

# Curiouser and Curiouser

“Asia is a treasure trove beyond anything I have ever experienced.” So says Ros Lovell, collector extraordinaire, who gives *Alexandra Kohut-Cole* a tour of her eclectic home

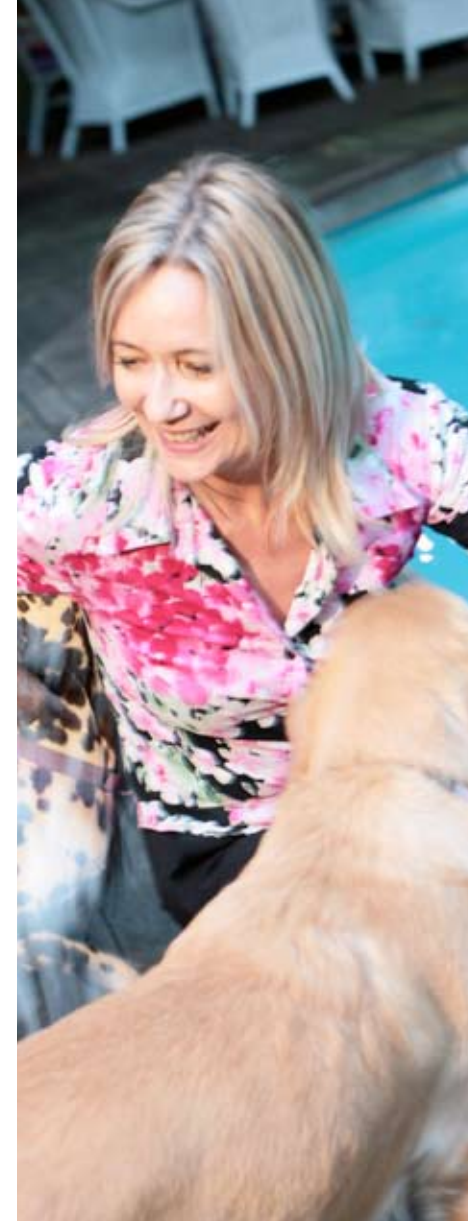


This picture: Adjacent to the library area  
Right: An old air-conditioning unit from Rajasthan

