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HKDI

HONG KONG  
DESIGN  
INSTITUTE  
香港知專  
設計學院

Member of VTC Group  
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«EVERYTHING TAKES TIME. BEES HAVE  
TO MOVE VERY FAST TO STAY STILL.»

DAVID FOSTER WALLACE

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HONG KONG DESIGN INSTITUTE

# SIGNED

ISSUE SIX 2013 HKDI

## THE TAO OF GIVING

BRINGING CLASSICAL CHINESE ART TO  
A NEW GENERATION

**STRIKING  
A BALANCE**  
HKDI'S ANNUAL  
DESIGN SHOWS

**THE DRAGON STIRS**  
MAO JIHONG ON  
CHINA'S CREATIVE  
AWAKENING

«WHEN  
YOU WANT  
INSIGHT AS  
BADLY AS YOU  
WANT TO  
BREATHE, THEN  
YOU SHALL  
HAVE IT.»

SOCRATES

ISSUE SIX

EDITOR'S LETTER

# INSIGHT

THE PAINTER VINCENT Van Gogh created profoundly innovative paintings but he also developed some extraordinary ideas about design, ethics and education in a famous series of letters to his brother Theo, a Parisian art dealer.

On April 3 1878 Van Gogh wrote these lines to Theo from Amsterdam, "If one is master of one thing, one has at the same time insight into many things" and he thereby revealed that to master any activity requires discipline - to acquire basic principles - and creativity - to adopt those principles to one's own circumstances. And insight, the theme of this sixth edition of *SIGNED* magazine, is what happens when discipline and creativity combine to create a fresh approach.

The word insight first appeared in English during the 12th century, when it meant, "to see with the eyes of the mind." By the late 16th century it had evolved to mean a "penetrating understanding into character or hidden nature." For a designer it's best to absorb both of these definitions to develop visions that create new ways of crafting materials or shaping space. A great designer must be able to see things from within, with all of their intellect and senses engaged. And they must be able to see things that are hidden from others, be it a way that two fabrics can be combined or a means of arranging space so that human beings can work more harmoniously together.

In this edition Mao Jihong (*The Dragon Stirs*), one of China's most insightful fashion innovators talks about how high standards can form the foundation of a revolution in design quality. In *Striking a Balance* the work of HKDI students and staff for the school's annual design show reveals the importance of self-disciplined reflection in choosing the right mix of technique and creativity in. And in *Drive Time, Space*

*to Grow* and *The Voice* Ford designer and HKDI alumnus Chelsia Lau, interior designer Rosan Bosch and filmmaker Ruby Yang demonstrate how insight and its cousin intuition are the driving force behind great cars, inspiring environments and life-changing documentaries.

This edition is completed by stories about the "hidden nature" of Hong Kong's tiny apartments, iconic-designer Barney Cheng using his sharp "mind's eye" to advise HKDI's budding couturiers and the "penetrating understanding" to be found in modern reinterpretations of Classic Chinese paintings.

The great Russian humanist and author Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote "...we make mistakes because the easiest and most comfortable course is to seek insight where it accords with our emotions - especially selfish ones." He meant that true insight comes when creative people act selflessly and seek for inspiration outside their comfort zone. That's the kind of insight that Van Gogh sought in his painful explorations of his own limitations. Where there's no pain, there's no gain - and no insight.

**DANIEL JEFFREYS**  
*Editor-In-Chief*

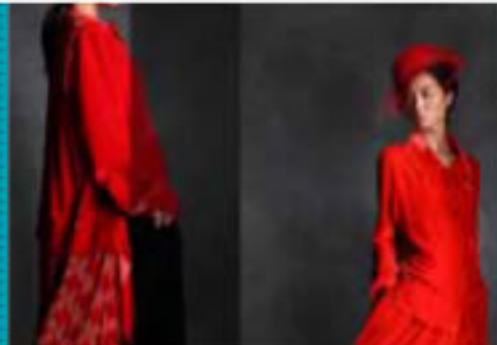
# CONTENTS



**06** FEATURE  
**STRIKING A BALANCE**  
Craftsmanship and Creativity at the HKDI's annual design show



**14** FEATURE  
**THE DRAGON STIRS**  
Fashion entrepreneur Mao Jihong on the rebirth of Chinese luxury



**20** PEOPLE  
**DRIVETIME**  
Chelsia Lau and the global car



**26** PEOPLE  
**SPACETO GROW**  
Dutch designer Rosan Bosch talks about designing for social change



**30** PEOPLE  
**THE VOICE**  
Oscar winning director Ruby Yang at HKDI

**36** FEATURE  
**HAUTE ARCHITECTURE**  
HKDI students design couture with fashion legend Barney Cheng



**42** CULTURE  
**THE TAO OF GIVING**  
Bringing new life to the Xubaizhai collection

**48** CULTURE  
**SMALL MIRACLES**  
Big lessons from Hong Kong's tiny flats

**50** EVENTS  
**WHAT'S NEXT AT HKDI**



COVER IMAGE SCREENSHOT FROM AN ANIMATION IN THE E-BOOK 'A JOURNEY INTO CHINESE PAINTING: A SELECTION OF WORKS FROM THE XUBAIZHAI COLLECTION' CREATED BY HKDI STUDENTS

The Hong Kong Design Institute is a member institution of the Vocational Training Council. For more information about HKDI, please check our website on [www.hkdi.edu.hk](http://www.hkdi.edu.hk), or email us at [hkdi@vtc.edu.hk](mailto:hkdi@vtc.edu.hk)

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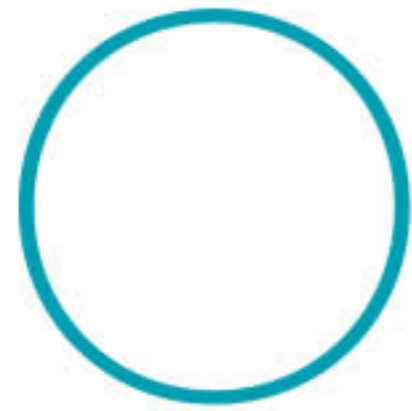
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PHOTOGRAPHY VANESSA KO EDITOR SUMMER CAO CONTRIBUTOR LISA LI  
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# STRIKING A BALANCE



*The best design education creates harmony between craftsmanship and creativity, with students being equally equipped to manufacture and inspire. This year's annual design show "Searching... Becoming - Emerging Design Talents" at HKDI and IVE - Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (Lee Wai Lee) revealed that there are many different ways to achieve the right mix between technique and innovation. USA LI reports.*

ALL IMAGES: HKDI



On 29th June 2013, I boarded the Star Ferry at the Edinburgh Place Pier in Central but the ship's clock told me it was 11th November 2006 and I realised I was about to join a Ferry Pier farewell party.

This exercise in nostalgia was crafted by Higher Diploma graduates from IVE (Lee Wai Lee)'s Department of Multimedia and Internet Technology and the mix of music and images felt like riding a time machine, especially when three true stories from ordinary Hong Kongers became part of the narrative, reminding audience members of their deep-seated affection for the old Ferry pier.

*The Remaining-Star Ferry* (留情 - 天星) graduate project was one of three shown during this year's Multimedia Entertainment Show, which had My Hong Kong as its theme, providing an opportunity for students to reflect on the city's collective identity and the need to preserve its cultural heritage. These issues were explored by applying industry-leading technology, such as laser animation, moving projection systems, computer lighting programmes and moving sound technology, which the students had mastered during their two years' of study.

"The Multimedia Entertainment Show focused on the kind of visual effects and entertainment that visitors see at Disneyland and Ocean Park," says Peter Si, Acting Principal Lecturer at IVE (Lee Wai Lee)'s Department of Multimedia and Internet Technology (MIT). "We also launched Micro Film Screening this year, for which students created films, multimedia advertisements and animations."

The Micro Film Screening was a collaboration between the Department of Communication Design



PREVIOUS PAGE FIVE FASHION COLLECTIONS FROM THE HKDI'S ANNUAL DESIGN SHOW 2013  
TOP STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE MICRO FILM SCREENING ABOVE AND TOP RIGHT TWO WORKS IN THE MULTIMEDIA ENTERTAINMENT SHOW  
OPPOSITE LOWER: FOUR SCREEN CAPTURES FROM FILMS SHOWN AT THE MICRO FILM SCREENING



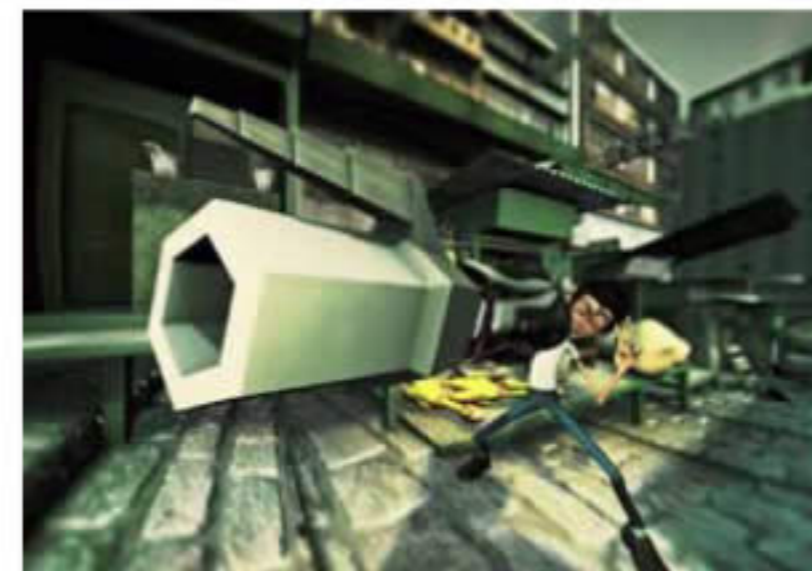
« THERE IS NO MORE 'PRODUCT' BECAUSE PEOPLE JUST WANT 'SERVICE', IT IS ALL ABOUT THE STYLE OF LIVING. »

and Digital Media (CDM) at HKDI and MIT. The CDM provides programmes for a Higher Diploma in Film and Television, in Advertising Design and Creative Media (Animation and Visual Effects) while MIT offers a Higher Diploma in Multimedia and in Digital Entertainment (Games and Animation).

