



DESIGN
DESTINATION:

HONG KONG

There is more chatter now that Hong Kong should diversify her interests and start embracing the softer side of life. The Umbrella Revolution last year is one indication that the quest for civil liberties, and by extrapolation, things needed for the soul, should now come to the fore.

STORY BY ETHAN LOW





CENTRAL & SHEUNG WAN, HONG KONG ISLAND

Pedder Building in Central and Sheung Wan, Hong Kong's epicentre of finance, commerce, arts and design, is an ideal starting point for an arts journey. The beautifully restored neoclassical building in the heart of Central is home to heavyweights Gagosian, OMA-designed Lehmann Maupin, and Andre Fu conceived Pearl Lam. The prime property's collective tenants make up a veritable United Nations of artists, and exhibitions in the said buildings often cover all continents.

Meanwhile, the newly revamped and renamed Police Married Quarters or PMQ (www.pmq.org.hk) is anticipated to propel the city into a true design centre. Revived by a trio of forward-looking local investors after over a decade of neglect, PMQ's old apartments have been converted into retail and studio spaces to serve as incubator for design firms and galleries where low rent and common address seem a boon for businesses hoping to attract design enthusiasts.

Among the standouts in the eight-floor hub are Goods of Desire or G.O.D. (www.god.com.hk), the doyen of Hong Kong design scene, with its array of eccentric yet functional (often) locally made products; Good Design Store (www.g-mark.org), where Japanese designs are showcased in museum-like manner; Kapok (www.ka-pok.com), with its well curated, multi-brand merchandise; books, music, and literary

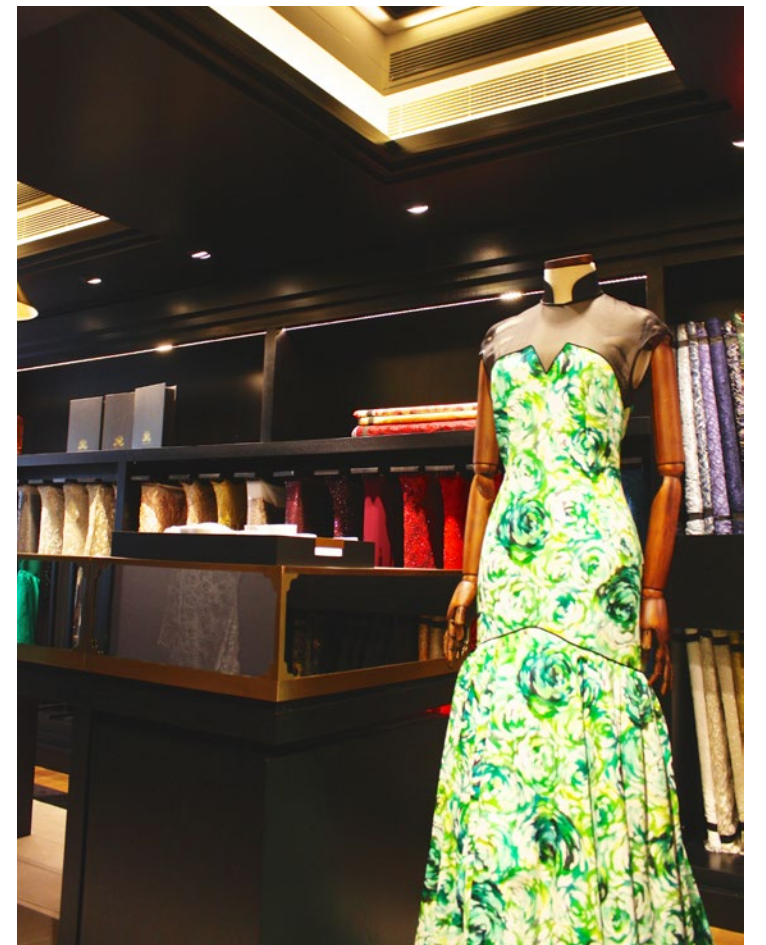
A 'cold concrete shrine to materialism', and 'money-crazed den of pure capitalism' are some of the Faustian monikers that Hong Kong has garnered in her ascent as one of the world's most important financial centres, implying that its wealth obsession is at odds with her dreams of becoming an arts, design and cultural centre.

