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Interior intelligence

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Interior intelligence

In celebration of World Interiors Day, HKDI held a series of seminars with prominent interior designers and a workshop to promote this year's theme of intelligence

Held on the last Saturday of May each year, World Interiors Day is an event set up by the International Federation of Interior architects and designers (IFI). The aim is to promote the interior design profession across the world with events held by its members, who are design-based organisations, including educational establishments such as HKDI. The day not only serves to highlight the profession itself, but also reminds people how the built environment affects us, and how both interiors and their occupants are connected, through a series of events.

For the first time, this year HKDI held a series of master lectures by prominent local interior designers in the run up to the event, as well as a design workshop on interior design for both students and the public, held on Saturday May 28 itself.

"By organising these talks and workshops, we hope to engage our students and the public. To have them realise that interior design is more than just design, the way they move around and utilise their surroundings affects their daily lives, behaviours and thinking. The most direct way to do this is to let them listen to some of the best in the industry," says Daniel Chan, head of Product and Interior Design Department at HKDI.

With top Hong Kong interior designer, Steve Leung, due to become president of the IFI in 2017, HKDI invited him to be a keynote speaker for their event, along with other significant industry figures, including Joey Ho, James Law and lighting designer, Tino Kwan.

Leung believes this year's World Interiors Day theme of Interiors Intelligence is rather a fashionable one. "We are all in the internet world, and intelligence becomes part of our daily life. I think it's a topic for us to have a lot of debate and discussion over," he says. "We always encourage our members to promote this world interior day in their own

country. I think it's important for more and more people to be participating, no matter whether they are students, practitioners, professors, writers, editors, it doesn't matter. We also encourage our members to collect what they have discussed, with any conclusions or suggestions, then we can put it all together and share among the members."

HKDI alumni, Tenniel Tsang, now the director of interior design firm Novus Penetralis, was invited to organise the workshop to be held on World Interiors Day for students and general public. In the workshop, the participants were asked to build a sustainable interior to accommodate as many people as possible, with limited time and resources.

The task gave the participants the chance to build something from scratch and made them think about the important elements in good interior design. "It may be a workshop for design 101, but we were happy to see that some of the youngsters actually started to think about how they should feel, and what people are expected to be inside this little experimental design," adds Chan.

But the highlight of this year's events in Hong Kong was definitely the master lecture series. Both speaker sessions had a full house, with more than 300 in the audience at each, made up of both students and practitioners. "I think it is a good thing to select a day every year and name it World Interiors Day, to celebrate the interior professions and make people aware of the importance of interior design," says Leung. "Not only for making beautiful interiors like restaurants or shops, but also to tell people that interiors, like architecture, can influence the society and can be part of the society. It can be part of people's everyday life."

For more information on World Interiors Day, visit www.ifeworld.org

Left: Steve Leung's project, the Yuan at Atlantis, The Palm, Dubai

Inspiring young designers

This being the first year involved in the World Interiors Day, HKDI hoped to build momentum to promote interior design and each of the lectures went some way to inspire the designers of the future. "I shared my experiences with the students. I shared with them my career, starting from a very young primary student and then to university, and then to nowadays," says Leung. "I think Hong Kong, at the moment, is at a crossroads. There's a lot of complaints among different groups of people, especially young people. They feel frustrated, so I wanted to give them positive energy."

Lighting design is an area of interior design not many people are aware of, but it serves a hugely important role in the look of a building, both inside and out. With so much to consider on a large project it requires a lighting specialist and Tino Kwan is one of the best in the business. "It's not that interior designers can't do lighting design," says Kwan, "it's just that lighting has become a little bit more technical and not many interior designers have the time to keep up to date with them."

Tino Kwan also offered the audience an insight into his world. "I said a bit about myself," says Kwan. "That I was born here and I was educated here, and now I'm working here. And I tried to convey to my audience that Hong Kong may be very small but, in fact, designers like me or like Steve Leung are able to bring the design standard to a level that's internationally accepted."

