

volume
05
2013

STRANGER THAN SCIENCE FICTION

Six kitchen appliances that look and feel like art pieces from the future.

MATERIAL COMFORT

Your guide to the perfect countertop material.

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CEO'S MESSAGE

FORGING AHEAD

We dedicate this issue to the future—for all the opportunity
and promise it holds!

In this edition, we feature products with futuristic aesthetics that would not look out of place in a sci-fi movie, from cooker hoods to taps and induction cookers; we offer you a glimpse of the revolution taking place in kitchen design and planning.

With a view to the future, we have ventured into Hong Kong with two retail showrooms that have a combined space of over 13,000ft² of experiential kitchen shopping for our clients, offering venerable brands such as Eggersman and Siematic, as well as appliances from La Cornue and Liebherr. Our showroom in Malaysia has also undergone a major facelift to offer the finest in kitchen technology and design to cater to the growing market across the Causeway.

As our business is evolving, so too our publication! *Kitchen Culture* magazine is now divided into two sections.

In 'Form & Function', we will offer insights into our products. Besides introducing you to the history and design philosophy behind the brands, we will also offer opinions and critique from professionals, ranging from designers to chefs, who will be consulted for their take on our products.

In 'Luxe Living', we have lifestyle-related articles and tips covering wines & spirits, gourmet delights, travel, and art & design—*la dolce vita* topics that, we are convinced, hold great interest for those with a penchant for the finer things in life. If you are contemplating leasing a whole island for yourself for the June holidays, or adding to your Chinese Contemporary Art collection, we hope to pique your interests and provide interesting nuggets on what matters to you!

C'est la vie!

LIM WEE LI

Executive Chairman & Chief Executive Officer
Kitchen Culture Holdings Ltd.

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kitchen
culture

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TIO
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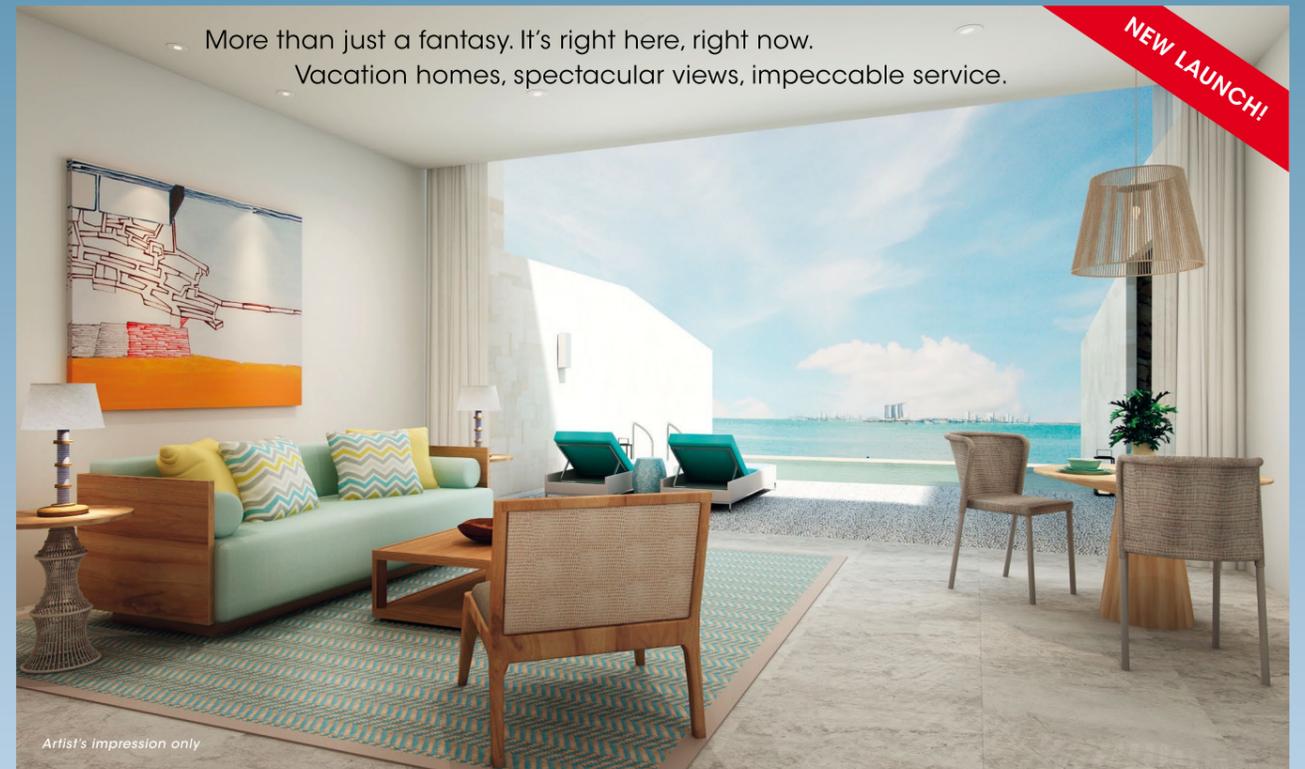
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CULTURE CLUB



What have we been up to the past few months here at Kitchen Culture? Here's a wrap-up of some interesting activities that we organised or took part in.