But arts and design development in Hong Kong has been very active lately. The government is behind rising West Kowloon Cultural District, touted to be the world's largest arts district for visual and performing arts. More colonial and historically significant buildings are being listed to save them from demolition. Hong Kong also hosts the lone Asian edition of the world's most prestigious art fair, Art Basel, the important art auctions after New York, London and Beijing, and the Asian satellites top-notch galleries Pace, Gagosian and Lehmann Maupin.

These days, Hong Kong is not on short supply of design-driven establishments for shopping or dining, with younger, worldlier locals ensuring it is taken seriously as a design hub.



(Clockwise from right) A strapless gown on display at Shanghai Tang, Duddell's second-level dining area, Duddell's private room, Chateau Zoobettle's storefront. (Opposite page, clockwise from top left) PMQ's distinctive facade, contemplative stillness in Ben Brown, Isono Bar's artsy interior, Pedder Building star tenant Lehmann Maupin. (Opening spread) A mural featuring Bruce Lee.



paraphernalia store Open Quote (www.openquote.com.hk); and Isono & Vasco (www.isono.com.hk), the Joyce Wang-designed restaurant on top of the building.

The neighbourhood is jam-packed with independent retail and cafés. PoHo (Po Hing Fong), one of the streets demarcating this area, is lined with small, independent retailers and artisanal shops that moved west to escape the skyrocketing rents in Central and eastern Sheung Wan. Among notable locators is A.Style (www.astyle.com.hk), a home shop focused on emerging British designers, but with design influences extending well beyond the British. Square Street (www.squarestreet.se) specialises in Nordic design items for the funky, fashion-forward gentleman, while Juice (www.clot.com) stocks sartorial products targeted at the young avant-gardes. Chateau Zoobettle (www.chateauzoobettle.com) is a little French shop of curiosities done up as a Parisian apartment, which means wine is never too far away. (It has an in-house wine bar).

On Central's Duddell Street is the new, three-storey Shanghai Tang Mansion (www.shanghaitang.com), with its hard-to-miss 1930s Shanghai Art Deco etched glass façade that serves as clue to the updated contemporary style within. It houses the label's bespoke cheong sam tailoring service, a sizeable home-ware section, and full apparel lines.

Post-retail sustenance is available at Duddell's (www.duddells.co), situated in the same building. Its founders, Yenn Wong, Alan Lo, and Paulo Pong, the same people behind 208 and The Pawn, aim to develop Hong Kong's creative landscape through this delightful gastronomic and cultural destination. Apart from the two-Michelin-starred Cantonese restaurant famous for its weekend champagne-dim-sum buffet brunch, it also houses a rooftop terrace-bar with a library. Most interestingly, it promotes itself as an alternative art platform and regularly invites guest curators to reinvent the Ilse Crawford-designed space. Duddell's art project manager Shormi Ahmed showed us a selection of exquisite Chinese ink masterpieces from the M.K. Lau Collection, which was started by Alan Lo's father, and leading Chinese conceptual artist, Song Dong's self-titled edible exhibition. Hong Kong would do well to have more private spaces open up as alternative platforms for the culture and the arts.





Bibo (www.bibo.hk) is another notable art gallery/restaurant setup. Not far from Duddell's, the space has featured works by Basquiat, Hirst, Murakami, and Koons, among others culled from the collection of the establishment's anonymous owner. Chef Mutaro Balde, who trained under Alain Ducasse, helms the kitchen.

At SoHo one encounters Ho Lee Fook (holeefookhk.tumblr.com) whose cheeky name is actually Cantonese for 'good fortune for your mouth' in Cantonese. Inspired by old school Hong Kong cha chaan tengs, or casual cafés, and late-night Chinatown joints in 1960s New York City, it brandishes a funky streak with a mahjong-tiled open kitchen and a platoon of fortune cats on the feature wall opposite. Not surprisingly, the renovation was done with Douglas Young, G.O.D. founder. Fun and irreverent, it serves a modern take on Chinese comfort food.

End your first-day exploration at stunning boutique hotels under the National Hotels banner all conveniently located within the Sheung Wan



district. The aesthetic language and execution are consistent throughout the four properties, but One96 (www.one96.com) and 99 Bonham (www.99bonham.com) inch out from the pack. One96's lone suite per floor is larger than the average Hong Kong hotel room in this part of town. Its eye-catching intrecciato-patterned façade hints at the quietly edgy and sophisticated interiors by acclaimed local architect Norman Chan.

Meanwhile, 99 Bonham is the result of the Antonio Citterio-Patricia Viel collaboration. Similar to One96, it presents an integrated design throughout the property—from conceptual approach to structure to every detail inside.