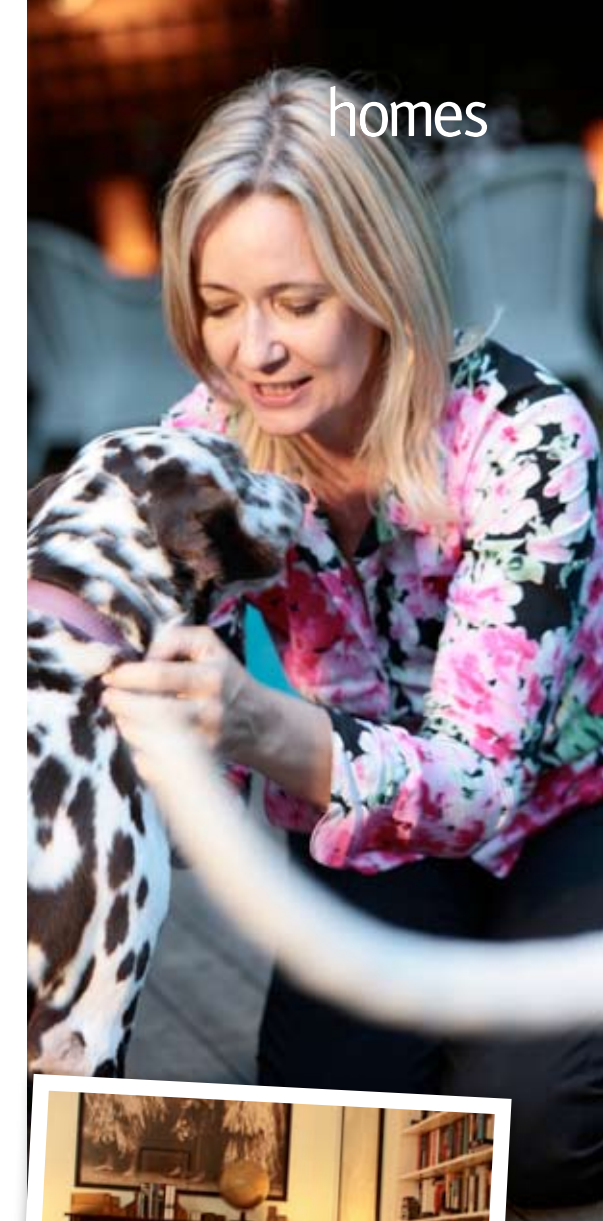




The drawing room with Mao statue



Ros Lovell with her dogs



homes



Sitting room with pianola

**“I am quite mad about dalmatians; they are very sweet with a lovely disposition”**



Pianola rolls

**H**ome for Ros Lovell, her husband Richard and their two children, Harriet and Jack, is a black and white 1930s colonial house in Alexandra Park shared with two dalmatians, Dotty and Mathilda, and two retrievers, Tilly and Mango. But while she grew up in the British countryside, Lovell maintains she's a city girl at heart who "loves the cut and thrust of Singapore. It's certainly more than it used to be – more dynamic and daring."

Lovell owns and runs Cho Lon, a homewares store in Holland Village. "It's basically a homes store; something like an old curiosity shop in a way, but with books," she says. Starting off as an antique/old furniture shop with home accessories, Cho Lon now stocks anything from old globes and briefcases to vintage hats and walking sticks sourced from India, China and Vietnam. Cho Lon is the Chinese district of Ho Chi Minh City and means "big market."

Lovell's passion for collecting started from childhood: "I had a fascination for old and different things," she says. "So Asia was the perfect place from which to move that passion forward." Her background is advertising

rather than interior design. Gambling on the idea that people who visit her home almost always express an interest in her interior style and furniture, she decided to design the store along the same lines and it worked: "It's because there isn't another store in Singapore quite like it."

**It's hard to know where to rest the eyes among the artwork, quirky figures, colour schemes and dressmakers' dummies – every corner offers something unexpected**

"Highly cluttered eclectic" is how Lovell describes her home's style. Having evolved her interior approach over many years, it is now stamped on her home and the store but she says the two are inseparable, with one spilling over into the other.

In the triple-aspect drawing room it's hard to know where to rest the eyes among the artwork, quirky figures, colour schemes and dressmakers' dummies – every corner offers something unexpected. "The aspect is so gorgeous and peaceful you don't hear anything here other than insects and, because it's elevated, we feel as if we are in the trees."

Colonial houses are a blank canvas, says Lovell, being painted all-white inside. "With that backdrop you can do whatever you like," she says. On her self-designed, contemporary-style glass coffee table proudly sits a shiny, black top hat on a stand in a glass case – a special buy from Barcelona. "I bought a collection of old hats from an antique shop. I've sold quite a few velvet ladies' hats from the 1920s, '30s and '40s."

In the window overlooking the driveway serenely rests a spectacular 18th century marble head purchased in Hong Kong. "People around here love it because they can see it in the window from the road," she says. Another of Lovell's incredible finds is the ceiling lantern which she found under a pile of rubbish in Vietnam. "As soon as I realised it was glass I thought one panel would be broken but it