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COOKING WITH V-ZUG

Kitchen Culture and V-ZUG jointly organised a series of cooking classes for existing clients as part of our customer relation management programme.

Held in the Kitchen Culture Singapore showroom, these classes were helmed by Chef Mervyn Phan, who taught participants the finer points of preparing delectable Chinese dishes such as *sio bak* (roast pork with crackling) on jasmine rice, Hainanese chicken roulade with fragrant rice, Asian-style steamed barramundi, and truffle mushroom in vol-au-vent shells. Kitchen Culture provided sweet endings to each meal, such as ginger crême brulee, and kaffir lime banana pastries with vanilla ice cream.

During these classes, clients were given a refresher course on the features of their V-ZUG kitchen appliances in order to take their culinary skills to the next level.

At the end of each session, each guest walked away—full and satisfied—with a Kitchen Culture bag that contained numerous cool items, including a V-ZUG cookbook. “My husband and I enjoyed the cooking demonstration and picked up a few key points throughout the session,” said one happy participant. “We would love to come by for another demonstration!”

LOCO FOR POLO

This year, Kitchen Culture is sponsoring a team from the Singapore Polo Club.

The team, consisting of club members Ali Reda, Gerry Gan and Stijn Welkers, will be supplemented by a professional player when taking part in events such as Club Tournament, Diplomats Cup, International ProAm and Singapore Open.

During these tournaments, the team will don shirts and pants emblazoned with the Kitchen Culture logo, while their horses will have saddle blankets decorated with the same image.

At the time of this writing (end-Apr 2013), the Kitchen Culture team had already won the Mackray Cup at the Club Tournament.

The social elite of Singapore—from politicians and diplomats to celebrities and captains of industry to the well-heeled—are the usual supporters of these tournaments. In addition, three of the four tournaments will be telecast on Fox Sports and Star Sports across Asia.

All in all, Kitchen Culture will receive plenty of the right exposure.



KITCHEN CULTURE CARES

As part of our Corporate Social Responsibility effort, Kitchen Culture proudly sponsored a prize—a Liebherr wine fridge—for Celebrities Sports Club Charity Golf 2013.

The tournament, held on 8 Mar, was jointly organised by MediaCorp celebrities, and sporting personalities from the Jurong Country Club. Funds raised at the event were channelled to the Apex Day Rehab Centre for the Elderly so that it can continue providing quality services for senior citizens.

“The charity golf event was the perfect opportunity to raise awareness for the needy,” said George Lim, Executive Director of Kitchen Culture Holdings Ltd. “Giving back to society is a big part of what Kitchen Culture is all about.”



KITCHEN CULTURE MALAYSIA GETS FACELIFT

Established in 2000, the Kitchen Culture showroom in Malaysia recently underwent a complete makeover to better showcase new brands in its portfolio. So names such as Eggersmann, La Cornue, Steel and BluForm now stand alongside bestsellers such as Poggenpohl, V-ZUG, Sub-Zero and Wolf. There are plans in the near future to use this showroom to feature wardrobe systems and furnishings from Interlübke, Fimes and COR, as well as Kitchen Culture's exclusive line of appliances and related products.

"We are proud to be one of the few players in the Asian market with the exclusive rights to represent some of these brands, and we are excited to bring even more cutting-edge technology, good functionality and outstanding designs to our Malaysian customers," said Lim Wee Li, Executive Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Kitchen Culture Holdings Ltd.





SUB-ZERO, MOVIE STAR?

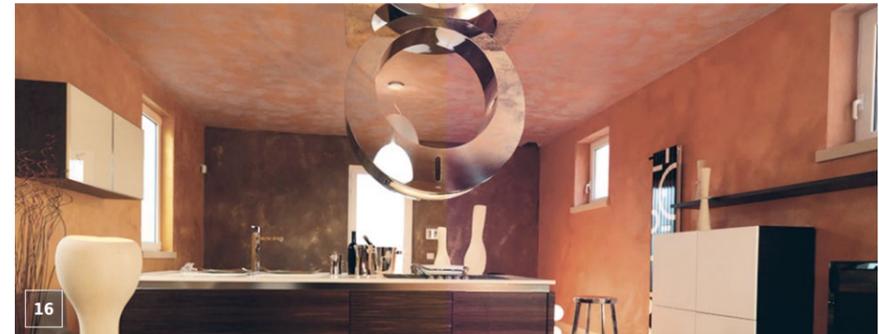
Did you know that a Sub-Zero refrigerator was prominently featured in *Iron Man 3*?