"There is some similarity in the work we do. So after a suggestion by Eric Liu, the Vice Principal (Academic) at HKDI & IVE (Lee Wai Lee), we decided to organise the Micro Film Screening together," Si says.

The Micro Film Screening became a visual banquet offering TV commercials, microfilms and animations. The first occasion was a big success. More than a thousand people attended screenings between 29th and 30th June, including many professionals.

"We did not prescribe a general theme, to leave more space for imagination," says Si. The young creatives thus weaved their life experiences into the graduation pieces and made the micro films a celebration of youthfulness with a variety of topics expressing the young generation's views on society, culture and their hopes for the future. Old Hong Kong stationers, Pottinger Street and Tong-sui stores all became playgrounds for their creativity.





A different kind of story was being told by graduates of the Department of Fashion and Image Design (FID), although both sets of students faced the same challenge, namely how to strike the right balance between creativity and craftsmanship. For fashion students the dilemma often pushes them toward flamboyance as they try to stand out from their contemporaries.

"You need something to catch the eye on catwalk and so sometimes the pieces are not wearable in any realistic sense", says Elizabeth McLafferty, the head of the FID, commenting on the 2013 Fashion Show.

This year being noticed meant garments that echoed the curves of surrealist Spanish architect Antoni Gaudi, the futuristic skin of Hollywood's Alien, and

« FASHION IS ABOUT BEING AVANT-GARDE, CHIC AND NON-REPETITIVE. BUT IT IS ALSO ABOUT PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT. »



OPPOSITE & ABOVE FASHION COLLECTIONS AND LOOKS FROM THE HKDI'S ANNUAL DESIGN SHOW 2013 BELOW ONE OF THE LOOKS FROM ANGUS TSUI, OVERALL WINNER OF THIS YEAR'S FASHION SHOW

Salvador Dali's empire of colours. The high degree of creativity on display left a deep impression.

"It was unprecedented," says McLafferty "There were exceptionally strong design concepts in the students' work this year."

Prize winners from FID were invited to show their full collections at the annual show but in response to the outpouring of creativity this year McLafferty and her colleagues decided to add a Performance Show session, which gave selected students who did not reach the final shows a chance to display one or two of their designs on the catwalk.

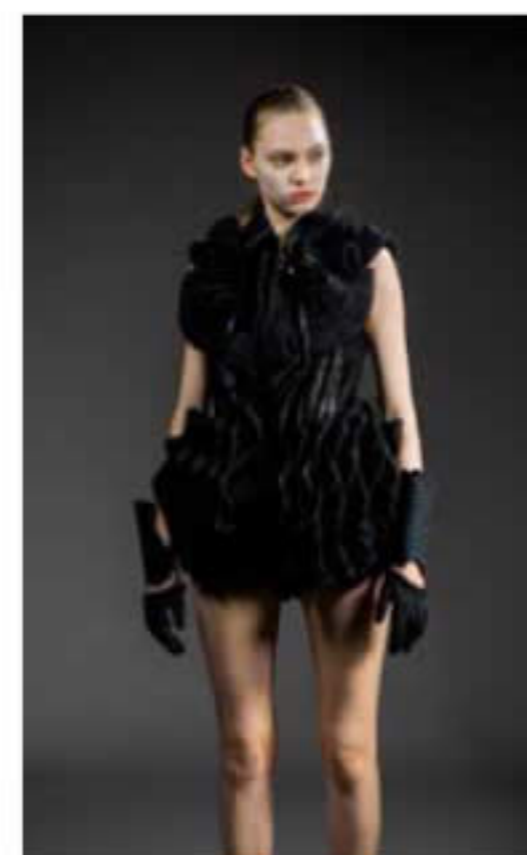
All the garments submitted for the design show must display a refined level of craftsmanship. The students must learn to knit, weave and execute fine details. Besides focusing on craftsmanship, the young designers also need to reflect on how fashion impacts society.

"Fashion is about being avant-garde, chic and non-repetitive. But it is also about protecting the environment," says Angus Tsui, the Overall Winner of this year's fashion show. "It is the role of designers to resolve the tension between the two."

Tsui's work seeks a harmony between fashion and sustainability. His design concept was inspired by the Xenomorphic creature in Alien and he applied the concept of "Zero-Waste" to his collection by creating irregular pleated forms with different sizes of rectangular panels that allowed him to use every scrap of fabric. Thus by weaving the concept of sustainability into garments that echoed the Alien's body shape, Angus used his design as a lifestyle experiment, illustrating a way of being creative without using an excessive amount of resources.

The Jewellery and Lifestyle Design Show produced by the Product and Interior Design department (PID) also used a socially conscious approach to explore the tension between craftsmanship and creativity.

Titled *iConique* the show offered aesthetic treats as well as a thoughtful discussion on the purpose of design. One student, Ma Ka Ching created pieces that seek to capture feminine beauty in a gesture. "She portrayed a lady dancing and twirling her dress in a very elegant and detailed way", says Bill Chan, PID's Course and Stream Leader, who accepts that making something aesthetically pleasing is only one goal of fine design. "Most people understand 'lifestyle' as being something defined by luxury, materialism and consumerism. But 'lifestyle' is also about living in a more caring and respectful society."





Designers have increasingly come to realise that they have a responsibility to create products that contribute to a better society, especially with regard to environmental protection and a better use of resources. In his design *Naturergy*, Cheung Chun Sing proposed a product that would save energy by using free natural resources such as sand, rock, sunshine and variations in temperature with minimal extra resources to obtain basic daily services for people living in an environment with limited resources.

The film, fashion and product design pieces have transformed the annual design show into a forum for dialogue about the direction of design. The show prepared by students from the Higher Diploma in Digital Music and Media programme (DMM) used the language of music to explore the tension between technique and creativity. The student concert *Music in Motion* combined the two with a rare degree of harmony.

"We were impressed by the diversity of musical styles and the professionalism of the performances," says Shirley Cheung, programme leader in Digital Music and Media. "You find jazz, canto-pop, rock, metal and post-rock in this concert."

Cheung noticed that her students began with music playing technique as their basic foundation and then embellished it with "applied creativity."

"The students mastered the technical skills very well," says Cheung. "The concert was a showcase of their original work. They cooperated with one another and applied all the knowledge obtained in their studies on things like event management, song writing, music production and audio technology. The results produced very positive feedback from industry professionals. Many students were offered contracts after the performance."



« BEING GOOD AT TECHNOLOGY IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH. »

Balancing the mastery of craftsmanship and technology with the development of style and innovation is a difficult task for any design educators. At HKDI the challenge is more intense because the programmes have tight limits. And teachers need to teach everything from scratch. Yet the annual design show reveals an impressive degree of balance between craftsmanship and creativity, although each department has a different approach to arriving at a place of harmony, with different programmes giving the two elements a different priority.

"The mastery of skills and techniques must come first because of the time constraints of the course and the nature of vocational training," says McLafferty, who accepts that many of her students come to their studies with an abundant reserve of natural creativity that often has to be given strong direction. "The students need to learn how to construct, then in their further study, they can take time to learn about concepts and develop deeper creative skills."

Those teachers involved in the *Music in Motion* show believe technique is only a start. "Being good at technology is not good enough," says Cheung, "Our students tend to focus too much on technique. To be successful in a music world defined by passion and musicianship, they need to be unique



and differentiated. That's why being creative and be able to comprise local and Chinese culture is advantageous."

For Bill Chan of PID, design education needs to be far more than learning the process of product production. "There is no more 'product' because people just need 'service', it is all about the style of living. Design teaching should switch the focus from product to the people that use them and the lifestyle they lead."

Despite the apparent divergence in their opinions on how to balance technique and creativity, students have no shortage of opportunity to develop both skills thanks to HKDI's drive to be a platform for exchange and inspiration.

The success of Tsui is a good example. He got the idea to have no waste in his graduation project after engaging with industry practitioners.

"I had my first exposure to sustainability during the 2012 Asian EcoChic Design competition," he says. "After winning an award, I got the opportunity to join a cultural trip to London Fashion Week where I met different sustainable designers. I was also invited to give a workshop by the Friends of the Earth on how to upcycle jeans and trousers."

Not many Hong Kong students have had a chance to travel abroad. Thus HKDI has invited many world-renowned designers to Hong Kong, but that's just the start to a global exploration of the balance between creativity and craftsmanship.

"Our next step is to develop a curriculum that will enable student exchanges," says McLafferty. "Hong Kong students must go out and see the world. They will be inspired by meeting with students from other parts of the design community."

This openness enables HKDI to absorb know-how

from industry and obtain insights on how to prepare its students for the challenges of the global marketplace.

"The difference between school and real life is the sense of what the market wants. Students need to test their designs to see if the market accepts them. And that's where we can help," says Bonnie Chin, a senior designer at Cirbaf, which specialises in recycling fabric in the fashion industry.

At the end of a tutorial project run by Cirbaf at HKDI on upcycling, some students were invited to join Cibraf's design project. In this process, students were exposed to global trends in the design industry. "We helped them adjust their designs," says Chin. "They learnt how to make work that would sell and be consistent with global trends in the design industry. In our case, that's all about making attractive, sustainable design."

HKDI also needs to market itself more effectively to bring more experts in creativity and craftsmanship to its door. HKDI has achieved a lot as a young school and its openness to industry can do much to increase its reputation.

"We see many good designs from students," says Chin. "It is important to promote this work to a worldwide audience. HKDI should work together with stores like Lane Crawford and Harvey Nichols. They can introduce HKDI collections to the world market."

A school that can strike a perfect balance between creativity and craftsmanship will no doubt send out graduates that can reach world markets. That the annual design show is such a lively example of HKDI's commitment to find the right mix between technique and innovation is a sure sign that the school is one to watch. ☺





# THE DRAGON STIRS

**MAO JIHONG** is leading the charge of new Chinese designers with his emphasis on handmade craftsmanship and Asian inspired creativity. He spoke to **DAISY ZHONG** about the rebirth of luxury manufacturing in China and the consequences for European fashion brands who have relied on easy profits in the East for too long.