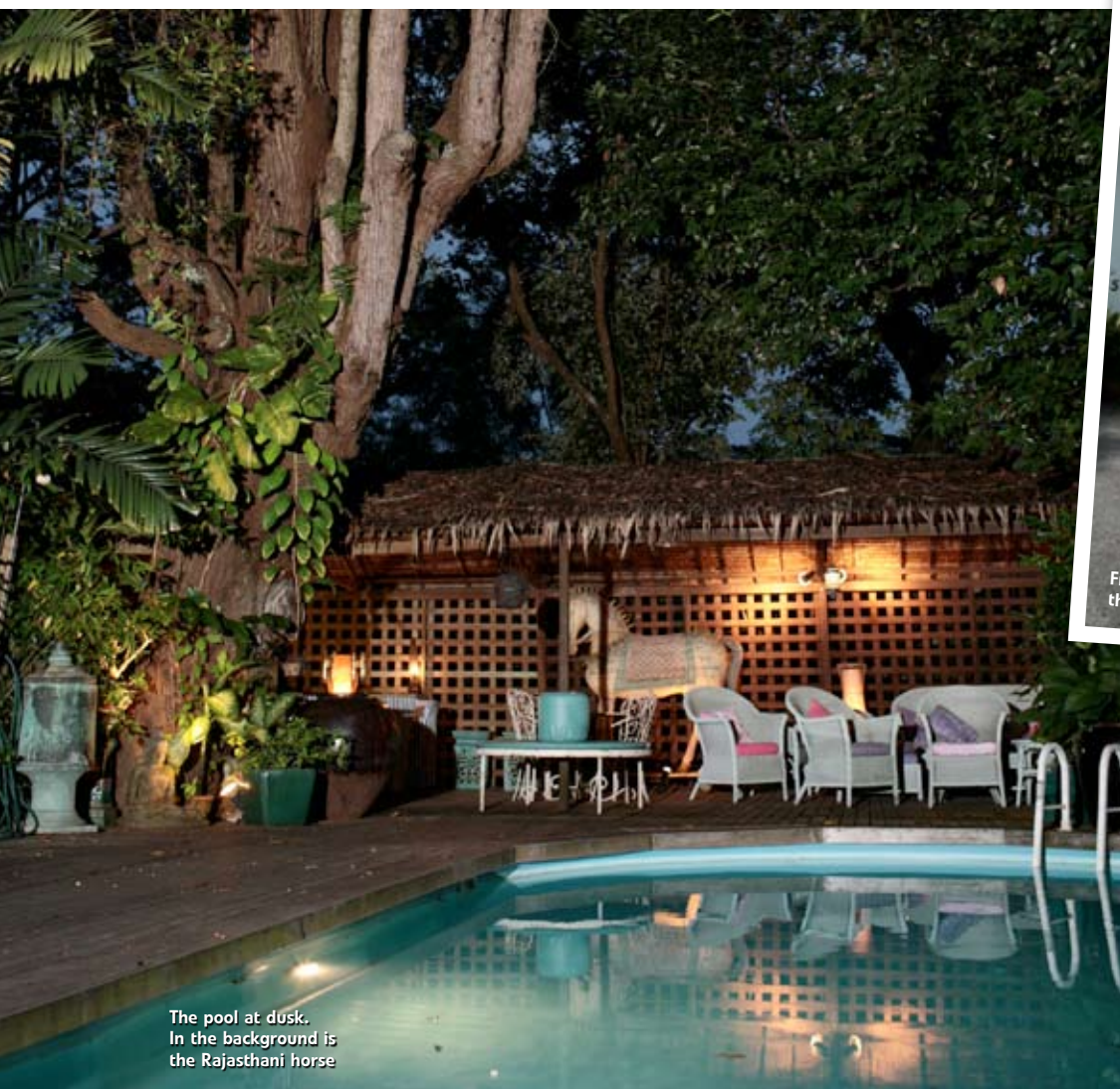
wasn't. They were all intact." She didn't risk sending it and brought it back herself, despite its weight. Several Chairman Mao statues in varying sizes adorn nooks and crannies, but one in particular surveys the sitting room, cigarette in hand.

Another favourite of Lovell's is a Burmese script on bamboo – a gift from monks who invited her and her husband into a monastery. "They gave it to us on a piece of bamboo," and it now provides the backdrop to the timber, turn-of-the-century shoe lasts at the top of the stairs.