More than a hundred of Kitchen Culture's valued clients and business partners were made aware of this nugget of truth when they attended a special screening of the blockbuster action flick at Golden Village VivoCity on 2 May. Organised by Sub-Zero and Wolf, the event received the thumbs-up from all participants. "This is such a fun way to associate the Sub-Zero brand with a positive experience," claims an attendee.

FORM —&— FUNCTION

| PRODUCT FEATURES

| GALLERIES



From the perfect countertop material (p26) to the final frontier in kitchen appliances (p16), this issue's Form & Function section has plenty of cutting-edge ideas for your home. Use them to deck out a new range of bespoke condominiums (p46), or, as Fu Ya Yin (p36) will show, to make your parties a lot more fun.



PRODUCT FEATURE

STRANGER THAN SCIENCE FICTION

There are product designs, and then there are product designs. Here are six kitchen appliances that look and feel so out of this world, they wouldn't look out of place in a sci-fi flick!

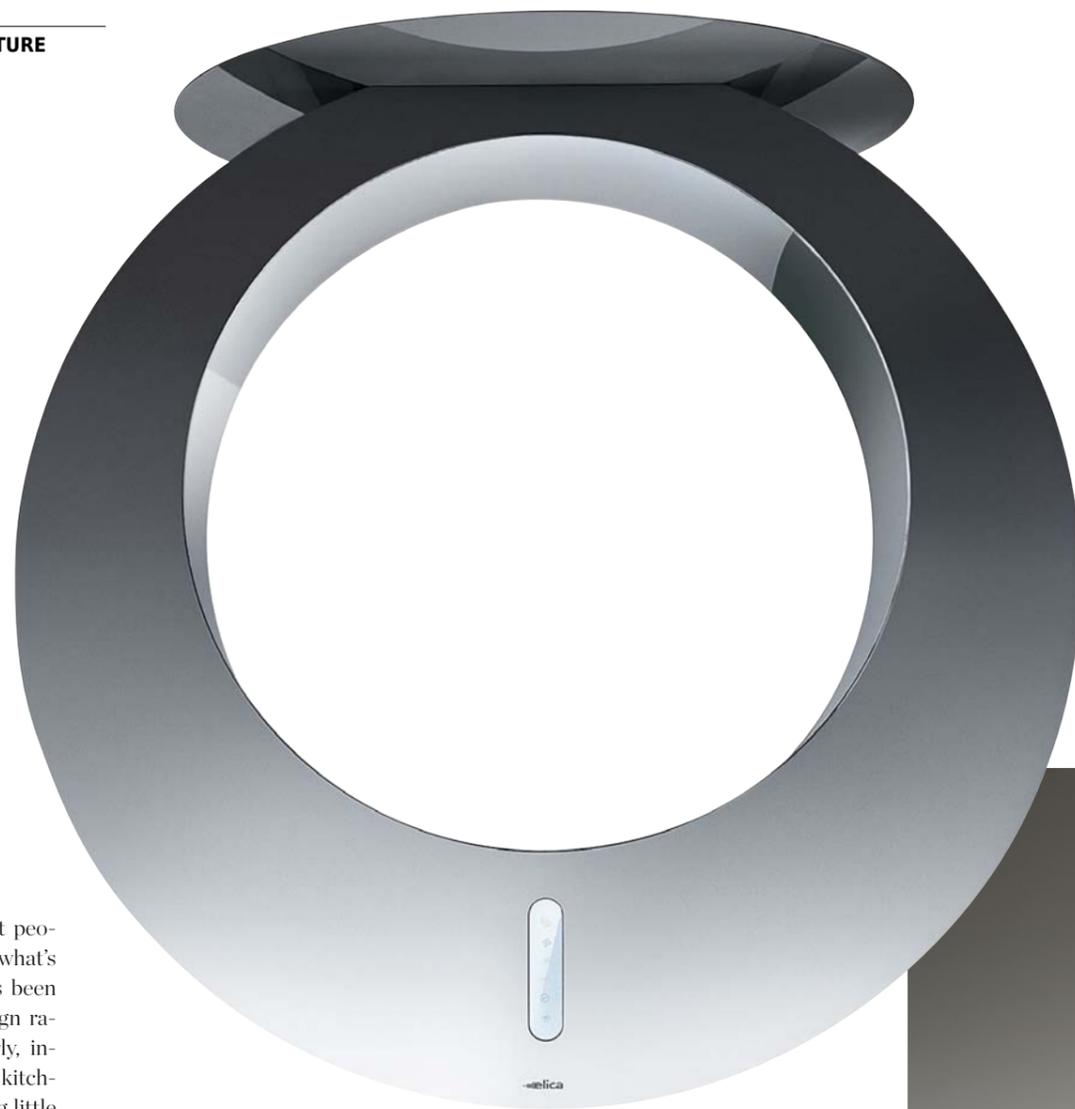
By **CHIN WEI LIEN**

When it comes to the kitchen, most people opt for what works instead of what's beautiful. Function, not form, has been the driving force behind the design rationale of most kitchens. Similarly, industrial designs of contemporary kitchen products usually revolve around pragmatism, leaving little room for the aesthetics.

