

# dwell

AT HOME IN THE MODERN WORLD

asia

**THE NEW  
OFFICE:**  
How Today's  
Workspace is  
Changing For  
the Better

## Live To Work

Designers Who Really  
Take Their Work Home

**RIGHT ON TREND**  
Fashionable  
Furniture  
Collaborations

**FOCUS ON FLOORING**  
The Low-Down  
on Modern Tatami  
and More



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# MIND OVER MATTER

GOING FROM A DECREPIT BUILDING ON A FRANTIC STREET TO AN IDEAL LIVE/WORK SITUATION WITH A SURPRISING GREEN OUTLOOK, THIS BANGKOK SHOPHOUSE IS THE RESULT OF AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLEVER IDEAS.

Story by **Melinda Williams**  
Photos by **Jirasak Thongyuak**

Project: aTypical Shophouse  
Architects: Savinee Buranasilapin and Tom Dannecker, Thingsmatter  
Location: Bangkok, Thailand









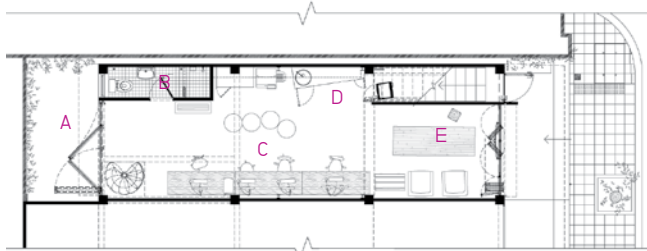


Savinee Buranasilapin, Tom Dannecker and their faithful dog Kundun (previous page) are partners in work and life, hanging out together everywhere from their apartment's compact kitchen (previous page) to their ground-floor office (below). Being located in central Bangkok means the couple can bike everywhere (left). Bifold doors that open the office to the street (right) have been left to weather naturally, to blend with the neighborhood.

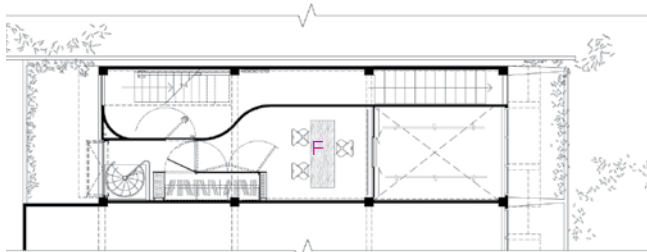
**“In Bangkok, shophouses have a reputation** for being crowded, poorly ventilated and dark. That’s because people fill them with clutter, lock the windows, and wrap them with billboards for condo towers,” says Savinee Buranasilapin of Thai architectural duo Thingsmatter. Undaunted by this unpromising reputation, when Buranasilapin and her partner Tom Dannecker found a “hideous” 30-year-old shophouse in dire need of renovation near a train station, they decided to transform it into a rentable office and apartment above. But when their tenant moved on after two years, they decided they liked the space so much that they moved in themselves. “Suddenly the building really felt like it was ours,” says Buranasilapin. “The building, our practice, and our lifestyle have evolved together, and continue to do so.”

Buranasilapin and Dannecker had a philosophical objective right from the outset of the project: ▮

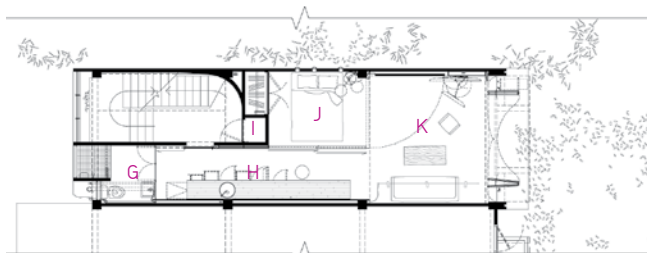




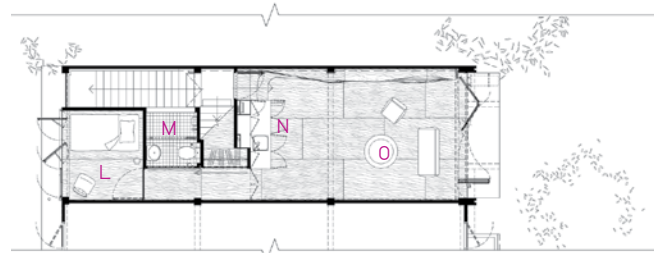
First Floor



Mezzanine



Second Floor



Third Floor

# aTypical Shophouse Floor Plan

- A Garden
- B Bathroom
- C Office
- D Kitchen
- E Meeting Room
- F Model Making
- G Bathroom
- H Kitchen
- I Laundry Room
- J Bedroom
- K Living Room
- L Bedroom
- M Bathroom
- N Kitchen
- O Study Room







"We were consciously trying to demonstrate the potential of this local typology. We used big windows, and we moved the plumbing and stairs towards the middle of the house in clever ways to let each floor cross-ventilate. It was really just a common sense, problem-solving approach, made easier by the building being a total wreck when we started."