He also talked a little more about lighting design as a profession. "Even now, if people ask me what I do and I say 'lighting design', they think I'm the one doing all

those Christmas lights on the buildings [laughs]. I also demonstrated what non-successful lighting design looks like. If you don't show people the not-so-good ones, they can't understand, so I did that in my talk," says Kwan.

The designers also had some advice for the students. Kwan believes that if Hong Kong designers really develop themselves, they can stand among international designers. "One of my staff reminded me that being a lighting designer is very lucky because we have the opportunity to work with many different designers around the world, to see or learn from what they do," says Kwan. "We work with interior designers, architects and landscape architects. It's one of the perks [laughs]."

Steve Leung reminded students that if you really want to do interior design, you've got to have a passion for it. "You have to ask yourself whether you really like interior design. Many young students think interior design is just putting beautiful things together – but it is much more than that. The profession is getting more and more complex, like architecture. As the profession is getting more mature, the more specialisations are being demanded. I think a lot of young people have a very narrow definition of interior design but actually it's quite broad," says Leung.

Joey Ho added that, too many students are in too much of a hurry to become a designer. "They need experience, they need to practise, to have stronger foundations. So I tell them, try to get more exposure, because that exposure will change not only their career, but will really change how they think, and how to move on," says Ho.



Tino Kwan's lighting project for the Peninsula Tokyo, Japan

PICTURE CREDIT: TINO KWAN LIGHTING CONSULTANTS

The masters of design



PICTURE CREDIT: STEVE LEUNG DESIGN

Mandarin Palace, Nanjing by Steve Leung

STEVE LEUNG

Chairman of Steve Leung Design and president-elect of the International Federation of Interior Designers/Architects

What makes interior design unique to architecture or product design?

I think, with interiors, we have more freedom to design. But interior design is not as permanent. In architecture, when you finish a building, the building is going to stand there for 50 years or more, but in interior design they sometimes do everything all over again in five years. The beauty of that is that you have a relatively short cycle.

What are your views on the current state of design education in Hong Kong?

I think it's getting better and better. I remember when I was a student in architecture back in the 70s, there was only one school of design that offered an interior design curriculum, and, at that time, the polytechnic was not a university. Now there's a lot of different institutions offering design education in interior design, and I think they are doing better and better every year. But I think there's still a long way to go.

What's the most important lesson you've learned in your time in the industry?

I think the most important thing for me is to be yourself. Architecture, interior design or any kind of business – at

the end of the day, it's about you. How you deal with people. Are you honest? Are you humble? Are you working nicely with people? I think, now, integrity is more important than your professional ability. The better integrity you have, the better your reputation and the more people actually come to you. They want to make friends with you. They trust you. That is the most important available asset. It's not because you're a great designer or because you're a great businessman. At the end of the day, it's the personality. The older I grow, the better I understand this.

How does it feel to be elected the first Chinese president of the International Federation of Interior Designers/Architects?

To become the first president of IFI from China, I think it will be good for China, good for Asia and good for IFI. This is a global organisation. It shouldn't belong to any one country. It shouldn't belong to any particular individual, so the best thing is to have the presidency rotate. Of course, I will not regard myself as representing China because I'm representing the whole world. I will make my decisions without prejudice. Currently as president-elect, I'm working very hard with my Italian president Sebastiano Raneri. We want to expand our membership. We want to make IFI more transparent. We want to make IFI more noticeable, not only to the interior design profession but to the general public. I will be proposing something next year when I become president that will become my goal.

JOEY HO

Design partner of PAL Design and vice-chairman of the Hong Kong Interior Design Association

How would you describe your design style?

Hopefully people will see a certain kind of style in me but I feel the success of each project is more on the space we create. When people really inhabit the space, they start to feel what our intent was – the meaning. The style, to me, is secondary. I would prefer that people treat me more like a movie director because I'm more interested in making meaning out of each challenge. It's like a movie – you start with a good storyline and the rest is about your techniques and how you put everything together. We're not just doing designs. We are co-ordinating with other professions and consultants, and together we start to influence our client. We give them some creative thoughts related to the programme, to improve the entire thing.