OTHER DISTRICTS, HONG KONG ISLAND

A city whose residents frequently accuse as having a short memory, Hong Kong makes good with preservation of heritage buildings in the busy and expensive district of Wan Chai. The Pawn (www.thepawn.com.hk), named after its past life as a pawnshop, is a fin-de-siècle four-storey tong lau that now houses a lifestyle store, restaurant and bar, with a balcony that allows one to enjoy a cocktail while following the tram's progress down the avenue.

Following a full revamp that assimilates modern, retro and culturally integral elements, it was re-launched in 2014 to praises for Stanley Wong's artful and elegant interpretation of the colonial space, and Tom Aikens's modern British cuisine that adequately proves his two-Michelin-star renown. Its cavernous space sets it apart from the hole-in-the-wall establishments common in space-scarce Hong Kong



A visit certainly leaves well-heeled patrons feel more like kings and queens, than mere pawns.

On the ground floor is the lifestyle concept store Tang Tang Tang (www.tangtangtangtang.com), the brainchild of Sir David Tang, which brims with interesting objets d'art and objets de maison infused with modern Chinese elements.

At the apogee of Hong Kong's best-designed hotels is arguably the Upper House (www.upperhouse.com). The nondescript Thomas Heatherwick-designed entrance immediately sets the tone with its immensely understated elegance and nuanced sophistication. And it here that André Fu signs off as the peerless master in high luxury interior design. The sense of seclusion is emphasised by the use of warm hues on the walls, bespoke furnishing, and the deft use of space. This cosy feeling extends to Café Gray Deluxe, which offers unpretentious cuisine in an intimate setting distinguished by jaw-dropping views of Victoria Harbour.

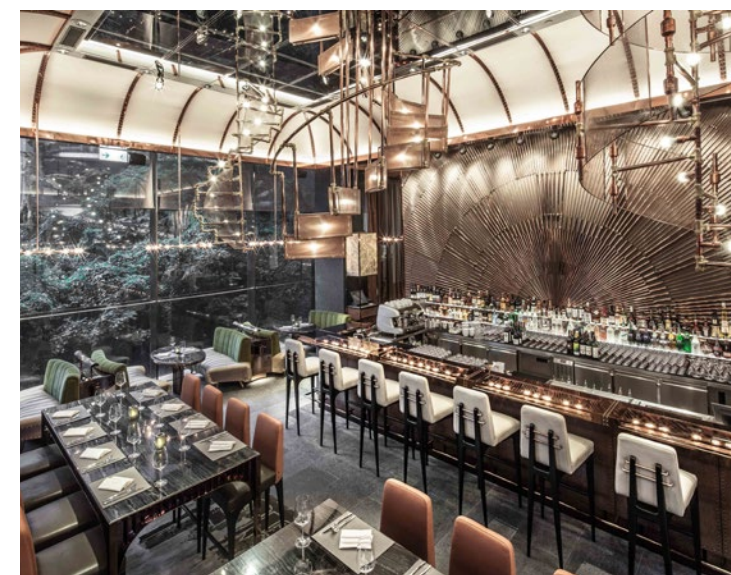
Not far from Upper House is another Joyce Wang masterpiece: AMMO (www.ammo.com.hk). Located in a leafy enclave within Admiralty, it is soaked in history that is as exciting as its appearance. As its name suggests, it is part of a fortress-like building that was once a British Army explosives magazine, and later headquarter of Hong Kong of the Asia Society chapter. Its new name is an acronym that encapsulates its essence: Asia, Modern, Museum and Original. The extensive use of copper at the entrance heightens the sense of arrival that is akin to the trumpets' passages in Mahler's Symphony No. 5. The pièce-de-résistance is surely the floating (and non-functional) metal spiral staircase that hangs like a chandelier. The glass box restaurant set in a calm, verdant surroundings easily impresses diners by perhaps making them forget they are in one of the world's densest cities.

KOWLOON

If skyscrapers represent the vertiginous financial apex of Hong Kong, then its malls must be the physical manifestation of its consumerist soul. But malls need not be sapless, as 1881 Heritage proves. The second of two prominent buildings previously occupied by the police (the first being PMQ), it is the former headquarter of the Hong Kong Marine Police. This white-stucco Victorian-era building with neo-Classical elements has been meticulously preserved and renovated—a welcome break from all the post-modern monstrosities surrounding it. Now officially declared a monument, it also houses the sumptuously decked-out, suites-only (10 in total) Hullett House (www.hulletehousehotel.com). None of the 10 suites are alike, including their names. Hand-painted murals serve as wallpapers, and a generous dose of art—purchased for the hotel or picked from the personal collection of its owner, designer David Yeo—hangs all over the property.



