



# Oil and water

When a still-life painter dropped anchor in an Aberdeen studio, the 1,600 sq ft industrial space made his work absorb the sea view.

*"We shape our buildings, thereafter they shape us."*

Every wall and corner of Richard Winkworth's studio evokes that Churchillism, with images of ships and mountains vying for attention in a scenic, eclectic space. In the distance, through large windows, a familiar volcanic hump makes sense of his paintings of lone peaks. Closer, the container vessels that ply the East Lamma Channel explain the bold depictions of seagoing craft.

That his surroundings could have such an influence on him surprised no one more than Winkworth, a British artist who lived in Hong Kong as a child and returned from London in 2007.

"I'd been a still-life painter up to the point I moved into this studio," he says, "but I found one's

environment has so much impact on one's psyche." Winkworth discovered the 1,600 sq ft space in Aberdeen with the help of a property agent who suggested he stop looking at small flats in Sheung Wan and start checking out industrial buildings. On entering what was once a warehouse he knew he had found what he wanted.

"My dad was a sailor so ... being able to see one of the world's busiest shipping lanes was very important to me," he says.

Winkworth also recalls a time, when living in Bombay, India, he would wait at home for his father's ship to cruise by, then catch a taxi to greet him as it docked. "I walked into this space and was taken straight back to my childhood."

Now, with an eye-catching mixture of Chinese

antiques, furniture that moved with him from London, *objets* picked up on his travels and items found discarded (including pots, another obsession), the studio, which is devoid of internal walls, has evolved into an inviting space where Winkworth can paint, display his work and entertain guests, some of them art dealers. When necessary, it is also a crash pad, with a roomy sofa doubling as a bed.

"You can partition these spaces but for a studio, the farther back you can get from a painting the better you can judge composition and balance of colour," he says, adding that the minimal changes he made included installing a sink and tiling the wall behind it, as well as sealing the concrete floor and rebuilding the bathroom.

Using shelving, cupboards and large artwork,



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Text Charmaine Chan Pictures John Butlin Styling David Roden

Winkworth fashioned discrete spaces, including an office at the back and a kitchen beside the main bank of windows.

“One Saturday afternoon I rushed off to B&Q [since closed] and bought absolutely everything I used to set up the kitchen,” he says. “It was put together that evening and, hey presto – instant kitchen; really cheap but effective.”

Sharing the side of the loft that enjoys the most daylight is a large area where Winkworth uses molten beeswax to create encaustic paintings, one of the oldest art forms. The work space benefits from natural ventilation but, during the summer, when the heat gun is on, searing temperatures strip away the need for clothing.

Showing off his view, which takes in Lamma and >>

**1** Behind the old sofa from The Conran Shop in London ([www.conranshop.co.uk](http://www.conranshop.co.uk)) is an oil-on-linen painting, *Kyoto Garden*, by Richard Winkworth. The pair of late 18th- to early 19th-century cabinets came from Terry Lam of The Antique Box (tel: 6017 6387; e-mail: [lkmterry@netvigator.com](mailto:lkmterry@netvigator.com)), as did the 16th-century Ming dynasty jar (HK\$4,800), which originally would have been used to hold wine or vinegar; the 19th-century blackwood chair (HK\$12,000 for a pair); and the lacquered 19th-century coffee table (HK\$12,000). In the corner is a work in progress of two ships called *The Paris Express*, named after the vessel in the foreground. The large white bowl cost HK\$338 from King Tak Hong (128 Queen’s Road East, Wan Chai, tel: 3118 2422).

**2** In front of the main bank of windows, separating the work area and the kitchen, is a dining table once used in London as a conference table. The 19th-century blackwood chairs (HK\$12,000 for two) were from Lam. The clear-glass bottle was retrieved from a bin outside the building and the blue-and-white jar is on loan from Lam.

**3** In front of a 36-panel black encaustic and a 30-panel work in progress, of jars, are a 19th-century low table (HK\$3,000) and a pair of 19th-century black-lacquer cabinets (HK\$18,000 for the pair), both from Lam. The smaller works on the floor are also by Winkworth, who kept the original concrete surface throughout the studio but sealed it.



**4** One of Winkworth's many depictions of the East Lamma Channel sits among his still-life and landscape paintings. The statue, one of a pair of clay and straw Taoist deities (HK\$380,000) from the 12th and 13th centuries, is on loan from Lam. Also from Lam came the 17th-century walnut altar table (HK\$48,000).



**5** After having a sink and tiled splashback installed (not seen), Winkworth put his kitchen together in a day with shelving from B&Q (since closed). Castors on the shelving allow him to push it out of the way when more space is required. The pots and pans came from Ikea (various locations; [www.ikea.com.hk](http://www.ikea.com.hk)). The chest, with brushes on top, is used to store paint and came from a junk shop in King's Cross, London, years ago.

**6** A lacquered and unusually large "beckoning cat", the *maneki neko* (a symbol of good fortune in Japan), is on loan from Lam. Behind it is a 19th-century elm panel (HK\$8,000) from Lam, who also sourced the late 18th- to early 19th-century elm vegetable cabinet. The red mountain painting is by Winkworth.

**7** The cosy office, behind the *Kyoto Garden* painting in the sitting area, features an Anglepoise lamp bought 10 years ago in London. Winkworth also moved to Hong Kong his old desk, bought from a junk yard near King's Cross station for £100 (HK\$1,200).

**8** In a corner of Winkworth's work space, by windows affording views of the East Lamma Channel, is a large mountain painting called *Dawn, Ap Lei Chau*.



**Tried + tested**

**Trick of the light** A display cabinet that once inhabited Terry Lam's Antique Box now serves as a striking light feature, with the simple addition of a handful of candles in small red glasses bought from a supermarket.

Lantau, Winkworth explains his fascination with the volcanic shape that appears in many of his paintings. "There's a mountain through there, in that gap. That is a shape that appears over and over again in the Hong Kong archipelago. It's like a metaphor for here." He then brings out what is akin to a "ship-anorak's" diary. In it are, among other details since incorporated in his artwork, rudimentary sketches of vessels, their names and the dates on which they sailed past. Flipping through his notes, surrounded by artwork that grew out of his studio, he says: "That's what this space has done to me."

*Richard Winkworth's exhibition "Back Home" will run from February 23 to March 18 at the Karin Weber Gallery (20 Aberdeen Street, Central, tel: 2544 5004; [www.karinwebergallery.com](http://www.karinwebergallery.com)).*