How has your joining with PAL design as a design partner affected how you work?

I see a practice not as a company or a setup. To me, it's a platform from which we do creative stuff. It's a new challenge for both of our teams, and for me and [PAL

founder] Patrick Leung. We have two different styles but we share the same goal and have the same mentality. We understand that we still have our own room to develop but at the same time we have another partner to challenge each other. I think we can also inspire more design firms that are reaching a time when they can incorporate with each other. We're like *The Avengers* – together we have a better ground to fight against our enemy [laughs]. It's been a year so far and we're pretty happy. I think we can really see the benefit.

What's the most important lesson you've learned in your time in the industry?

For the first part of my design career, I only focused on design itself. I was so into design that every project I did was focused on it. After about 12 years, I realised that I should make use of design to create my own life. And I think that is a very good lesson. I realised all the ideas and all the concepts are through my own ideas of life, my own understanding of life, my own exposure. And that started to shape my design again. I realised I should live properly, so I can do even better design. This doesn't mean I've changed my working pattern. It's the same. But it was the mentality that changed and, to me, that was a very important lesson.



From left: Four Seasons Hotel Seoul, Korea; Mango Tree restaurant, Hong Kong by Tino Kwan

TINO KWAN

Lighting designer and founder of TinoKwan Lighting Consultants

What drew you to lighting design?

It was kind of by accident because I was trained as an interior designer and a product designer. In fact, after I graduated from Hong Kong PolyU, I worked for a short time as an interior designer in Hong Kong, doing very small interiors, for maybe six months. Then I heard about an American lighting design company in Hong Kong who wanted to hire a designer. I thought I was going to do products, like light fittings, but at the interview they said 'actually, we do that but we do much more lighting planning design'. So that's how I got into lighting design – and I fell in love with it.

How would you describe your style of work?

I don't know if you would call it a style but when I started doing lighting design, I looked at other people's work and I realised that even professional lighting designers tend to put a lot of lights in their designs. I find this very excessive. I really dislike it because it destroys the interior, so that's why I came up with my philosophy of trying to use less light sources or fittings while still being able to give the desired effect. I realised why designers use so many lights – it's because they're not very sure of what they're doing. They do it to be safe. They put more rather than worry that it's not bright enough. So, when I design, I work closely with the interior designers on the materials because the reflections, together with the ambient light coming from the decorative lights, is what allows me to use a lot less to achieve the design intent.

Lighting has joined the ranks of the smart home technologies with Wi-Fi-controlled functionality. How does this affect your designs?

The latest lighting technology or developments are mainly concerned with the light source, which is primarily LED. A few years ago you couldn't really touch LED because, as a light source, it was very limited. The colour was too cold and too white, and the light output was too little. Nowadays you can really apply it to all

sorts of lamps, from candle lamps in a chandelier to a car lamp or to street lamps. We are able to use LEDs for all those functions. Also, with the technology of dimming and control, using Wi-Fi or whatever, it makes it easily accessible for people.

How important is sustainability and green design in your projects?

I always tell people that green lighting or energy saving lamps – they're not that green if you overuse them. People think that these lights are so energy efficient or energy saving and they end up using them in places where it's not necessary to use them, so you end up with lighting that's not saving energy and is not a green solution. My philosophy of using minimal lighting equipment to achieve maximum lighting effect is actually a very green solution. This concept started long before the energy crisis. So when I talk about green lighting or green solutions, we're not talking about purely using energy efficient lamps. It's really about starting from the design.

For more information on World Interiors Day, visit www.ifworld.org



Joey Ho's projects. Clockwise from top left: Urban Cafe Commune, Hong Kong; Bracket House, Singapore; Hotel Constance, Pasadena, USA; Spring Learning Centre, Hong Kong

PICTURE CREDIT: TINO KWAN LIGHTING CONSULTANTS



The Peninsula Tokyo, Japan by Tino Kwan