

Once the host agrees to let the photographer in, he must quickly determine where the best possible views for the available light compositions can occur. Anton Gautama is truly in love with each of these rooms—the kitchens, the living rooms, the bedrooms, the bathrooms, the desktops, the basement storages. It is as if he is trying to tell the inhabitants “This room is so important for me to understand who you are.” He alternates his cameras, a Phase One or a Leica and uses a tripod. Exposures can take up to several minutes which many homeowners find hard to understand. On occasion a ghostly figure emerges from the woodwork as they pass his lens—curious of his slow way of working or just going about their everyday.

“It is not easy to enter the Chinese houses, as they are very protective of their privacy,” says Anton Gautama. The photographer is fascinated with the inside of the home as if it is a book of life. To date, he has been admitted to 24 homes in order to photograph. This visual story is a reference to living quarters of different fourth generation Chinese-Indonesians based in two communities: Surabaya, East Java and Makassar, South Sulawesi. Gautama has roots in both of these districts: today, he lives in the port city of Surabaya. Makassar, South Sulawesi, was where he grew up. In addition to his acquaintances and family, he randomly chose other unknown family homes to photograph and these places comprise most of the subjects here. Anton Gautama—the unexpected visitor—turns these minute impressions into visual statements about time, place and culture.

Even with the onslaught of social media, access and documentation of private spaces are rare. Family, friends or servants are usually the only guests that are permitted in a home. During the ongoing history of art and photography the camera clad observer, welcome or unwelcome, has entered personal spheres. Photographers acquire entry to the intimate domestic life when they are making a story involving those living in their homes. It may be an editorial environmental portrait or a long-term essay about a culture or subject that fascinates the photographer and spawns their own creative process. There are thousands of examples to this end but one to note here is Jacqueline Hassink’s “Female Power Stations: Queen Bees.” To pursue her project, she travelled the world in the late 1990s to photograph the home dinner tables and corporate meeting tables of top women executives based upon a researched list of Fortune Global 500.

The pure placement of objects and furniture in homes anywhere can reveal how complex and symbolical humans shape their environments. Wealth or the lack of finances does not necessarily discern who is organised and who is not.

In most of the homes in this book one can sense the generations that have passed through them. Taoist altars, some with countenances, some not, frequently appear as glowing red and yellow shades of light. Decades of framed family photographs or wall calendars in these homes are as common as in many corners of the earth and at the same time so very unique and personal. It might be the curiosities of the long-run family business side by side with historical photographs which impress the photographer most. Or the colonial style green door or window frame that captures his eye first. The juxtaposition of different perspectives of the same room guide our eyes to engage with details of the functional space and in some ways the beauty of the simplicity of lines, and the patina of surfaces. Much of the time he is standing in darkness, waiting for his eyes to adjust. A path

to a basement can be precarious, sometimes haunting. In the older kitchens, the cooking utensils appear as curious, surreal sculptures in variance to more recent plastic and electric varieties. Stone or cement block stovetops can be found in many places photographed: no longer used for cooking, the massive slabs give reminiscence to the re hearth that was standard here not long ago.

A home has many functions and in its purest structural form it is a place of shelter against the elements of climate. The grounds and weather conditions are the decisive factors for the choice of settlement. Indonesia is a multi-ethnic country of over 17,000 oceanic islands formed by the seismic activity and it is the fourth most populated country in the world. These are the key facts about a country's living conditions, but what Anton Gautama enables is a privileged observation: a unique sliver of Indonesia.

In contrast to his last book "Pabean Passage", about the vivid back streets and the protagonists of the centuries old spice markets in East Java, "Home Sweet Home" focuses on the domestic interiors of homes in the streets where Anton Gautama was born and where he lives today. Similar though, Gautama shows us how he is exhilarated by experimenting with the sensibilities of colour and lighting. In "Home Sweet Home" as with the spice market work, his concept evolves around capturing traditions that he feels are of social documentary importance—and his choices are justified. To be able to observe the waves of change in everyday life, it takes more than having a photographic eye; it takes a great amount of stamina and patience but more than anything the photographer must be able to convey their experience. Anton Gautama's understanding of the places he photographs is not just about the social evidence, but also about deciphering the compositions.

Gautama shares intimate views into where and how ethnic Chinese-Indonesian communities have lived for generations. He is not interested in a room with a view or producing the perfect seductive and dreamy interior design shoot, but he is clear about showing the view of a room. Paradoxically, it is the liveliness of the space and the inanimate objects which are present. Each of the objects has been touched by a hand and often passed on, maybe to the point that it is no longer in use and thus becomes an emblem of a person or an action of the past. If the object can tell a story, the photograph can tell more. It can preserve the object for more eyes to see.

By Celina Lunsford