It was two hours before the start of the HKDI's annual Fashion Show, a signature event that showcases work by selected graduates and has launched the careers of several Hong Kong designers.

As the minutes ticked away a team of judges stood in front of two whiteboards pasted with photographs from 24 collections, debating which student designers should be among the prizewinners.

All went smoothly until the judges hesitated over whether one collection should be awarded two prizes. The collection was distinguished by exquisite patterns that had been printed on fabric. The matter was undecided until one of the judges made a passionate plea for a principle that he regards as essential for China's resurgent fashion industry.

"Collection 23 displays excellent handling of colours and patterns," said Mao Jihong, the co-founder of Exception de Mixmind. "However, it relies on computer-generated images and the craftsmanship

LEFT LOOKS FROM  
THEYMOYNOT 2013  
AUTUMN/WINTER  
COLLECTION  
BELOW MAO JIHONG

has not been done by hand. If we give 23 a second prize we will be promoting a practice that creates a beautiful effect, but can never attain the uniqueness and originality of hand-painted patterns. I think as judges it's really important for us to send a signal that designers should respect work that's done by hand. It's about nurturing good habits."

High standards of production are something that Mao takes seriously. He founded Exception de MixMind on this principle and it has helped the company become one of the most highly regarded fashion brands in the world. Established by Mao and his then wife Ma Ke, the brand's innovative designer, in Guangzhou in 1996, Exception deliberately avoids mass production. All their clothing is made from natural materials such as cotton, linen, silk and wool; the use of artificial dyes and colorants is minimised, and the manufacturing process is conducted mostly through traditional techniques like spinning, weaving and sewing.

Exception's sister brand, a couture collection called Wuyong (which means useless in Chinese) was founded in 2006 and many say it represents the pinnacle of Chinese fashion design with its exclusive non-commercial feel and its avant-garde artistic use of discarded materials such as leftover tarpaulins and paint covered sheets.



For Mao, regarded as the foremost entrepreneur in China's fashion industry, a craftsmanship-based approach lies at the heart of his philosophy of design education, and he believes it is the key to establishing a thriving domestic fashion industry.

In evaluating the work at the Fashion Show Mao reiterated his hope that students will pay more attention to the importance of handcrafting their collections. "Fashion is not just about drawing designs on a computer," he says. "Designers must know how to create garments by hand, which is the most important practical skill. Young designers should go to workshops and factories, and become familiar with the environment, which will give their designs a more human element."

When Mao assesses a garment he does more than observe the details with his trained eye, he also "touches it, feels it, and thinks about its relationship to the human body." In an interview with *CKGSB Knowledge* last year, Mao noted that while Westerners use sight as their fashion sense, "The Chinese tend to favor touch and texture as a measure of beauty." According to him, this perspective is rooted in oriental values that revere unity between humanity and nature.

Although sustainability has become a popular theme for fashion brands, what distinguishes

OPPOSITE LOOKS FROM THE YMOYNOT 2013 AUTUMN/WINTER COLLECTION



«IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT TO SEND A SIGNAL THAT DESIGNERS SHOULD RESPECT WORK THAT'S DONE BY HAND.»

Exception is that an environmentally friendly approach has been one of its core values since the beginning. This insistence on core values has given Mao a significant role in the re-emergence of China's domestic fashion design industry. According to Tomothy Parent, a fashion observer and writer on the evolution of style in China, Chinese domestic designer brands simply did not exist before the establishment of Exception.

With over 100 stores in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou and an estimated annual turnover of more

than RMB 900 million a year Exception is unquestionably a success story. The brand won global attention in March when China's first lady Peng Liyuan chose a coat, suit and handbag that had been tailor-made by Mao's company when she accompanied her husband Xi Jinping on a visit to Russia, his first official trip as China's new President.

"Because of the media coverage, people suddenly realised that China's indigenous fashion industry is doing great," says Mao. "But the process started at least 17 years ago, when people began to chose Exception as the brand they love best."

Mao believes that the renaissance of Chinese domestic luxury is closely related to the renewed strength of

the nation and the improved quality of life that many people have. China has been through a period of "savoir-faire imperialism" in which European brands, especially those from France, have tried to occupy China and persuade Chinese people they do not have the skills to make products of European quality. But in the same way that Chinese filmmakers have



now pushed Hong Kong films from the mainland market, Mao expects Chinese fashion designers to do the same to the cultural invaders from the West. Many industry experts agree arguing that the time when uninspiring brands like Tod's (which some incorrectly thought had made the bag Peng Liyuan carried to Russia) can rely on Asia to replace profits lost from Europe and the US is coming to an end.

"This trend coincides with the fact that the balance of power is shifting from the West to the East, economically and politically," says Mao. "In past decades people around the world did not think Made-in-China was a good enough label."

Although China had arguably the world's strongest

« THE HKDI'S EMPHASIS ON ACTUAL PRACTICE, ON THE TECHNIQUE OF MAKING GARMENTS BY HAND... IS THE GREATEST ASSET OF THE INSITUATION. »



« IT DOESN'T MATTER WHERE YOU THINK THE BATTLEFIELD IS, WHAT'S IMPORTANT IS THE STATE OF MIND YOU BRING TO THE BATTLE. »

economy for two millennia (and was the prime source of luxury products like ceramics and silk), the country only started industrialising at the end of 20th century and rapidly became the world's prime source of inexpensive labour, specialising in mass-production of low-value goods such as cheap T-shirts. The Chinese were rarely thought of as creative and mostly stereotyped as copiers and counterfeiters. But Mao says this is no longer true. "These stereotypes are changing. After having gained financial security, people naturally developed their own lifestyle, taste and preference. Chinese consumers no longer see Europe as the only place that can produce luxury."

From the very beginning Exception has considered its competitors to be well-known international brands and was fully prepared to play at their level. They have recently been joined by a host of talented young Chinese designers such as Ziggy Chen, Uma Wang, Masha Ma, Nicole Zhang and Mary Ching, all of whom Mao says have "contributed to elevating China's homegrown luxury industry".

"We have long been involved in a global market, and customers in and outside China have been making a conscious choice about quality," he says. "I don't intentionally bring my brands to the international market. It doesn't matter where you think the battlefield is, what's important is the state of mind you bring to the battle."

Simply put, the evolution of Chinese domestic luxury is as natural as the "survival of the fittest": it is shaped by choices of consumers who are increasingly sophisticated. One of the latest developments of this evolution is Mao's involvement in the launching of a new brand YMOYNOT, which has seen HKDI take a key role.

The brand, named after a play on the words "why not?", is founded by Mao and his Hong Kong counterpart Stanley Wong, with support from iconic Japanese designer Yohji Yamamoto. Setting out to challenge fashion conventions with its oriental aesthetic, the brand opened its first shop in May on Hong Kong's Star Street, with 200 more shops expected to open around the region in the next two years.

HKDI's Department of Fashion and Image Design (FID) was invited to act as YMOYNOT's branding consultant with FID staff and students coordinating the fitting of the shop in Hong Kong, organising the opening event, providing PR services and overseeing daily operations.

Leung Mee Ling, senior lecturer of FID, says that

besides branding and marketing cooperation, both YMOYNOT and Exception keep recruiting HKDI students as their fashion designers and sales trainees. "YMOYNOT wants to establish a long-term relationship with us regarding branding and product development."

Mao chose to work with HKDI because he and the design school share a passion for craftsmanship. "The HKDI's emphasis on actual practice, on the technique of making garments by hand, refined by a meticulous attitude towards research and study, is the greatest asset of the institution, distinguishing HKDI from other design institutes across Asia. This practical-oriented direction in design education is something I wholeheartedly endorse."

And with Mao supporting the upsurge in craftsmanship and creativity in mainland China while HKDI does the same in Hong Kong it may not be long before the world's fashion leaders are heading to Guangzhou and Tseung Kwan O for their inspiration instead of Milan and Paris. ①

ABOVE LEFT LOOKS FROM THE YMOYNOT 2013 AUTUMN/WINTER COLLECTION  
ABOVE RIGHT A LOOK FROM THE EXCEPTION SPRING 2006 COLLECTION

PEOPLE

The Vocational Training Council, HKDI's parent body, has recently formed an alumni association that includes **CHELSIA LAU**, a graduate of Lee Wai Lee Technical Institute who has become one of the world's most accomplished automotive designers. She talked to **SUMMER CAO** about her twenty years with the Ford Motor Company

This is what we are about," says Chelsia Lau, Ford Motor Company's Chief Designer. "We always want to inject a visual premium into our designs. We are not talking about whether it's expensive or not – a car may be for mass market but if it's designed with ingenuity consumers will feel that the people behind it have paid attention to every detail."  
Born and bred in Hong Kong, Lau graduated from Lee Wai Lee Technical Institute before continuing her studies at the Art Centre College of Design in California. She joined Ford in 1992. Within

# DRIVE

# ME



THIS PAGE REAR VIEW OF THE FORD FIESTA; CHELSIA LAU AT A FORD FIESTA LIFE STYLE EVENT IN TAIWAN 2009





« YOU HAVE TO... BUILD UP A LIBRARY OF CREATIVE REFERENCES THAT CAN TRIGGER YOUR IMAGINATION »

eight years, she was given responsibility for designing models for the South American market and was named by *Autoweek* magazine as "one of the top ten secret people who will change your world".

In 2006, Lau received the World's Outstanding Chinese Designer award from the Hong Kong Design Centre. Currently Lau is working in Shanghai as the Chief Designer of Ford's Strategic Concepts Group, focusing on defining the future vision of Ford design.

Lau's input to Ford's portfolio includes concept cars, SUVs and small economy cars, many of which have won international accolades. To give a mass-market vehicle some of the premium feel of a supercar requires strokes of genius and Lau says these require dedication and hard work.