In recent years, consumers are becoming more affluent and design-conscious. As such, they are beginning to look beyond what a product can do and at how a product looks, feels, and how it fits into their home décor both thematically and as a conversation starter.

Christopher Tan, owner of Chris Jaren Design and a part-time lecturer at LASALLE College of the Arts, believes that design-conscious consumers see kitchens as more than just a place to prepare meals. Instead, they have become statement pieces that reflect the users' social status and who they really are.

In response to this demand, designers are stripping away extraneous parts of kitchen products in favour of a cleaner, more minimalist aesthetic. This process of simplification has resulted in products that often resemble props from science fiction movies, thus giving birth to the look of the modern, bespoke kitchen. The similarities between science fiction and industrial design shouldn't come as a surprise. After all, for more than a century, science fiction writers have been dreaming up seemingly fantastical devices that will someday become a reality. The science fiction genre has been a source of inspiration for many designers, and the result is a series of products that are more than just kitchen appliances—they are works of art that hail from the future.



ELICA: LEGEND COOKER HOOD

The kitchen stove is commonly regarded as the heart and soul of the kitchen, as it's where fragrances and flavours come together. Complementing kitchen stoves are the cooker hoods, an appliance designed to remove cooking fumes and unpleasant odours. In recent years, however, cooker hoods have evolved dramatically in terms of their aesthetics and design, transforming from a boxy kitchen appliance into a decorative piece that begs for attention in any kitchen.

THE LOOK

Take the Legend cooker hood from Elica, for example. On first impression, the cooker hood looks like it belongs in a museum or the bridge of a spaceship. Its designers have discarded the traditional shape for an elliptical form that defies conventional interpretations. In fact, the Legend cooker hood looks so alien that, to the untrained eyes, it may look more like a hovering ornamental light. "My favourite part about this cooker hood is that you don't immediately know how it works," says Tan. "In fact, you don't even expect to see a cooker hood like that in an ordinary home, making it extra appealing to users who are looking for something different and striking in their kitchens."

THE FEEL

The Legend cooker hood has a sleek satin steel finish, a choice of surfacing that, according to Tan, can only be found in high-end products. "Using steel in industrial design is nothing new. It is how you treat the material that makes all the difference in the world." In this case, the steel has been treated with an architectural finish, which is characterised by the fine polishing grit lines that are uniform and directional in appearance. The result can be felt on the tips of your fingers as satin steel gives its users a feathery, almost powder-like sensation when touched. "This defies the traditional idea of what a metallic surface should feel like, creating a very out-of-this-world finish," Tan explains.



On first impression, the cooker hood looks like it belongs in a museum or the bridge of a spaceship.

ELICA: ADAGIO COOKER HOOD

It is near impossible to prepare a full-fledged Chinese meal without cooking up a storm. As such, in a typical Asian kitchen, the cooker hood is almost always switched on when the chef is on duty. Here's the tricky part: what if you just want to make a sandwich or a salad? Traditional cooker hoods are built into the walls, ceilings or countertops, making them impossible to conceal when you don't need them. In the future-inspired kitchen, however, concealment has become a key feature of modern design.

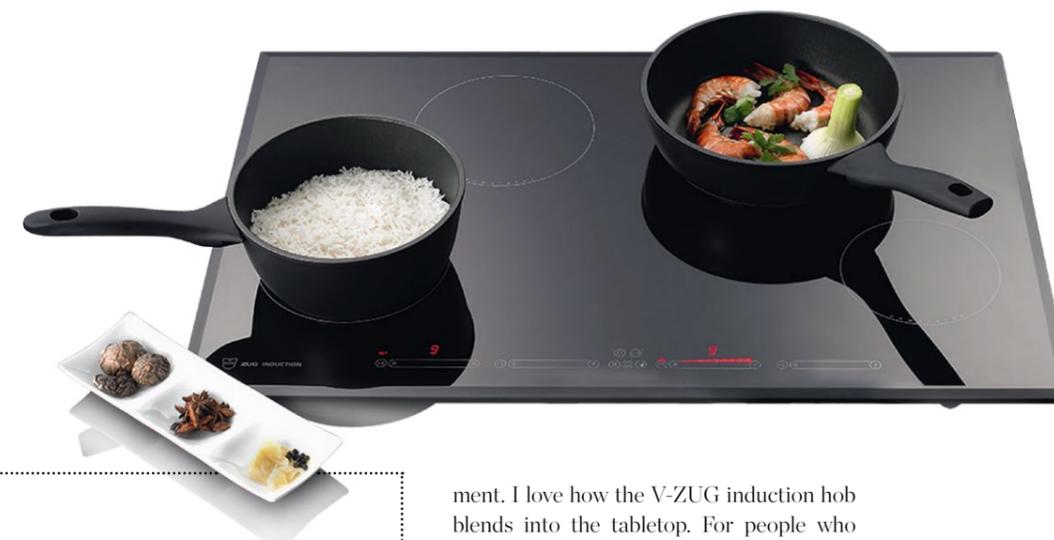
THE LOOK

Experiencing Adagio for the first time, it's easy to dismiss it as just another island-mounted cooker hood. However, unknown to most people, the Adagio cooker hood actually has a trick up its sleeve: fitted with an external motor, the cooker hood can be lowered and completely concealed within the countertop. In fact, since the top of the cooker hood (where the touch controls are located) is flush with the surface, the mechanism actually leaves no trace of the cooker hood ever having been there at all!