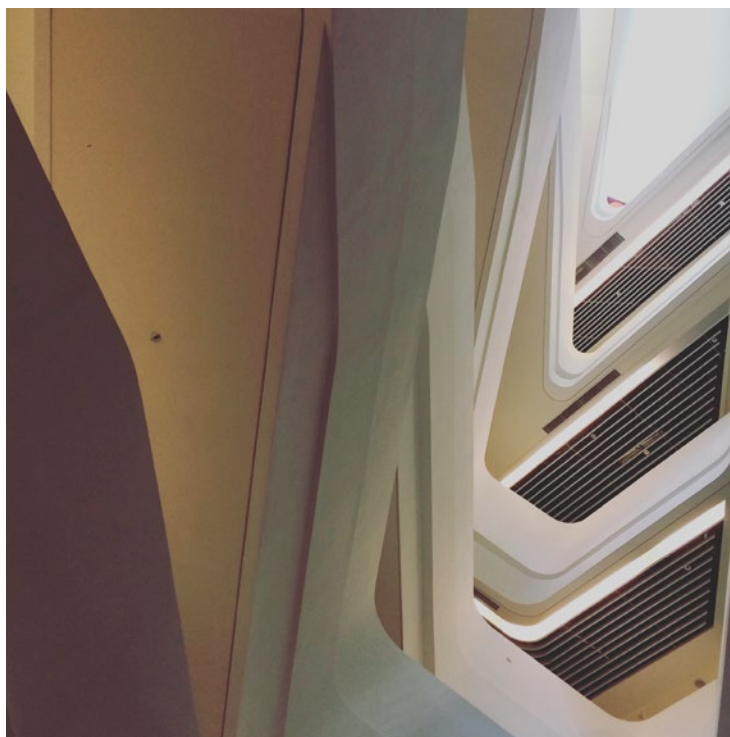
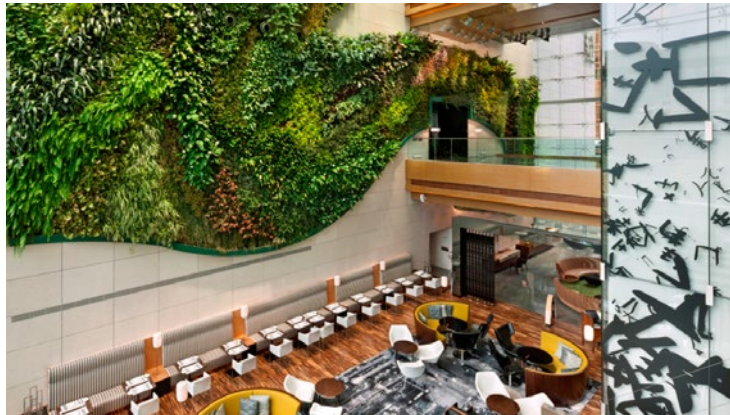
(Clockwise from extreme left) Elegant refuge in Upper House, chinoiserie meets modern meets OTT at Tang Tang Tang Tang, an intimate cloister at The Pawn, AMMO's arsenal of good taste. (Opposite page, clockwise from top left) A 99 Bonham suite looks out to the city, distinctive quirk on One96 façade, more is more at memorably named Ho Lee Fook, Miss Hepburn spray-painted at Bibo.





Not far from here is Hotel Icon (www.hotel-icon.com) which lists design heavyweights behind its conception, including Sir Terence Conran who, with Above & Beyond, designed all of the hotel's dining spots; Rocco Yim, the same architect for the International Finance Centre across the harbor, and Vivienne Tam, who designed one of its suites. The vertical garden, which calls to mind that of Pershing Hall in Paris, is immediately noticeable upon arrival and is in fact Asia's largest. A large art collection proudly features the best of local contemporary artists. The result is in an effortlessly chic but welcoming establishment that also serves as training hotel for Hong Kong Polytechnic University's School of Hotel and Tourism Management.