"Inspiration requires preparation. As an automotive designer, you have to subconsciously build up a library of creative references that can trigger your imagination," Lau says. "You have to know where to look, be curious, and have an open mind. Above all, you must pursue the things that fascinate you. When the right time comes, these resources can inspire unexpected ideas."

From an original idea to final production, developing a new car model is a cycle that requires about four years, according to Lau. The design



CLOCKWISE CHELSIA LAU EVALUATING A MODEL IN THE FINAL STAGES OF ITS DEVELOPMENT; LAU WITH MEMBERS FROM OTHER TEAMS IN THE FORD MOTOR COMPANY; CHELSIA LAU WORKING ON A CLAY SCALE MODEL.

team begins by making sketches that explore different possibilities. Based on these some scale models will be created. The ideas will be further refined after feedback from customer groups. A few concepts will be selected for clay development and will be subjected to engineering and aerodynamic evaluation. The final theme will be chosen based on innovation and customer feedback. Next step is craftsmanship and product execution through series of stringent tests and refinement. Therefore it is paramount for a car designer to predict what future tastes and technologies may be at least five to ten years into the future.

"We start from the customers," says Lau. "We observe them and listen to them carefully, study their behaviour and try to think like them, because it's important to know their priorities. We also look at world trends and try to project what might happen, as we can't communicate with the customers of four years from now."

With China changing so rapidly, predicting the future is challenging. Metropolitan areas of China have gone from virtually zero private car ownership 25 years ago to rates of 22 cars per 100 people, a ratio that's equivalent to that of New York City. The *Economist* magazine recently observed that there are now more than one billion cars in the world, and the number is likely to double by 2020, with much of that growth occurring in Asia, especially China and India. Moreover in Asia there are cultural issues that have a profound influence upon design, making it more challenging to predict customer preferences.

“Deep down Chinese consumers might want something new and different, but they also need to be collective, fitting into the norms of their society,” says Lau. “Some might like a sportier car, but because they need to respect their superiors or care what people think of them, they will buy a more understated vehicle. The contradiction hidden in this context tells us that Chinese customers need to feel like they fit in.”

However, the Chinese markets are not entirely opaque. Chinese culture and traditional wisdom can provide car designers with useful signposts.

“As the economy continues to develop and incomes rise what remains important for the Chinese customers is that their car is a portrait of their status, representing their face,” says Lau. “So a car should be Daqi (大氣) – to convey a feeling of nobility and superiority. As the auto market becomes more mature in China, people will

« OUR JOB REALLY IS TO PROTECT THE INTEGRITY OF THE DESIGN »



ABOVE: CHELSIA LAU AT FORD WORLD HEAD QUARTERS

become more comfortable with expressing their own personality and individuality.”

Globetrotting Lau has worked on four continents and she finds Chinese customers to be the most demanding. “The Chinese are most able to articulate what they want,” says Lau. “People here expect a shorter product cycle, they expect new designs to appear more frequently. Moreover, deep in their mind beauty requires that something should look harmonious. The consumers may not be design experts, but they can always tell you whether a car’s proportions look comfortable or not.”

In light of China’s challenging cultural requirements, Lau has recruited local talent. “They really know the culture and the market, and these young Chinese designers are very eager,” says Lau. “But even though they grew up in China, they have different backgrounds, and come from different regions. Some of them have studied car design overseas.”

Lau says one of the most important decisions Ford has made in the last few years is to design and manufacture cars based on the One Ford strategy. With this strategy, Ford will develop a vehicle based on global markets in mind rather than regional needs. This strategy leverages our global expertise and vastly improves the efficiency of developing a vehicle.

“In the past many other car companies would first develop a car for the European market,” says Lau. “Later on, the car company might want to develop a sedan for a different region, so they will just add a back end to the existing architecture. The consequence would be a car with awkward proportions.”

“The Ford Fiesta is a great example. The two models – a hatchback and sedan – were developed side by side from day one. If you look at the roof profile, we have fine-tuned the rooflines, adjusting them so that both cars look sleek and dynamic at every angle. We had input from all the key markets, to develop a truly global product that has universal appeal.”

Although thinking ahead, knowing your future customers and possessing a flair for innovative design are all essential for giving a car premium qualities they are not enough to make customers take out their wallets. Designers face a further battle even after the key design features have been finalised. Different countries have different technological, manufacturing constraints and safety standards, all of which require modifications from the core design.


« WE MUST BE PASSIONATE ADVOCATES FOR OUR DESIGN AND PUSH AS HARD AS WE CAN »

“We are talking about thousands of parts, but a very small team of designers are responsible for the entire car and they have to make every part cohesive,” says Lau. “If some technology is not available in one of our manufacturing countries or if that market has different standards, we have to come up with an alternative.”

Pressure also comes from teams in other parts of the company who don’t necessarily speak the language of design, and to whom designers must defend their work.

“Our job really is to protect the integrity of the design, making sure we deliver the best to the customers,” says Lau. “In a regular meeting, we only have two or three designers to speak up for the design and they have to face a large number of challengers. We must be passionate advocates for our design and push as hard as we can in response to challenges from cross-functional teams such as engineering and cost control team. And above all we have to be confident in our design.”

Lau attributes her confidence to embark on a career in car design to the Lee Wai Lee Technical Institute, which gave her a strong foundation in product design. “When I went to the Art Centre, I realised my education in Hong Kong was very good and I was well prepared,” says Lau. “Although I went to the Art Centre to further my studies in product design, I felt I was ready to move on to try different things.”

Lau’s journey has taken her far from Hong Kong but the drive that has propelled her to the top of the car world remains as an inspiration to the city’s current generation of young designers. Lau has proved that with talent, hard work, passion and imagination anything is possible. Even a truly global car with universal appeal. 

BELOW: LAU PARTICIPATED IN THE DESIGN OF THE EXPLORER SPORTTRAC CONCEPT TRUCK



# SPACE TO GROW E

Dutch-born designer **ROSAN BOSCH** is a master of interior design with strong opinions about how to improve the way we work, learn and play, as HKDI students discovered when she led an innovative workshop in Hong Kong.

*DANIEL JEFFREYS reports.*

R

osan Bosch has sharp eyes. As she moved among students at HKDI to examine their designs for new meeting spaces her irises dilated to signal that she was forming a question, one that would cut to the issue's core.

"Why have you put the seating here?" she asked, pointing at one team's design on a computer screen. "Is that going to create the best flow?"

Bosch was at HKDI to hold a five-day workshop at which students from the disciplines of design, architecture and landscape architecture gathered to develop ideas, concepts, design proposals and models for new meeting places at HKDI. The students worked together in small teams to develop design proposals that would attract students from across disciplines to meet, interact and work together more freely. Flow was the key to success.

"A good design has points of entry and exit," said Bosch as she examined a model with three levels of white space. "People need to feel

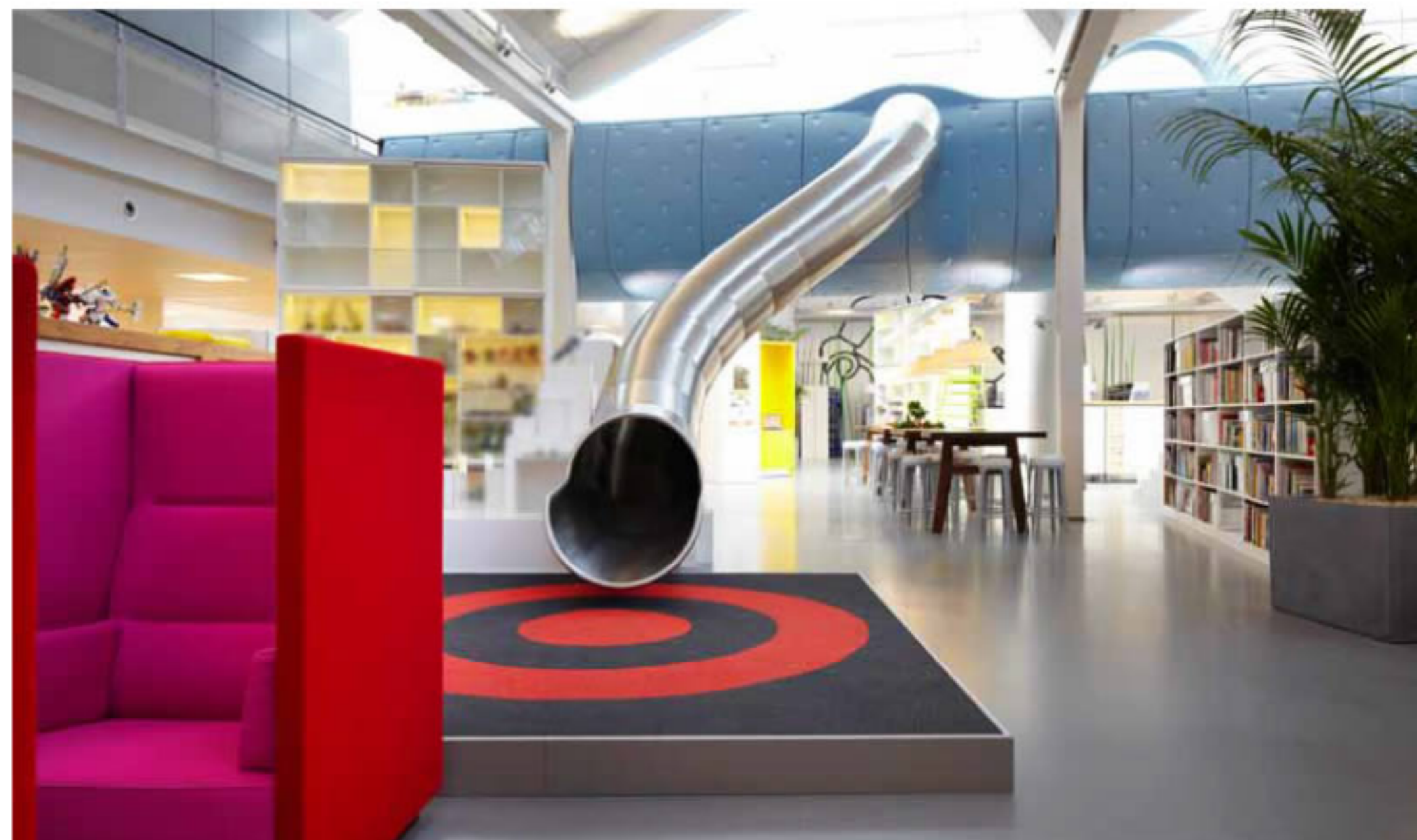
the meeting space is inviting but not constricting."