THE FEEL

According to Tan, cold stainless steel and glass are two very common materials used in high-end products as they not only look good, they feel even better. The rigidity of these materials is balanced by the grace they add to the product, while the smooth surface they render gives the cooker hood a touch of class. "From a designer's point of view, when a product looks good, feels good, and has unique features, it is already in a class of its own," insists Tan. Especially in the kitchen, where designers are increasingly looking at ways to conceal the immediate function of their designs, the Adagio presents a unique way of how appliances can be stored right within the kitchen's furnishings. "You don't see the product when you walk into the kitchen until you need it, and that puts this product ahead of its time," says an impressed Tan.

"You don't see the product when you walk into the kitchen until you need it, and that puts this product ahead of its time."



V-ZUG: INDUCTION HOB

"Less is more" is a mantra many industrial designers adhere to. In recent years, designers of consumer products have been taking their products apart, leaving only the bare essentials. Similarly, induction hobs are moving towards a button-less, more minimalistic interface.

THE LOOK

When it comes to induction cookers, the V-ZUG induction hob is the epitome of sophistication and elegance. Matching the black undercoat of the induction cooker with a black countertop, the edges of the V-ZUG induction hob disappear completely into the furnishing, giving the illusion that the entire countertop is, in fact, a cooking surface. "As a designer, it's important to note how colours interact with each other within an environ-

ment. I love how the V-ZUG induction hob blends into the tabletop. For people who don't know what it is, it might even look like a very clean surface with round patterns on it," Tan comments.

THE FEEL

The designers of the V-ZUG induction hob have translated the touchscreen experience onto the induction hob. The interface, along with the touch-sensitive controls, reminds Tan most of Steven Spielberg's 2002 science fiction movie, *Minority Report*. In the film, Tom Cruise's character is able to manipulate graphical interfaces of a computer by waving his hands in the air. Here, users are able to adjust cooking temperatures by sliding their fingers from left to right, along with a touch-sensitive locking feature that protects the children.



KÜPPERSBUSCH: HONEYCOMB COOKTOP

Stoves have come a long way from the days when they relied on gas and fire. Touch-sensitive controls on induction cooktops have revolutionised the way people cook and changed how humans interact with their cooktops. The next phase of change, according to Tan, is modularity. "Like furniture, there is an industrial trend to make modular products, which allow end-users to express creativity and customise a set of items to their own specifications." He refers to the Küppersbusch Honeycomb, an induction cooktop with a revolutionary design that will change the way you cook forever.

