

*In the living area of Dutch designers Joyce Urbanus and Dax Roll's Amsterdam apartment, colourful objects and artworks 'pop' against the white walls and ceiling. The abstract portrait (below left) was purchased at an art fair; the graphic print and the duckling under the cloche are by Dutch interior designer and artist San Ming; the sideboard is custom-made; the lamp is vintage; and the chairs were found on the street. OPPOSITE PAGE: The couple collaborated with local designers David Derksen and Lex Poit on the oxidised mirror, created for the new Hoxton, Amsterdam hotel.*



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The creative goal is in the name: Amsterdam-based design duo Nicemakers channel their love for quirky, beautiful art and objects into everything they do.

*By* MARC HELDENS  
*Photographed by* ALAN JENSEN

**T**here are times when you come across a partnership that just feels right, whether it's a fairytale romance or a creative collaboration. On rare occasions you might encounter a pair in perfect sync both personally and professionally — such as Amsterdam-based designers Joyce Urbanus and Dax Roll. The loved-up young couple share an interiors aesthetic, a passion for seeking out fascinating objects, a taste for travel and a talent for creating beautiful spaces — and have channelled that synchronicity into their design studio, Nicemakers, now one of the Netherlands' most sought-after practices.

Urbanus and Roll clicked immediately when they first met, and soon discovered they had much in common: she had studied fashion, media and interior-design styling, then worked for a number of interior design studios; he had studied advertising, marketing and communications before working in the fashion industry. They were a dream team destined to happen.

"After a lunch date and a three-hour walk," Urbanus recalls, "it turned out we both loved travelling to faraway places, collecting things and shipping »



*Original features such as the sun-filled living area's wooden ceiling beams drew Urbanus and Roll to their Amsterdam apartment. The sofa was a present from Roll's parents, while the coffee table is a vintage find. The artworks include pieces by Evert Thielen, San Ming and Ingeborg Oderwald.*

In a corner of the living room, a San Ming artwork presides above a day bed custom-designed by Roll and Urbanus. OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Sourcing unusual objects, such as the antique tortoiseshells seen here, is one of their shared passions; on the wall above hangs a photograph of the Brooklyn Bridge by Arthur Martin and a painting by Ming. The couple at their Amsterdam studio office. The copper-and-glass lampshade is a vintage find from Lisbon.



« them to Amsterdam, where they could be used for our projects.” Founding Nicemakers in 2011, the couple set up their studio office in a former diamond merchant’s building in the historical centre of Amsterdam. The serene white workspace is the ideal backdrop for their collection of vintage furniture, fine materials and special objects, photographs, art and interior design books — all inspiration for their glamorous, quirky interiors.

Thanks to the couple’s shared vision, things quickly fell into place for Nicemakers. Its first project, the House of Amstel hotel, was followed by more high-profile design appointments, including SLA salad bar outlets, the Americano Bar & Kitchen, and the Amsterdam outpost of London’s ultra-stylish Hoxton hotel group. In addition, the couple have put their stamp on interiors for menswear outlet No Label, a nightclub and several private homes.

“We’ve developed a strong mutual vision; it’s amazing how we complement each other,” says Urbanus. “We often come up with the same ideas.

“When we start a project, we don’t just see the space — we actually see the people who are going to use it; we hear the sounds, the buzz and the music,” she continues. “We achieve the best result when there’s a certain functionality attached to a project. And it’s the touch of ‘decoration’ that makes it our own.”

That Nicemakers touch — the clever, whimsical detailing that has put the duo on the design map — is in full effect in the couple’s compact first-floor apartment near Amsterdam Central railway station, on a vibrant street lined with cafes, restaurants and fashion boutiques and design stores. Like many of the grand houses in the historical centre, the property, built in 1745, is decoratively corniced and gabled, but when Urbanus and Roll first saw it, the interior needed serious work. That sealed the deal: the designers were thrilled to be given ‘carte blanche’ on the space. “We fell for the apartment on our first visit,” recalls Roll. »



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: In the bedroom, Urbanus and Roll have lined the original marble fireplace with antique mirrors found in Lisbon; the console is from Ikea; a vignette of found objects is displayed under the cloche; the ship print is a gift from Roll's grandmother; the spider artwork and butler's mirror are vintage finds. A custom-designed counter separates the new kitchen from the dining area; the basin mixer is Dornbracht's "Tara". An illustration by British artist Dan Hillier gazes out from behind a collection of design books. OPPOSITE PAGE: The dining area is brimming with vintage finds, including the table and chairs and a 1950s wall light by Italian modernist Gaetano Sciolari, the couple's favourite lighting designer. They found the green bowl in Nice and bought the vase in Portugal.



« After consulting the building's owners, they came up with a plan for some much-needed updates, including minor structural changes. "Essentially, we opened up the apartment," Roll explains. "Any doors we didn't need, we just took out."

The redesigned space demonstrates Nicemakers' ability to take an interior to the next level with a minimum of fuss. A counter custom-designed by the couple separates the new kitchen from the living and dining area, while a sliding door eases access to what had once been a cramped bathroom, still compact but now practical.

To modernise the timber ceiling beams and window frames, the walls and ceilings of the living areas and bedroom are painted brilliant white. In contrast, the passage to the bedroom — which doubles as a walk-through closet — is a dramatic combination of black and dark green, marking the transition from daytime to nighttime spaces.

Arranged against the simple backdrop of the painted walls are furniture pieces and decorative items in rich browns, warm copper, gold, ochre and orange — a signature Nicemakers colour. The collection includes additional custom designs — such as the day bed and dresser — and many treasured items unearthed by the couple at flea markets and auctions during their travels.

"It's a compact apartment, but it's perfect for two people," Roll says. "It has two zones: an 'active' part in the front that overlooks the street and a quiet area in the back, where we sleep. In the summertime, the cool wind blows through the space, and both zones have a view out to the little green courtyard. We can relax here, and work, and even have cocktail parties."

With its eye-catching art, vintage and custom furniture, and collection of unusual objects, the apartment tells the story of this talented couple and their love of all things nice. As Roll puts it: "This is our life, in the right spot, with the right features and the right energy." *VL*  
Visit [nicemakers.com](http://nicemakers.com).

**"THIS IS OUR LIFE, IN THE RIGHT SPOT, WITH THE RIGHT FEATURES AND THE RIGHT ENERGY" – DAX ROLL**

