



TATLER
DESIGN
AWARDS
2021

SINGAPORE

Tatler Homes



Creative Mix

Monochromatic spaces that serve as a canvas
for exceptional art and design pieces



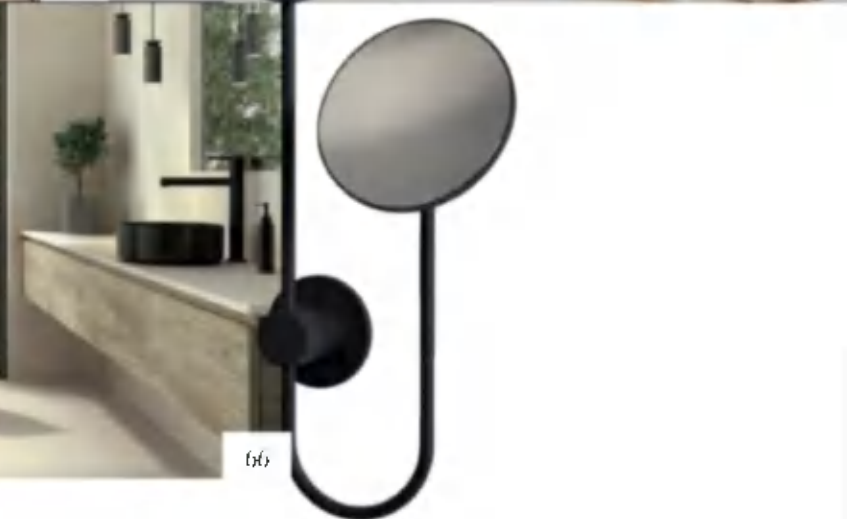
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Opposite page: Hong Kong-based interior designer and architect Steve Leung; the Oval table from the Huo collection designed by SLD Group for Medea 1905



| Iconoclast |

Shaping a Path

Hong Kong-based architect and designer Steve Leung's successful, award-winning business stemmed from a boyhood dream *By Luo Jingmei*

From a young age, Steve Leung knew he wanted to be an architect. He lived with his extended family and had witnessed the work of his uncle, an architect.

"I had always admired him because he is a real artist—he's an architect, he could draw very well, play music very well, and both his English and Chinese calligraphy were amazing," shares Leung, the founder of Hong Kong-based Steve Leung Architects and Steve Leung Design Group.

While he was not as artistic as his uncle, Leung was also creative. He played with scale models and Lego, and enjoyed making things. Determined to pursue his singular interest, he eventually applied to study architecture at the University of Hong Kong.

"It was my only choice. I was very foolish because people always put down a second choice, as there's no guarantee you'll be accepted into your first choice. Luckily, I was admitted," chuckles the bespectacled architect during our Zoom interview.

BOLD AMBITIONS

Many architecture students aim to work for famous firms after graduation, but not Leung. From the start, he had ambitions to set up his own company and planned his career trajectory assiduously. After



two years working in an architecture firm, he joined the government's Buildings Department to understand the industry's regulatory aspects.

"My surprised colleagues said, 'Steve, you are a design talent. Why did you decide to do a comparatively boring job like vetting plans?' But that was the second step of my plan," says Leung.

A few years later, he left for a property developer's firm. "I had to wear very different hats—representing the client while taking care of project construction, so that was very challenging," he recalls. In 1987, at the age of thirty, he decided to go solo and start his own practice. This desire to lead comes naturally to Leung. As a student, the avid sportsman did not just want to play.

"I wanted to manage, do strategic planning, be the team captain and the softball association chairman," he says.

“Design is not only about visual impact... We design for all”

Sports help in character building and team bonding, both of which are instrumental traits in helping a company of six hundred staff spread across five offices: the Hong Kong headquarters, as well as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen. Their range of creative services spanning architecture, interior and product design has been applied to projects in over 100 cities.

HARMONY IN DESIGN

From his first project designing an extension block for his alma mater in Hong Kong, Leung has since collaborated with firms such as UK-based residential brand Yoo and Italian luxury yacht manufacturer Sanlorenzo. For the former, he was the first Asian collaborator, alongside celebrated names like Philippe Starck and Marcel Wanders. He also injected his signature Asian minimalist style into the Yoo Residences in Hong Kong in 2013 and the Yoo8 serviced apartments in Kuala Lumpur.

Leung's work is very much influenced by Chinese philosophy and culture. He finds their human-centric, holistic principles paramount in designing. For example, in Yoo8, he incorporated elements of water and wood to create stylish homes bridging humans and nature.

“Good design is a balanced mix of aesthetics and functionality to serve people in the best ways possible, and to improve their quality of life. Design is not only about visual impact, but also about how the space responds to sustainability, and the needs of the elderly and disabled; we design for all,” says Leung on his belief in running a non-egocentric practice.



NEW HORIZONS

In 1997, turning forty set Leung thinking. He had built a good reputation doing mainly architectural work and “was happy but not satisfied”. Hong Kong's strict regulations curtailed his creativity, and it was not easy as a young practice to gain the confidence from developers for large projects. Leung laughs about his restless nature: “They say architecture is an old man's business because architectural projects take five to ten years to finish. I thought: Ah, I'm not that kind of person. I want to do it tomorrow!”

He made two major pivots: one was to do architecture and interior design in tandem, which would give him more freedom in design, faster results and buffer the business during economic downturns when architectural projects are the first to stop. The other involved expanding his business into China.

Today, Leung is more famous for interior design work, which makes up 90 per cent of the firm's oeuvre. In Singapore, he is currently designing the office of agribusiness Wilmar International, and renovating the VIP and VVIP suites at Marina Bay Sands. Last November, he embodied his achievements with the SLD+ Corporate Culture Centre



in Shanghai. This multifunctional, creative space also houses a permanent retrospective exhibition featuring models, sketches and media interviews from the past 30 years of his career.

Leung's expertise makes him a perfect jury member for the fifth edition of the Tatler Design Awards this year (page 160). He brings to the judging process the same meticulousness and strict standards he upholds in his designs. “To me, good design provides a visionary approach that is able to reshape our traditional ways and provide creative, smart and sustainable solutions.”

Clockwise from top left: The Yoo Residence in Hong Kong is the first project by the firm for the Yoo Group; the SLD+ Corporate Culture Centre in Shanghai is a multifunctional venue with exhibition areas, a meeting room and VIP zone; the St. Regis Bar Macao reinterprets classic British elegance through a richly textured setting