Bosch is well qualified to give advice. Since 2011 she has run the Rosan Bosch Studio in Copenhagen, where she has continued the groundbreaking work she did at Bosch & Fjord from 2001 until the launch of her own-name company. Her philosophy is that the "physical environment makes a difference to the way we act in the world." This led her to create designs that are active exercises in social change, designed to promote productivity, learning and social interaction.

"When we do a design we focus on how the end-user wants to grow within the space," she says. "This means the design has to generate positive responses. A design for a company needs elements that encourage creativity while a design for a hospital needs features that promote wellness."

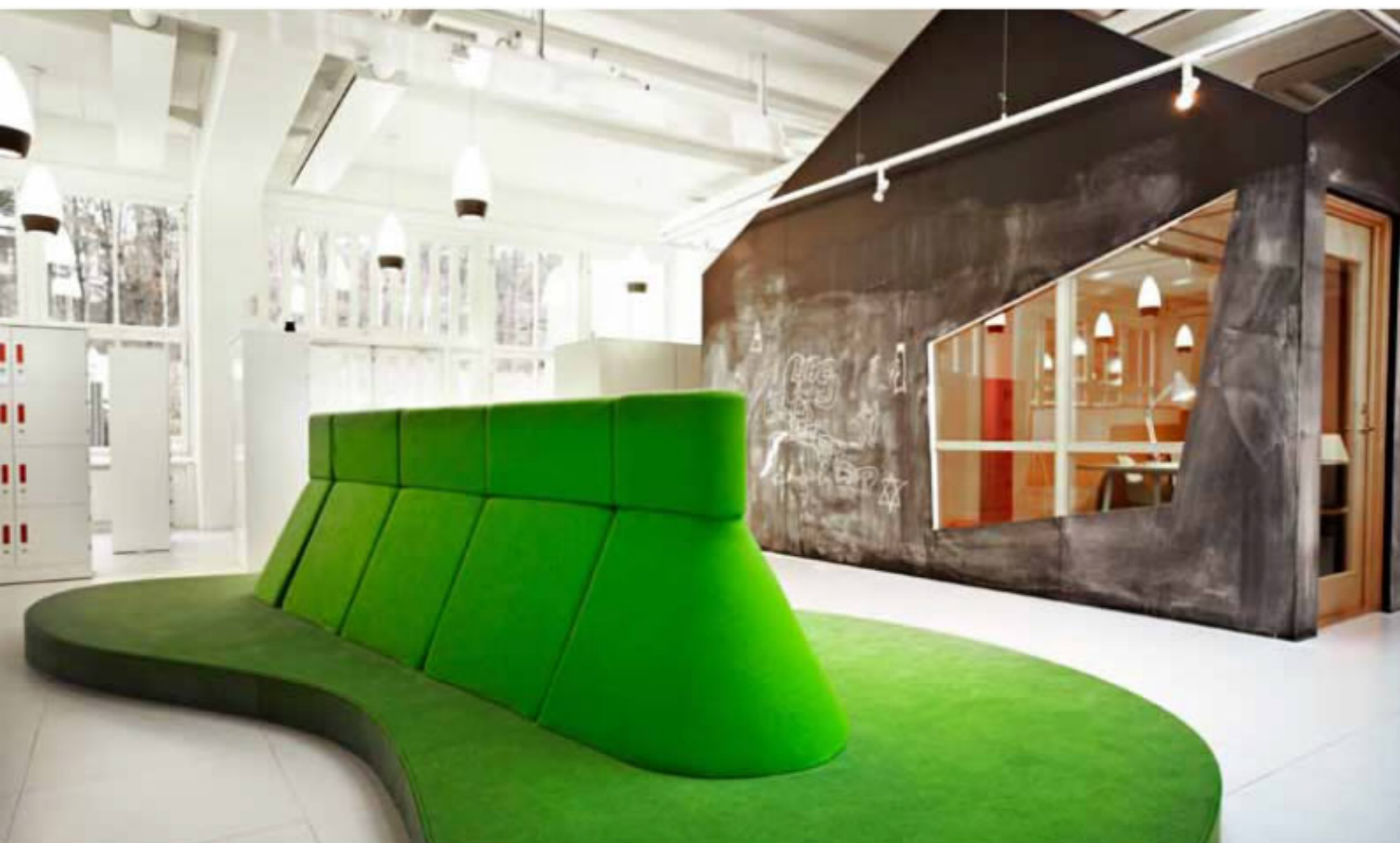
This approach with its focus on human outcomes rather than issues like space efficiency has led Bosch to produce prize-winning design solutions for many major companies. One of her most notable projects was for Lego, the toy company, which commissioned Bosch to create a new working environment for its development team. The result was wallpaper with giant blades of grass, tables with tiny bonsai gardens and a slide connecting two floors.

"We needed to create an environment in which the designers could enter a child's fantasy world,"



ALL IMAGES ROSAN BOSCH/HTD

ABOVE ROSAN BOSCH



says Bosch. "The outcome was a work area that emphasises fun, playfulness and creativity, which supports the playful character of their work."

The key features of Bosch's design were an oversize seating area with a light blue colour that transformed a dowdy walkway into a light, fluffy cloud. The cloud twists and turns and unfolds to form sofas, sitting podiums and the slide. The giant blades of grass with an oversize Lego man create a striking contrast with the bonsai gardens that are populated with tiny Lego people.

"We wanted to challenge the designers' sense of scale and make them question who is big, and who is small," says Bosch. "We needed the environment to be a place where the designers' imagination could be unleashed."

Creating positive energy is a key goal of Bosch's work. She sees design as "a powerful tool for change." This approach was very visible in school template she created in Stockholm, Sweden for the Vittra free-school organisation, which promotes individual, experience-based learning.

Before she began work on the Vittra Telefonplan in Hägersten, Bosch had already rejected the classic classroom setup with desks and chairs, seeing it as a design solution from a previous century, when children did not have laptops but sat rigid as a teacher scraped chalk across a blackboard.

She replaced all that with a giant iceberg, a cinema, and room for relaxation and recreation that now accommodates many different types of learning. Children can study independently on their laptops as they sit on one of Bosch's "soft islands". If they need to work with other students on a project,

## « WE WANTED TO CHALLENGE THE DESIGNERS' SENSE OF SCALE. »

they congregate in spaces like a tiny house called "the village" for group work or the more open "organic conversation furniture".

Jannie Jeppesen, the principal of Vittra Telefonplan writes on the school's website that the design is intended to stimulate "children's curiosity and creativity" and offer them opportunities for both collaborative and independent time.

The open nature of the campus and Bosch's unusual furniture arrangements reflect the school's philosophy that "children play and learn on the basis of their needs, curiosity, and inclination," which is an accurate reflection of how people of any age learn outside of formal educational environments.

"The principles of the Vittra School revolve around the breakdown of physical and metaphorical divisions as a fundamental step to promoting intellectual curiosity, self-confidence, and communally responsible behaviour," reported Architizer in reviewing the school. "Spaces are only loosely defined by permeable borders and large, abstract landmarks."

Vittra Telefonplan deliberately uses its interior design as a means of developing the school and its educational principles, which reflect Bosch's belief that design has a defining impact on the way people live their lives.

"We should approach every design project as an opportunity to affect the way people live," says Bosch. "Designers have too often focused on the way something looks rather than on what it does to the people who use it or encounter it everyday. For me the function of design is to make people's lives better."

In the HKDI workshop Bosch emphasised this point in every conversation she had with students, especially those who had created meeting places that were too abstract or played too little attention to how much interaction their spaces would create.

"The way we create spaces and the manner in which we fill them has an impact on our moods, our productivity and the quality of our relationships with other people," she says. "That's why good design is so important."

PREVIOUS PAGE  
ROGAN BOSCH'S  
DESIGNS FOR  
LEGO'S CREATIVE  
DEPARTMENT  
OPPOSITE PAGE  
ROGAN BOSCH'S  
DESIGN FOR TWO  
VITTRATELEFONPLAN  
SCHOOL



# THE VOICE

Oscar-winning director **RUBY YANG** recently visited HKDI and described the power of documentaries. She talked to **SUMMER CAO** about how she decided to use film as a way to speak out for the disadvantaged.

**A**t the Academy Awards in 2007 Ruby Yang accepted the Oscar for Best Documentary Short Subject for her film *The Blood of Yingzhou District* and gave thanks "...to all who have been fighting against AIDS and to those who gave us support." She spoke in Chinese but her message was clear to everybody. Children on the mainland orphaned by AIDS who now have the disease themselves will no longer be forced to hide silently in the shadows.

*The Blood of Yingzhou District* tells the story of Gao Jun an orphan who is also HIV-positive. Residents in this remote village in southeast China refuse to go near him. He spends his days ostracised, his only companions a pack of barnyard pigs. Yang has become one of the industry's most accomplished

socially aware documentarians and *The Warriors of Qiugang*, a film she made about farmers fighting pollution was also nominated for the short-subject Oscar in 2011. Yang's success is in sharp contrast to her early life but its roots lie deep in her childhood.

Brought up in Hong Kong, Yang spent part of her childhood helping her mother in a plastic flower factory while her father abandoned his career as an artist in order to provide for his family. Yang's family migrated to San Francisco in 1977, a time when racial discrimination was still common in the U.S.