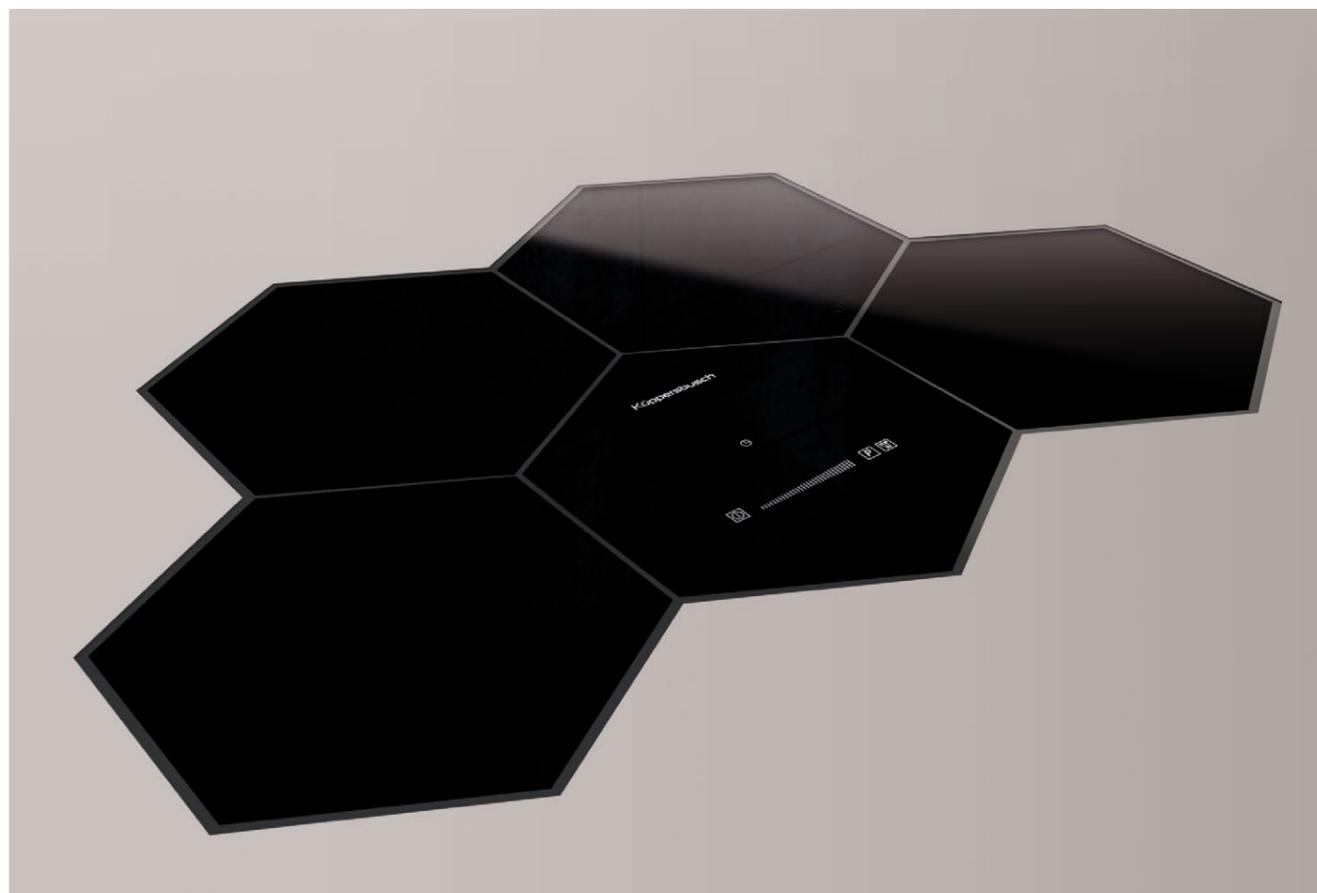
THE LOOK

Designers of the Küppersbusch Honeycomb did away with the conventional rectangular form of an induction cooktop. Instead, as its name suggests, the cooktop is segregated into individual honeycombs, or cook zones, which you can shuffle around to create your ideal layout. This means that the cooktop can be fitted into virtually any countertop material and provide high levels of flexibility in terms of functionality and aesthetics. Translating the sense of modularity from furniture design to product design, Tan reveals, is the most impressive part about the Honeycomb. "You can design

the cooking area to suit your cooking style or the number of cooking zones you need. This is not just a good selling feature; it really makes this high-tech cooktop a beauty to look at."

THE FEEL

Touch sensors mean individual heat levels can be set using the tips of your fingers. This, explains Tan, brings about a human touch and a sense of familiarity to the user. Furthermore, with everything built into the honeycomb-shaped control unit, the contextual interface is completely hidden from view when not in use. Once turned on, the luminous red digital display glows underneath the black glass, giving users the illusion that the numbers are suspended beneath the cooktop as their fingers dance across the surface.



Küppersbusch is the oldest kitchen appliance manufacturer in Germany.



KWC: USO ELECTRONIC FAUCET

The faucet is an appliance that we interact with on a daily basis, and we don't normally consider it a high-end kitchen product. However, one look at the KWC USO faucet and it's clear that there is more to this tap than meets the eye.

THE FEEL

Futuristic industrial designs tend to encourage users to have a more tactile experience. In this case, the KWC USO faucet removed the traditional levers and knobs in favour of a touch-sensitive user interface. "Clever designs are no longer about pressing buttons or turning knobs these days," explains Tan. "That's because the tactile experience is always best when it comes to design." Furthermore, the designers opted for stainless steel with a brushed metal finish, which provides a higher level of fluidity to the lines. The smooth curves coax users into touching the product, which then reveals its hidden function. Engaging the sense of touch and the sense of sight at once, the KWC USO faucet adds a really human yet futuristic touch to even the simplest appliance in the kitchen.

THE LOOK

The first thing you notice about KWC's USO faucet is the LUMINAQUA LED lights located on the mouth and base of the tap. On one level, the lights may seem like a decorative element, adding colour to the stream of water. On closer inspection, it is evident that the lights actually serve a different function altogether. As you interact with the tap, the LED lights will change colour based on the temperature of the water (touch once for cold, twice for warm and thrice for hot). This clever innovation makes the USO faucet a true marriage between technology and aesthetics.



THE LOOK

Fans of Kubrick's science fiction masterpiece will immediately recall the monolith when they lay their eyes on Wolf's E-series built-in oven in black glass. The front of the oven is built of tempered glass, complete with a black undercoat to give it a minimalistic look. As part of its design feature, the black glass is also unframed and seamless, deepening its similarities with Kubrick's mysterious alien artifact. "Tempered glass is a beautiful material to work with because it finishes a product nicely and gives the product a lot of detail and depth," gushes Tan.

