

P

PostMagazine

JUNE 16, 2013



Stepping into the history books

The last of China's foot-bound women



Howard Marks goes to the dogs in Taiwan
P22



Dissident writer Liao Yiwu
P28



Ancient rock art in East Timor
P58

Venison chops, a Father's Day special
P62

Andre Fu

The Hong Kong-born architect and interior designer talks to **Kate Whitehead** about his inspirations and aspirations.

MY LIFE

FROM ST PAUL'S TO ST PAUL'S

I was born in Hong Kong, the youngest of three, and went to St Paul's Co-ed. As a child I loved drawing. When I was about eight I started drawing mazes and I'd pass them to my classmates [so they could] work their way out of them. Around that time I remember my mother saying to me, "Imagine if you were to become a designer or an architect; not only could you design an actual building, you could even design the towels that go into the room." When I was 14, I left to go to boarding school in the UK. My brother and sister were already in Britain and that made it easier, but there was still a huge cultural difference to get over. I went to Malvern College for my GCSEs. At boarding school I was doing pottery, fine art and acrylic painting. Then I went to St Paul's, in London, for my A-levels and got an art scholarship. I was painting with acrylic and doing a lot of figurative drawings.

EUROPEAN DAYS I already had the idea that I would pursue a career related to creativity; and because I come from quite a traditional family – the mentality is that kids need to have some sort of professional qualification – architecture seemed a natural route. I did a three-year Bachelor of Arts at Cambridge University, took a year out to work and then went back for a two-year master's degree, to become a qualified architect. My whole sensibility to culture and design is influenced by those days and my time in London afterwards. I was hanging out with a lot of Europeans, doing weekend excursions to the museums around Europe. It was a period that really nourished how I appreciate art and the whole dining culture. These days, design isn't purely about creating a room that looks great. It needs to provoke a certain lifestyle, create an emotional connection – you have to experience that life to be able to interpret it.

Picture: K.Y. Cheng



ROOM SERVICE I graduated from Cambridge in 2000 and that year a friend offered me work on a small project in London, so I set up my studio, AFSO. In 2003, the year of Sars, I was offered a project in Shanghai, so I flew out there to work and took up a few projects. I properly returned to Hong Kong in 2004 and hired my first staff. In 2004, I worked on two restaurants at JIA boutique hotel (in Shanghai) and that pretty much landed me my whole introduction to the hospitality scene on a much more international platform. I enjoy doing hospitality and design because I like that you are creating a total experience that could interact with a lot of people. A lot of people associate hospitality design with luxury, visual excitement, that kind of thing. But, for me, the purpose of good hospitality is to

be indulged. It could be something very basic – it's just the thoughtfulness of it that makes it a hospitality experience.

SHARING NOTES The first big project I enjoyed was the Upper House (in Admiralty), because it really was an all-encompassing process to create a product that is holistic; not only from the way it's conceived but also from the way it's utilised. There was a huge team and multiple experts – I was more like a curator, some might (say) a culturist. I listen to music. I bombard my team with music and play it all the time. Whatever I'm listening to, everyone is listening to. Every time we do a project, we tend to have a song that goes with it. For the Upper House, it was the Sade song *Cherish the Day*. It fitted that sense of sensuality that we were trying to

bring to the project. It's about the mood of the song. I will usually play it during the presentation. It's about engaging people to a vision that you are trying to create. That's why I used the word "culturist", because you are really there to create a total experience. I still present with my hand-drawn sketches – ink pen with coloured pencils.

BUSINESS AND PLEASURE Increasingly I have less free time. Two projects have just opened – the IST TOO restaurant (at the Shangri-La) in Istanbul and the Inagiku Japanese restaurant at the W Hotel in Guangzhou – and there is a couple of exciting ones in London this summer – the Gong Bar at the Shangri-La in The Shard and a suite at the Berkeley Hotel. And we're working on the new Waldorf Astoria in Bangkok, which is scheduled to open in 2015. The nature of leisure and work become increasingly blurred for me – I guess my work is an integral part of how I live. I think quite a lot. Usually, after talking to the client and knowing the space, then it's kind of bathing inside of me and there will be a moment when I have that sudden outburst of vision. And that's usually the time when the design comes. It's quite natural; it's not something that I need to lock myself up for. I enjoy the fact that I'm creating at this particular moment but it won't be realised until quite a long time away. I enjoy that sense of process; how you can make a blank canvas into something that is real – a place where people really sleep, a restaurant that people really dine in.

I am increasingly comfortable about going back to places I've created. There is nothing more exciting than seeing the way people use a space. Galerie Perrotin, at 50 Connaught Road, is a huge 7,000 sq ft space and we divided it into five rooms of different proportions. People usually think that art space is just about creating white space for art to be displayed in but they don't realise that the proportion of the room, whether it's more landscape and lower or narrowed and taller, can actually inspire the artist.