"We could not rent a place close to my school because we were told that the neighbourhood was only for white people," Yang recalled during a seminar at



« THE FILM WON BECAUSE OF THE WAY ITS STORIES ARE TOLD. »



PREVIOUS PAGE RUBY YANG IN BEIJING TOP THE BLOOD OF YINGZHOU DISTRICT FOLLOWS THE STORY OF CHILDREN LIKE GAO JUN AND REN NANNAN (ABOVE) WHO LOSE THEIR PARENTS TO AIDS LEFT AND ABOVE LEFT THE WARRIORS OF GIUGANG FOLLOWS FARMER TURNED ACTIVIST ZHANG GONGLI AS HE DOCUMENTS THE POLLUTION FROM A CHEMICAL PLANT IN THE VILLAGE OF GIUGANG, IN ANHUI PROVINCE

HKDI. "As a girl with black hair and yellow skin I experienced a lot of discrimination in a Caucasian dominated society. So I decided to devote myself to fighting against social injustice."

With her father's passionate support Yang was able to get a Bachelor's degree in painting and a Master's degree in filmmaking. She immediately found work as an assistant editor for Wayne Wang and in the years that followed, she worked her way up to become an editor in feature films and documentaries. Yang soon discovered that documentaries were a perfect vehicle for her battle against discrimination. In 1994, she started to make films

that became a means to give a voice to the voiceless.

"My work is inspired and motivated by my own unlucky experience of emigrating to the U.S. at an early age," Yang says. "I want to empower the disadvantaged using my camera." In 2004, she moved to Beijing and discovered that Mainland China offered more abundant opportunities than anywhere else.

"The environment in the mainland is not as bad as widely thought," she says. "There are a lot of people ready to speak up. It is also cheap to make documentaries – a few thousand RMB for filming

« AS A GIRL WITH BLACK HAIR AND YELLOW SKIN I EXPERIENCED A LOT OF DISCRIMINATION IN A CAUCASIAN DOMINATED SOCIETY. »

a whole piece over the course of one or two years - not in Beijing but in neighboring areas such as Hebei Province."

In the same year as Yang moved to China's capital, she co-founded the China AIDS Media Project with American producer and writer Thomas Lennon, which aims to promote public health in China through film, television and the Internet. Since then the Project has made documentaries about AIDS in China and has worked with celebrities such as Peng Liyuan (who is now China's First Lady), Jackie Chan and NBA star Yao Ming to make a film to fight against AIDS.

BELOW RUBY YANG WITH THE PRODUCER OF THE WARRIORS OF GIUGANG, THOMAS LENNON



«ALTHOUGH I WANT TO EXPOSE SOCIAL INJUSTICE, A DOCUMENTARY SHOULD NOT BE BIASED, AND A DOCUMENTARY MAKER SHOULD ALWAYS REMAIN NEUTRAL»

Among their works, the most famous piece is *The Blood of Yingzhou District* with its heart-wrenching tale of Gao Jun and other outcast orphans in the small villages of Anhui Province. Yang acknowledges that AIDS is a hot-button topic with the Hollywood community but denies it was her subject matter that won the Academy Award.

"The Oscar was not given to me because of the film's theme, which has been explored by a lot of documentary makers who have filmed AIDS stricken families and children in Africa," she said in a television interview. "The film won because of the way its stories are told."

Yang puts into practice an old Chinese saying when she makes a documentary - people who are not directly involved in an issue usually have the best insights. "When I filmed in the AIDS infected village, I took the position of an observer," she says. "That enabled me to take good shots that reflect real feelings and events."

However, the offences against humanity are sometimes so profound that even an observer's impartiality is compromised. According to media reports most Chinese AIDS victims are from rural areas where the disease has spread among villagers who donated blood in the 1980s and 1990s to make a few dollars (US\$6 for two pints of blood). Most infections came after tainted blood plasma was injected into donors so they could give more blood. In some areas, the AIDS infection rate is 20% or more.

"From 2004 to 2006, I felt very frustrated," she says. "The AIDS villages had not yet been discovered by the outside world and had not been offered any help. Knowing that I had come all the way from the U.S. they were very excited to share their stories with me. I could feel they had rarely had an opportunity to talk about what they had been through."

"I felt very sad seeing the AIDS-infected farmers talking in such a lively way, even though they knew their lives would soon be over. And the innocent children who had been infected made my heart ache."

Despite accumulating 80 hours of emotionally disturbing material during

her ten visits to Yingzhou, Yang was forced to regain the composure of a neutral observer in the editing room when she had to cut everything into a 40-minute film.

"After the first edit, we had a three-hour version in which every take was very touching," she said. "But I needed to cut more in order to make a powerful film, because if you show the audience too much pain they become immune to the agony on screen."

Yang insists on this point of technique and believes that many Chinese directors have not been able to get an audience for their documentaries, despite having excellent subjects, because they are invariably too elaborate and lengthy, whereas western audiences especially in the U.S. prefer stories to be short and incisive. Yang believes that a good documentary should be concise and blend different emotions and points of view.

"Although I want to expose social injustice, a documentary should not be biased, and a documentary maker should always remain neutral," she says. "Taking *The Warriors of Qiugang* as an example, it doesn't just take the side of the farmers, claiming they are the victims and blaming the government. To be neutral is very important."

The Oscar nominated *The Warriors of Qiugang* chronicles how Anhui farmers in a small village fought back against pollution from three chemical plants. It is a powerful story revealing social injustices in a Chinese rural area where human rights are easily trampled and overlooked. Moreover, its ingenious use of animation to complete the story telling is an innovative technique that can be an inspiration

for other documentary makers.

"Some things have already happened by the time I get tipped off or I find something in newspaper reports that we don't have on film," she says. "There were a lot of things like this that I have missed with the *Qiugang* documentary, so we used animation and still photos to make sure we told the whole story. There has been a change in attitudes regarding the use of animation in a documentary. Before it was simply not accepted, but now audiences have begun to embrace it."

Yang believes that documentaries can teach and elevate, making the world a better place. "I hope my work can increase people's appetite for watching documentaries," she says, but her biggest hope is that students in her hometown

will be attracted to documentary filmmaking and that the Hong Kong government will support their ambitions. "There is no way to make a documentary without any help," she says, but she believes with support Hong Kong could become a centre for documentary making in Asia, amplifying the voice that she has given to the disadvantaged in China and making the city a beacon of hope for those who suffer in silence. ⑩



BELOW RUBY YANG WITH HKDI STUDENTS WHO ATTENDED HER SEMINAR



PEOPLE



Hong Kong's favourite couturier **BARNEY CHENG** spent part of this summer working with HKDI's students to create high fashion



for the city's most prestigious racing event. He talked to **DAISY ZHONG** about the insights he acquired from his young colleagues.

# HAUTE

# ARCHITECTURE



THIS PAGE  
BARNEY CHENG  
GIVING ADVICE TO  
STUDENTS AT A SA SA  
LADIES' PURSE DAY  
WORKSHOP IN JULY



« I SEE A DRESS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ITS NEGATIVE SPACE, SILHOUETTE AND PROPORTION. »

Your design is beautiful and the details are impeccable, but the belt is damaging the silhouette,” said Barney Cheng, Hong Kong’s most sought-after couture designer, as he scrutinised the sketch of a cocktail dress created by one of 16 HKDI fashion students. His message was clear - when it comes to fashion design every nuance makes a difference.

The 16 students worked with Cheng last July to create dresses to be worn by models and celebrities during one of Hong Kong’s most celebrated social events and fashion pageants, the Sa Sa Ladies’ Purse Day race meeting on November 3rd. Cheng is the creative consultant of the fashion show event and his HKDI workshop was a master class in couture design.

“I am sensitive to the structure of my surroundings,” says Cheng, whose approach is rooted in architecture, which he studied before entering the fashion world. “I see a dress from the perspective of its negative space, silhouette and proportion. Couture is designed to perfect female beauty. A well-designed couture dress should use structure to minimise a woman’s less favourable features while maximising her virtues.”

The chic females who flock to Ladies’ Purse Day have coveted flattering couture dresses since 1846, when the event was first held at Happy Valley. It has since become one of the most popular race days in Hong Kong. In 2005 the Hong Kong Jockey Club joined forces with Sa Sa, the largest cosmetics retail chain in Asia, to organise the event. Sa Sa has turned the Ladies’ Purse Day into a major festival of femininity with catwalk shows, a make-up workshop and a photo corner for those wearing the best hats. Last year the event attracted 63,000 people.

To encourage the city’s homegrown designers Sa Sa chose to collaborate this year with students from HKDI’s Department of Fashion and Image Design (FID). The first thing FID agreed with Sa Sa was a budget of HKD8,000 per dress. “We wanted to provide the students with a good opportunity that enabled them to produce something interesting using quality fabrics,” says Liz McLafferty, Head of FID and coordinator of the collaboration.

This year’s Ladies’ Purse Day took *England Chic: Ladies and Gentlemen* as its theme and was inspired by prestigious high society occasions in Britain like Royal Ascot where racing thoroughbreds and high fashion mix as naturally as strawberries and cream. Cheng is well aware that heritage plays a key role in design. “The event is a platform where modern aristocrats like to distinguish themselves by the taste of their outfits, and young ladies in search of a husband will dress up in order to impress young men who are in the matrimony market. The best reference would be the Royal Ascot scene in Audrey Hepburn’s 1964 film, *My Fair Lady*.”

Royal Ascot was founded in 1711 by Queen Anne and is Britain’s most prestigious racing event. In the film Hepburn stunned the exclusive Royal Enclosure with her iconic Cecil Beaton designed black and white lace gown and swooping feathered hat, which was sold at a memorabilia auction in 2011 for US\$3.7 million.

To ensure fashion decorum, Royal Ascot’s organisers publish a style guide, specifying strict protocols – hats must have a base of at least 10-centimetres; dresses must be of “modest” length, falling just below the knee; fancy dress, strapless, off-the-shoulder and halter neck tops are outlawed, and a lady’s midriff must be covered at all times.

Much like in *My Fair Lady*, designer dresses and millinery masterpieces are also a must for Hong Kong’s high society. Although Cheng has not published



ABOVE A LOOK FROM  
AUDREY HEPBURN'S  
1964 FILM, MY FAIR LADY

a style guide for the Ladies' Purse Day in Hong Kong, he does stress the importance of refinement in couture design.