WOLF: E-SERIES BUILT-IN OVEN

Stanley Kubrick's 1968 masterpiece, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, prominently features a monolith of unknown origins in its now-famous opening sequence. In the film, the surface of the monolith is impossibly smooth, reflects no light, and was the reason early humans learnt how to hunt, construct and communicate.

THE FEEL

Much like how the monolith in the film was the source of intelligent life, technology has also been built right into the oven to up the product's intelligence quotient. Temperatures can be adjusted via the touch-sensitive electronic control. This, Tan elaborates, allows the users to feel as though they are manipulating the machine with their bare hands. Breaking down the barrier between human and machine is part of the process when pushing industrial designs forward.



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PRODUCT FEATURE

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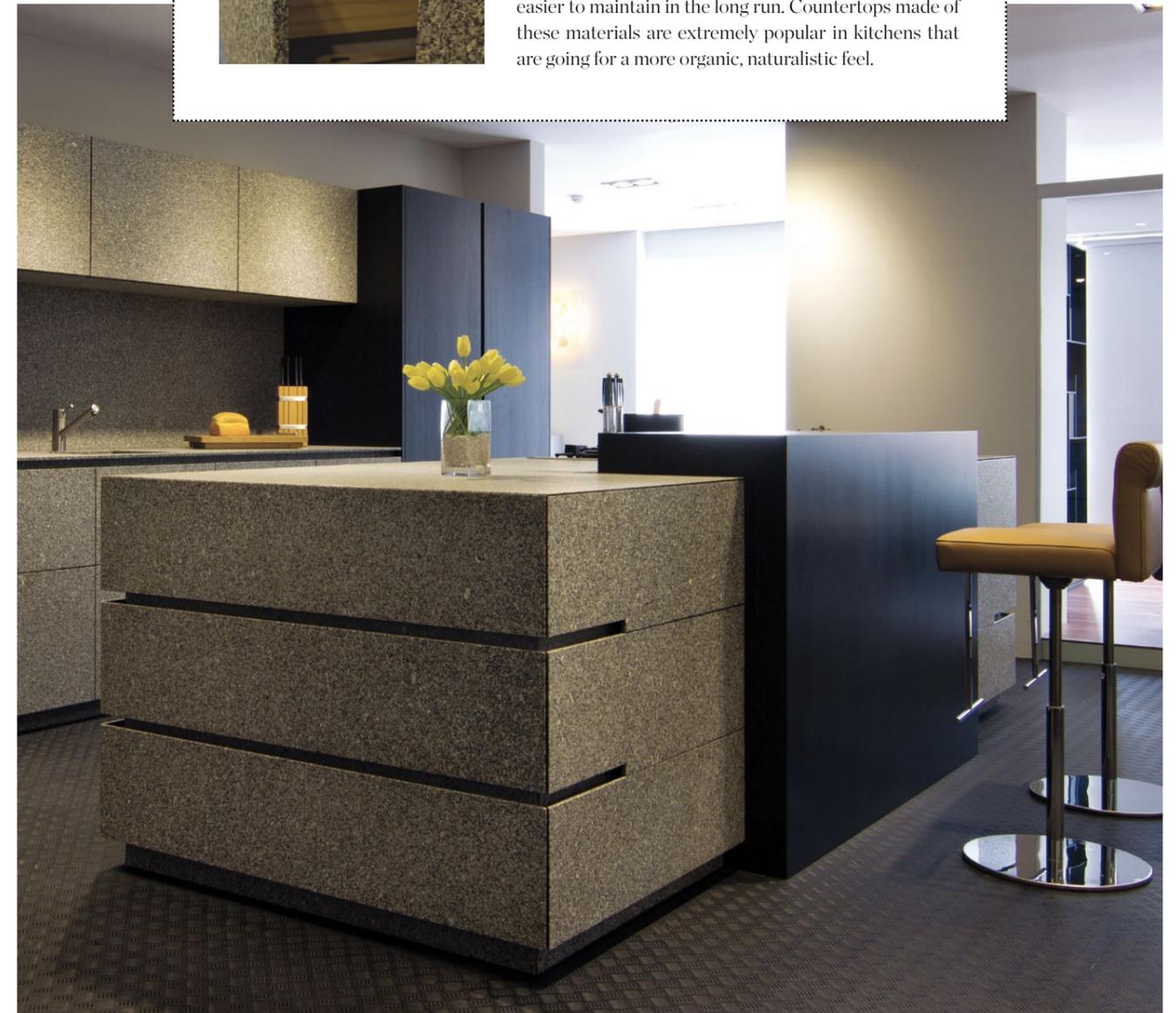
Faced with myriad options when it comes to kitchen countertops, one can be easily overwhelmed. Here's a handy guide of popular materials to help you select the perfect countertop for your dream kitchen.