Farther east, in the Polytechnic University campus, is The Jockey Club Innovation Tower which houses the University's School of Design as well as Hadid's triumphant return to Hong Kong, after the building that catapulted her to international prominence in the early 1980s, The Peak, never got built. The neo-futuristic structure is more a statement of "a vision of possibilities for the future" and architectural fluidity that screams Zaha Hadid from every angle. The building contains design studios, labs, workshops, exhibition areas and lecture venues for nearly 2,000 students and staff.



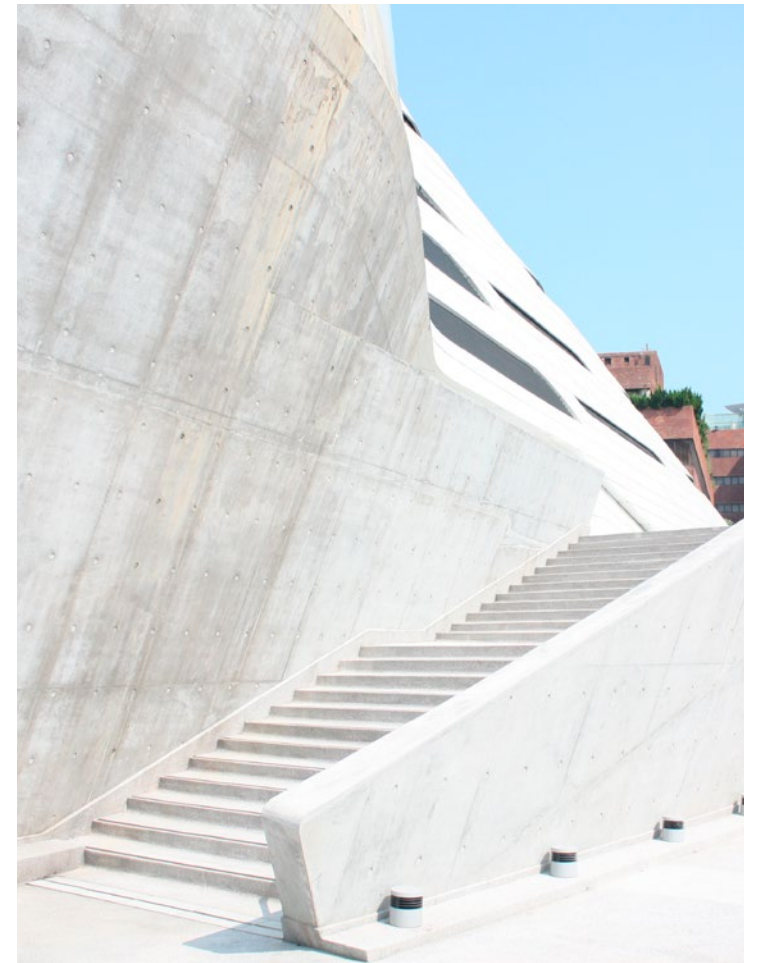
Innovation Tower's dynamic structure (left) and steps are clever plays on perspective, a rendering of the Xiqu Centre, one of West Kowloon Cultural District's attractions. (Opposite page, clockwise from bottom left) march of the arches at Heritage 1881 and Hullet Hotel, stunning vertical garden at ICON Hotel, innovative architecture inside Innovation Tower.



WEST KOWLOON CULTURAL DISTRICT

No discussion of Hong Kong's future as arts and design destination will be complete without mention of the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD)—although it seems to hog the headlines these days for ever-inflating budgets, revolving-door changes to senior management, and long delays (expected completion, 2026). There remains more reasons to celebrate WKCD, foremost of which is that the 40-hectare master-planned project will be the world's largest, with 17 arts venues designed by the formidable Foster + Partners.

The complex's prima donna looks set to be the modern and contemporary art museum, M+, by Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron, the same practice behind Beijing's 'bird's nest' Olympic stadium. It will be an important venue for 20th- and 21st-century Asian art, design, architecture and film, bolstered in no small part by the donation by Uli Sigg of his massive collection of Chinese contemporary art—widely recognised as one of the most important in the world. The opening of M+ is now slated for 2019.



Other venues worthy of mention include the Xiqu Centre, expected to be the first major venue to open in 2018—a harmoniously sleek modern edifice dedicated to the performance, education and preservation of Chinese and Cantonese opera, as well as the Lyric Theatre, which will serve as WKCD's home for the performing arts. It will rise in the midst of an immaculate landscape, art galleries, and retail space, set along a two-kilometre coastline with unobstructed views of the Hong Kong skyline. 