"You should think of a lady like Guo Jingjing (the former diver and Olympic celebrity who married business tycoon Kenneth Fok) when considering the person who will wear your dress," he says. "It's difficult – the dress should be fashionable but at the same time proper and appropriate for her social status."

Overall, Cheng identifies the design aesthetic for Ladies' Purse Day as "royal, elegant, and noble", that should be executed in knee-length cocktail dresses. "The design should be about details, a feminine feeling with an haute couture element."

Cheng is pleased that the HKDI students have captured the right design direction for Sa Sa Ladies' Purse Day. "Students have very sharp fashion sense. I have faith that this new generation of designers will provide a good foundation for Hong Kong as a centre of creativity."


But Cheng also notes that students need to polish their skills in handling materials. "Few students go beyond using materials as they are," he says. "They need to take one step further and process the fabric to increase its value. Ingenuity and craftsmanship can improve a design without increasing the budget required for manufacturing. For example, after producing a digital print they can embroider the fabric's surface, which can create a noble feeling, even with an average piece of fabric."

A noble feeling is not just about exquisite design but also propriety. Cheng notes that race day outfits should be distinguished from other kinds of haute couture. "The Ladies' Day race is a daytime event. Thus the dress should be formal daywear and designers ignorant of this might design evening gowns. As a designer you should know that ladies in the 19th century England wore different types of dresses for different occasions in their daily routine, so having some knowledge of these etiquette rules is very important for creating appropriate clothes for women in high society."

Raised in a well-heeled local family, Cheng is no stranger to the culture of high society. He has a strong following among celebrities and socialites from across Asia, including Michelle Yeoh, Maggie Cheung and Eleanor Kwok, the owner of Sa Sa. His expertise encompasses couture, couture-a-porter, daywear and eveningwear, with a signature style that combines luxurious, intricate beading details, embellishments and fur.

According to Cheng, sophistication is paramount in securing a clientele that many regard as inaccessible, "As an haute couture designer, you should be familiar with the haute couture lifestyle. If your clients are trend leaders and collectors, you should educate yourself about art, wine, fashion, jewellery and travel for the purpose of more meaningful communication, which is the foundation of a good client relationship. You don't need to be rich in order to know these things, but you need to be well-read, know their life and make yourself convincing."

As a designer who set up his own design studio in 1993 at the age of 27, Cheng treasures the spirit of entrepreneurship and believes that communication technology has made it much easier for fresh graduates to set up their own brands, and "to have their own look from the beginning". "You can create your own website at home, targeting people all around the globe and start to have followers online. Furthermore, geographically Hong Kong is very promising because China is the most energetic and vibrant place in the world now and is seeing a strong rebirth of its fashion industry."

And that seems good advice from a man who has been the architect of his own success. 

«INGENUITY AND CRAFTSMANSHIP CAN IMPROVE A DESIGN WITHOUT INCREASING THE BUDGET REQUIRED FOR MANUFACTURING»



THIS PAGE LOOKS FROM THE SA SA LADIES' PURSE DAY CATWALK SHOWS FROM 2009, 2010 AND 2012



BELOW A LOOK FROM CRISTOBAL BALENCIAGA'S 1950 HAUTE COUTURE COLLECTION USED BY BARNIEY CHENG AS AN EXAMPLE OF NOBLE DRESSING



«AS AN HAUTE COUTURE DESIGNER, YOU SHOULD BE FAMILIAR WITH THE HAUTE COUTURE LIFESTYLE.»



# THE TAO OF GIVING

*With help from HKDI, the Hong Kong Museum of Art has created a trail-blazing application that is set to galvanise the public's interest in its Xubaizhai Collection of traditional Chinese art. SUMMER CAO reports.*

Collectors are often driven by an obsession to seek new acquisitions, something older, rarer or in a better condition but Low Chuck Tiew (1911-1993) was one of the few collectors who was motivated by pure love for the treasures under his protection. His philosophy was captured by the name Xubaizhai (Xubai Study)

that he gave to the study where he housed his trove of ancient Chinese paintings. The name is derived from the Taoist proposition that being free from desire is the path to enlightenment.

Collectors who are motivated by the monetary value of their hoard will often use every possible means to protect their treasures from ill fortune. While Low put his collection above himself when he risked his life to save one of Shitao's paintings from his bombed home in wartime Singapore in 1942, he could not bear to send all his treasures to the safety of London in the early 1980s when Hong Kong was on the edge of chaos. "I collected them because I don't want them to leave their homeland," he said to friends who tried to persuade him to send the priceless paintings to a safe haven in London.

The nature of the collecting process tends to make collectors possessive. They tend to want the sole privilege of enjoying their collections until death closes their eyes. But Low again took a Tao approach to his treasures, believing that we lose those things that we try to keep. Thus Low donated his entire collection, consisting of more than 600 pieces of art from about 600 AD to 20th century to the

Hong Kong Museum of Art in 1989, four years before his death.

The legendary stories behind the breath-taking Xubaizhai collection have attracted visitors from around the globe to the permanent exhibition room at the Hong Kong Museum of Art. And last year's 20th anniversary celebration exhibition was a success, creating a sensation with art connoisseurs throughout Asia. But the ambitious museum was not satisfied, hoping to enlarge the range of its audience and engage the younger generation and general public.

The result was a decision to collaborate with HKDI to make an e-book of the Xubaizhai collection.

ABOVE FIFTEEN VIEWS OF THE GARDEN (園林十五景), LEAF NO. 3 BY WEN BOREN

« WHEN WE TOLD HKDI STUDENTS OUR STORY LINES AND IDEAS, THEY NEEDED TO MAKE TECHNICAL BREAKTHROUGHS TO MAKE THEM HAPPEN AND CREATE NEW IDEAS TO SOLVE THE PROBLEMS. »

This is not the first time that the prestigious museum has cooperated with HKDI. In 2012 the two institutions collaborated to create *Imperishable Affection: The Art of Feng Zikai* for which the former had assembled a comprehensive selection of work by the famed Chinese cartoonist from other museums and private collections while the latter made an e-book introducing Feng Zikai and his work.

"We are more involved this time, not only in the sense of using our own collection, but also by providing input to content structure and animation story lines," says Dr Raymond Tang of Hong Kong Museum of Art. "The Feng Zikai e-book was excellent but it was linear and straightforward. For the Xubaizhai e-book, our museum has been like a movie director orchestrating different parts, having developed a concrete theme with each chapter closely related to each other."

The e-book was launched at the opening of the exhibition *A Journey into Chinese Painting: A Selection*

*of Works from the Xubaizhai Collection* on August 29th, and can be downloaded from the apps store using iPad for free. It contains 25 images of Xubaizhai paintings and consists of five chapters – foreword, garden touring, paintings, animation and articles. The interactive interface and creative animation along with elements of pop culture are high lights of the book.

The garden-tour chapter has eight paintings from Wen Boren's *Fifteen Views of the Garden* as its background and two children guide readers to explore other paintings, their styles, artists and related art schools. Animated icons can also be accessed as portals to additional information.

"*Fifteen Views of the Garden* is an important part of our upcoming exhibition," says Tang. "We chose it as a thread because the garden views give a relaxing feeling, inviting readers to explore more. It also has an interface of an online game, which will attract the younger generation."

The animation chapter is another example that combines traditional art with pop culture. The five-minute video is a romance, telling the story of a dancer who travels back to the late Ming Dynasty as the courtesan Li Xiangjun falls in love with the famous artist Yang Wencong whose work is included in the Xubaizhai.

"The two protagonists were real people living at the end of the Ming Dynasty," says Tang. "We have drawn inspiration from popular time-travel dramas that have become hits in the recent years. One of the most intriguing aspects is that the time travel begins and ends at the Xubaizhai exhibition room, and Wen Zhengming's *Cooling off in the Hot Summer* is the link connecting the two eras. The animation not only makes the e-book more lively, but also gives a glimpse of how people lived and thought in the late Ming Dynasty."

Besides the user-friendly interface and the popular plot, small details such as lifelike sound effects and the appearance of the characters was also given careful consideration to make the project accessible and popular. "We want the characters in the e-book to be connected to pop culture, so we have employed the shoujo manga style to cater to popular tastes," Tang says. "Even when introducing the classical arts, we are using an accessible approach. The book doesn't talk about the different schools of art in a dry tone, but reveals the important characters in each painting or stories from the life of an artist."

To create an e-book that incorporates art, the exhibition space, history and culture in an interesting way required ingenuity in story telling and technical creativity. "The biggest difficulty was the technical problems," Tang says, "When we told HKDI students our story lines and ideas, they needed to make technical breakthroughs to make them happen and create new ideas to solve the problems."



Some might say that projects like the Xubaizhai e-book sacrifice the purity of art in exchange for popularity but Tang believes that the two can be combined and it takes genuine courage to change the ways museums curate their exhibitions as technology advances.

"In the e-book, we have separated the entertainment from art where appropriate," Tang says, "The entertainment elements won't interfere with people viewing the original paintings. The animations are minimal in the painting chapters - just blinking icons to signal readers to explore more. For the animation chapter, the paintings are almost shown alone with a small touch of animation. The strongest entertainment twist lies in the time travel element."

The famous Chinese educator Chen Heqin once said, "There are no incapable students, only incapable teachers." It is encouraging that the Hong Kong Museum of Art has taken this idea to heart and is probing new ways to engage with a young generation steeped in digital technology. Other museums have much to learn from their example. After all, museums should be for the public, not the cultural elites, otherwise they are no different from those obsessive collectors who hoard treasures for themselves rather than those selfless collectors like Low who donate their beloved possessions while they are still alive to enjoy them. ㊦



ABOVE SCREENSHOTS OF THE GARDEN-TOUR CHAPTER

*The exhibition A Journey into Chinese Painting: A Selection of Works from the Xubaizhai Collection will be held from August 30th 2013 October 31st 2014 at the Hong Kong Museum of Art. The e-Book can be downloaded on iPad for free starting from the end of October 2013 by using the search terms "盧白齋畫遊記".*



FEATURE

## SMALL MIRACLES

A new book that explores the homes of ordinary Hong Kong families reveals that the city's residents have designed intriguing solutions to the challenges of living in tiny apartments. SUMMER SAO talked to the book's authors and discovered that necessity can be more than the mother of invention.