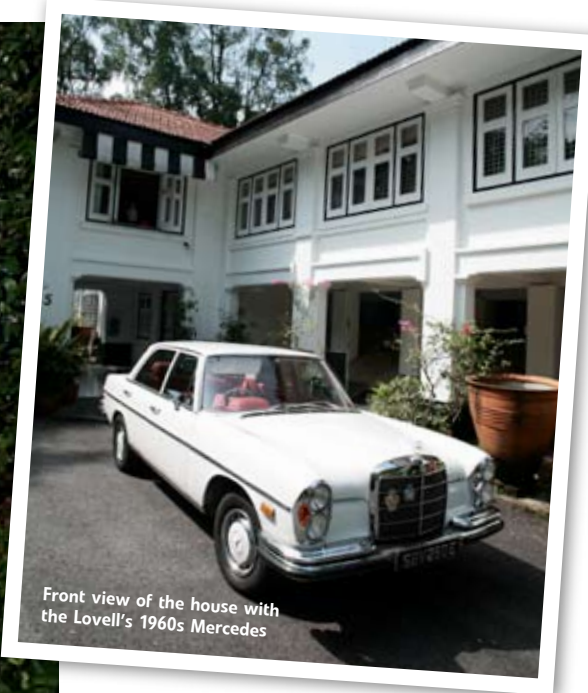
Ornately carved Thai doors lead from the drawing to the sitting room. "You would think they had been made for the doorway, but they just happened to fit so we took the door down," Lovell explains, remarking that whenever she makes a purchase she does so without an idea in mind as to where to put it: "I just think 'I've got to have it' and I'll find somewhere for it." An extraordinary golden bird cage contains two tiny stuffed, brightly coloured birds which sing with the aid of bellows, like the real thing. "It's French turn of the century, although they started making them quite a long time before that."



Left: The master bedroom  
Bottom left: Emperor and Empress painted on rice paper, Burmese script and timber shoe lasts  
Below: A corner of the dining room



The pool at dusk. In the background is the Rajasthani horse



Front view of the house with the Lovell's 1960s Mercedes

“The aspect is so gorgeous and peaceful you don’t hear anything here other than insects”



The sitting room is “so cosy,” its pièce de résistance a pianola – reportedly the only one in Singapore. “It’s a 1920s Steck, a German make from America which we bought in the UK. We now have about 400 pianola rolls.”

Lovell’s take on her eclectic style is that it is possible to mix modern and classic as long as it is carefully executed. “It works incredibly well and makes for a more interesting result with different combinations. The only combination which doesn’t work is rustic with classic – it ends up looking a mess but you can get away with just about anything else. It’s hard to imagine Chinese furniture in a house in France, for example, but it works well.”

A “ridiculous stuffed lobster from Indonesia” is how Lovell describes the most kitsch thing she has ever bought. It hangs unexpectedly above the door leading to the kitchen from the dining room, mounted in its original glass case which Lovell had restored. Either side of the kitchen door hang two classic Vietnamese side panels in black with Vietnamese text in gold leaf. “The paint is in good condition but one has faded. That’s what is so lovely about them – they are not uniform and are really different.”

On one wall hangs a series of paintings created by a Japanese artist using tiny charcoal pencil marks. “He went blind as his



A corner of the dining room

work was so close he was doing it through a magnifying glass,” explains Lovell. On another hang original costume design sketches from Glyndebourne last year. An imposing bronze Burmese Buddha bridges the gap between dining and drawing room and an Indian version of a tuba “which I got in Delhi and which makes an appalling noise” perches nonchalantly on a chaise. In the opposite corner quietly sits a china dalmatian, surveying the rest of the room. “I am quite mad about dalmatians; they are very sweet with a lovely disposition.”

The wooden Rajasthani horse by the pool was originally part of a pair. Of it, Lovell says, “I just knew there would be a place for them somewhere and I put one up by the swimming pool and the other in the shop. I thought it would be difficult to accommodate because they weigh a ton, being solid wood, but a British woman bought it immediately for her husband’s birthday and sent it back to London.”

But her most ridiculous attempted purchase was “an old stuffed ram from an old knitting shop selling skeins of wool in Queenstown, New Zealand. The only reason I didn’t get it back here was that I couldn’t get it into Singapore. It broke every quarantine rule and regulation: stuffed animal, dead animal, potential fungus. It’s probably still in the window of the knitting shop.” □