the artworks, and the people living in it.

The family has been living in the house for just nine months and as such, it is still a work in progress. Asked if there’s anything they would like to change if they could redo it, the man of the house smiles and says, “Nothing, although we are slowly running out of walls.”



AS NIGHT FALLS
(from top)
A view of Jose Tence Ruiz’s cathedral in the lanai; an altar in the upstairs hall