Is Hong Kong a livable city? Many residents who struggle through crowded streets with high pollution levels to get home to tiny apartments with sky-high rents would probably say no, but the city ranked top of the Economist Intelligence Unit's livable city rankings in 2012. The ranking was based on the city's available green space, natural assets, sprawl (or lack of) and isolation levels combined with scores on indices that measure stability, healthcare, culture, environment, education and infrastructure. The UK-based lifestyle magazine *Monocle* was less complimentary. When it published its *Most Livable Cities Index 2013* in July, Hong Kong missed the top ten, ranking eleventh but even that result might surprise some people who see the city as an unforgiving urban jungle.

Hong Kong's status in *The Economist* and *Monocle* studies aroused heated debates in the city's traditional and social media but now a new book *Patterns of Living - Hong Kong's High-Rise Communities* promises to take readers inside Hong Kong's family homes to shed some light on whether the city's average residents have livable home space.

"Outsiders are only able to look at exteriors," says Hilary French as she pointed to the book's cover with its picture of a typical residential building in Hong Kong. "This could be in Paris or Berlin. From the outside Hong Kong's apartments are not that differentiated from other big cities, but when you start looking more closely, you realise that the city's flats are half the size of those in Paris or Berlin and there are twice as many people living inside."

French is the co-author of the book, a researcher in housing design from the Royal College of Art in London and a visiting fellow at HKDI. She has relished the opportunity the book presented to see Hong Kong from a vantage point that few foreigners have enjoyed.

"As a visitor all you know is how comfortable it is to be here," she says. "The transport system works extremely well. Everybody is helpful and polite. There is hardly any crime. It feels easy to be here."

French's initial impressions could be those of any visitor



ABOVE THE COVER OF THE BOOK  
*PATTERNS OF LIVING - HONG KONG'S  
HIGH-RISE COMMUNITIES*

to the city and after a short stay they might return home thinking the city's high livability ranking is justified. However, French found a different story when she penetrated normal Hong Kong family homes with the help of 60 HKDI students studying Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Interior Design.

"Almost everyone in Hong Kong lives in tower blocks," French says. "But actually Hong Kong residents live in tower blocks in very big numbers with very small flats, which is something I certainly did not know until I looked at the situation more closely. It's the extreme density that makes Hong Kong unique."

The book gave French a rare opportunity to study how Hong Kong's generic tower blocks work inside. Almost 50 per cent of Hong Kong's population (3.5 million people) lives in public housing. These Hong Kong citizens occupy space that has a high population density, their small apartments having been built in a standardised, serialised, pattern to maximise construction efficiency.

"What makes this study



« THE CITY'S FLATS ARE HALF THE SIZE OF THOSE IN PARIS OR BERLIN AND THERE ARE TWICE AS MANY PEOPLE LIVING INSIDE. »



interesting is that there is one big landlord," French says. "We send the students out at random and of the 120 flats where they collected information, they were all family homes except one. They were all of a type, and 95% of them were Hong Kong Housing Authority designs. They are immediately comparable because they are the same apartments that have been developed in different locations."

The book includes snapshots from 120 homes collected by students who were asked to focus on the architecture and interior design of their own homes, and then their neighbours' and friends'. Based on this raw information, French and

her co-author Dr Yanki Lee drew the interior and floor plan for each home.

For Lee, a native Hong Kong citizen who is now director of the HKDI DESIS Lab, a new initiative for social design and research, the book was an opportunity for students to experience the kind of integrated community that was more common three or four decades ago when people would frequently visit each other's homes.

"If they were not part of this project it seems likely that the students would not visit their friends' homes or even the flats of family members," says Lee. "The homes of Hong Kong family are very private, although people live so close with each other, all packed together. When people make an appointment to meet with somebody else they usually choose to rendezvous in a café."

"It is not a part of our culture to meet someone at home any more, although it is very important for a socially responsible citizen to understand how others are living their lives. But people don't want to interact with

« IT LOOKS LIKE PEOPLE ARE ABOUT TO MOVE OUT... BUT WHEN YOU LOOK MORE CLOSELY, THESE ARE THINGS THEY ARE USING AND THEY ARE VERY ORGANISED. »

their neighbours in apartments that are tiny and packed with possessions and other family members."

Lee doesn't see her book as a forceful counter-argument against Hong Kong's ranking as a highly livable city. "We have avoided making any judgments," she says, "This is a factual survey to show what is actually happening. We really wanted to know how people actually live rather than being guided by *The Economist's* definition of 'livable'. That's why we called the book *Patterns of Living*, because it's about how people really live."

In their study, the two authors discovered the habits, ingenious methods and contraptions that people have adopted in order to live comfortably in small spaces.

"Hong Kong people really understand how to use three dimensional space," Lee says, as she leafed through snapshots in the book, "They build up the interiors bit by bit in a very logical way to take advantage of all the available space."

"If you have a more spacious apartment in Paris or in London, you set out your things like objects on a stage in a theatre, for display, putting a bed here, a light there. People in Hong Kong arrange things in functional order, along the walls and up to the ceilings, using every inch with maximum efficiency."

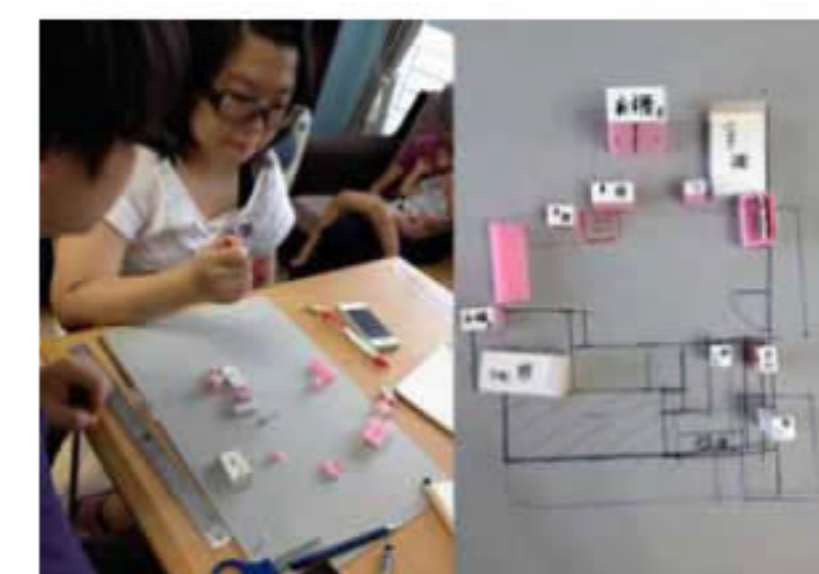
French agrees, "It looks like people are about to move out or just arrived and emptied the suitcase on the floor. But when you look more closely, these are things they are using and they are very organised. They are not neat, but everything is in the right place."

French thinks that the way Hong Kong people hang clothes on the inside of their apartments is an interesting invention used by a lot of Hong Kong residents. "It is a form of permanent clothes storage," she says. "This is something that you wouldn't find in England."

Bunk beds are also common in Hong Kong homes. "The bunk bed is placed next to the wall, and the bottom part is used for storage," French continues, "You have to jump on the table or climb the ladder to the bed on top."

French and Lee believe that other cities can learn from the experience of Hong Kong and that the book is more than just a way to satisfy people's curiosity, but also offers ideas about interior and furniture design. And they believe the interiors and small contraptions recorded in the book have broader significance for architects. "The book looks into the relationship between what architects think of the way people live and the way they actually live," says French.

*Patterns of Living - Hong Kong's High-Rise Communities* was launched at the Hong Kong Book Fair, and will soon be available on Amazon and major book stores. The insights it offers could be valuable to communities all over the world as they struggle with soaring population levels and seek to make their own spaces more livable. ①



ABOVE HKDI STUDENTS WORKING ON A FLOOR PLAN

UPCOMING EVENTS

Three events at HKDI this autumn celebrate artisanship and creativity

**TIME CAPSULE**

BALTIC AMBER FESTIVAL  
12 -16 SEPTEMBER

Fossilised tree resin is more romantically known as amber and some of the best quality specimens are found in Gdańsk, Poland, where there were once enormous forests that have since been swallowed by the Baltic Sea. The waters release the amber to the region's beaches. Amber, which sometimes contains insects trapped millions of years ago, has been beloved as jewellery and sculpture by Europeans for centuries but from September 12 to 16 Hong Kongers will have a chance to be smitten when the Baltic Amber Festival comes to the city. It will showcase the best of contemporary Amber design with stunning work by Polish designers and artists including Professor Slawomir Fijalkowski and John Fudala. Public lectures will be held at HKDI, followed by a two-day exhibition at Gloucester Luk Kwok Hotel in Wanchai.



**SNAP JUDGEMENT**

HONG KONG INTERNATIONAL PHOTO FESTIVAL FLARE 2013  
SEPTEMBER - NOVEMBER 2013

The Hong Kong International Photo Festival has been a major event in Hong Kong since 2010, engaging the local community in an exploration of photography as well as providing a platform for sharing creative ideas. This year a special exhibition titled *300 Families* will show portraits of Hong Kong families taken by 12 photographic artists. The exhibition will run at the HKDI Gallery from 28-29 September. Other activities running from September to November will include workshops, seminars, portfolio review sessions, a photo book reading room and opportunities to explore the future possibilities of photography.

**GLOBAL IMPRESSION**

CONFRONT / CONFORM - AN INTERNATIONAL  
PRINTS EXCHANGE EXHIBITION  
OCTOBER - NOVEMBER 2013

Confront / Conform - An International Prints Exchange Exhibition will feature over 130 print works from 22 international print shops at HKDI's d-mart for two months from October. Renowned printmakers from all corners of the world will showcase diverse work around the themes of the gains and pains of globalisation and the convergence of individual and national identities.