The shophouse is located on a "terrifyingly busy street", which makes people think the apartment must be a distractingly urban place to live, but that's only true for the shopfront on the ground floor, says Buranasilapin. "Go upstairs, and the views in both directions are surprisingly green. In the front, it's the trees on the street that block most of the traffic from view and mask the façade. In the back, it's a secret jungle, as the unkept gardens of the big houses behind us slowly overgrow their boundaries. This kind of condition is actually very common in Bangkok, but because people cover their windows and close themselves in, they don't see it. We opened up."

On each level, the duo changed the position of the staircase to minimize wasted hallway space, and allow the usable interior to reach to the back. Bathrooms were refitted into the remaining spaces, so that all



apartments have windows at both ends, making for dramatically different results on each floor.

"On the second floor, the space left over from the staircase and bathroom placements left only a dark middle bay for the bedroom," says Buranasilapin. "Since our building is the last in the row, we were able to cheat some magnifying lenses as portholes into the party wall for light, and a surreal, enlarged view of the trees outside. Sliding panels and a pivoting wall can enclose the bedchamber into a quiet, efficiently air-conditioned "black box", or be left open for a bigger, spacious feel."

The material palette for the building has been kept humble and industrial; a nod to the history of the space. "We usually like things to look like what they are," says Buranasilapin. "For example, we allow the steel frames on our shopfront doors to slowly

Dannecker was initially doubtful about investing money in the cantilevered staircase (above, left) but now agrees the sense of openness and light flow it creates makes it money well spent. "That stair is the difference between architecture and real estate," says Buranasilapin. No such economic consideration was given to the safety-orange floor (above) though: - "It just makes us happy," she says - as does the green view from the third-floor bedroom (opposite).





The 'black box' of the master suite features sliding walls that can be pulled back or forward for a cozy, enclosed space (right, top) or opened up (right, below). Bathrooms (below) occupy spaces freed up by moving existing staircases, while long, lean built-in cabinetry (opposite, left) and clever use of mirrors (opposite, right) help open up the narrow shophouse and reflect light and greenery.







rust. It looks great, and it's low-maintenance. People sometimes knock to ask us how we got the steel to look that way, as if there was a paint they could buy to get the same look." Elsewhere, MDF, plywood, and butcher-block made from rubberwood offcuts were coated with the simplest possible clear coat for protection. "We use the same jalousie windows that our neighbors have in their bathrooms, but we stretch them to entire walls. It's not necessarily the same materials and finishes we use for our clients, but it seems appropriate that this rugged, vernacular building would feel comfortable wearing materials chosen from our local hardware store, rather than a decorator's catalog. Of course, the safety orange floor is a little different. That just makes us happy."

Working, living and rebuilding all in the same space has had its challenges, especially since the pair moved in at a point where much of the building was still a construction site, but being right there in amongst the mess helped them make better decisions than they would have at a remove, says Buranasilapin. Now, with work downstairs

and living upstairs, the balance of closeness and separation is ideal. "The distinct circulation works well as the punctuation in "live/work," she says. "It absolutely feels like we are going home, or going to work, even if it's just a few flights of stairs and a change in lighting. Of course, our dog Kundun is with us at all times, but he seems to know the difference between home and work, too. He doesn't like to work weekends."

But the fun of redevelopment isn't over yet – the shophouse still has a fourth floor and a rooftop space that is virtually untouched. Until such time as they renovate the outdoor space, Dannecker and Buranasilapin will get their fix of flora and fauna from their spacious third-floor bedroom. "It's got a floor area of 6.2sqm, with a 4.3sqm fully operable window opening into the canopy of a massive tree, which we share with birds, squirrels, butterflies, and feral cats," she explains. "Given the positions of our neighbors' roofs, awnings, and windows, I think we're the only humans who can really appreciate it. It's very Bangkok, in a way people don't often recognize." ■■■