By **CHIN WEI LIEN**



NATURAL STONES

Natural stones such as granite are popular materials employed in high-end worktops. That's because minerals in natural stones are practically inert when they come in contact with other minerals and chemicals, making them easier to maintain in the long run. Countertops made of these materials are extremely popular in kitchens that are going for a more organic, naturalistic feel.



THE UPSIDE

Granite tops are scratch- and stain-resistant, and are naturally sealed against heat and water. Granite also comes in a wide array of textures and colours, ranging from variegated browns and midnight black to deep red and mottled white. With proper treatment, a granite countertop can last between 10 and

15 years. Chef Tan Huang Ming from Lolla, an up-and-coming Mediterranean restaurant in Singapore, knows the importance of a good countertop to a chef. "A countertop made of natural stone is important for pastry chefs because they offer a cold surface to work on. Natural stones also don't react with pastry items, thus ensuring the longevity of the countertop," he adds.

NOTE

Depending on the colour and complexity of fabrication, natural stone can be a fairly pricey option. Furnishings need to be properly reinforced, since countertops made out of natural stones are denser and heavier than other materials.



STAINLESS STEEL

Stainless steel is common in professional kitchens, such as those in restaurants and hotels. The obvious reason is that these places handle a high volume of cooking, thus the hardness of the material helps increase productivity and lower the cost of maintenance. In recent times, many kitchens in contemporary homes use stainless steel as the material of choice for the same reasons. This is especially so for designers who are gunning for the industrial look, since the rigid, hard lines of a stainless steel countertop form interesting aesthetic contrasts with the modern kitchen. However, for those who want the strong looks of steel but prefer a soft touch, there are brushed steel surfaces that impart a satiny feel.

THE UPSIDE

Bernice Ong, owner of Salted Caramel, took great care in choosing the right material for her kitchen's countertop. "At Salted Caramel, we serve more than 1,000 scoops of ice cream every day, so we needed something easy to maintain for the long haul," she explains. Stainless steel, for her, was the perfect material for the quaint ice cream shop. "It is low-maintenance and cheaper compared to marble," she explains. "Plus, stainless steel retains its low temperature well, which is ideal for making ice cream." Chef Tan agrees, explaining how Lolla also uses stainless steel as the main material for countertops. "They are non-reactive, durable and easy to clean. My kitchen is open

concept and completely exposed, so an emphasis on cleanliness and hygiene is extremely important." Being non-porous also means that stainless steel countertops do not absorb oil, moisture, stains, odours nor germs, and are highly resistant to heat. These qualities make stainless steel one of the most fuss-free options when it comes to long-term maintenance.

NOTE

Stainless steel is susceptible to scratches and dents. Even though it is striking to look at, the surface can collect fingerprints fairly easily. In addition, the cold toughness of a stainless steel countertop can look rather harsh for a cosy home.



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SOLID SURFACES

Solid surface counters are extremely versatile when it comes to kitchen designs. Available in a variety of textures, patterns and colours, countertops made of solid surfaces fit into the modern, pragmatic kitchen that are built to work and last. Private homes, in particular, are increasingly looking to solid surfaces as their countertop material of choice.

THE UPSIDE

Solid surface materials are made of acrylic, polyester, or a combination of both. This means that they are highly resistant to stains and scratches. Even if scratches and burns are formed on the surface, they can be sanded out; even deep gouges can be filled!

NOTE

Although scratches and burns can be sanded away, it doesn't mean that solid surface materials are immune to damage. Careless wear and tear can still take their toll over time, and uneven sanding will damage the aesthetics of the countertop.

LA CORNUÉ



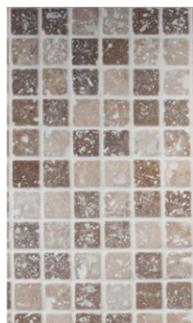
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CERAMIC TILES

High-end industrial designers prefer the seamless look as it reduces the number of parts involved, thus increasing durability. As a result, designers tend to stray away from ceramic tiles when it comes to countertop designs. However, when used correctly, tiled countertops can give off a very inviting and homely vibe. Some kitchen designers love to use tiles to mimic the look and feel of a country home in the heart of a metropolis, a juxtaposition that many end-users seem to like.



THE UPSIDE

Tiles are relatively easy to coordinate in terms of colours and style, and are ideal for secondary workstations such as islands, dining counters, peninsulas, wet bars or pantries. The right tiles are also extremely durable, since they are water-, heat- and oil-resistant. On the market, tiles are often available in a variety of styles to mimic marble, timber or granite, making it a cost-effective option for designers.

NOTE

Tiled countertops are not seamless, making them unsuitable for the modern and sophisticated kitchen design. Furthermore, tiled countertops require some upkeep to keep grout looking fresh and clean. Careless usage may cause the tiles to crack, chip or be scratched.



WOOD

Increasingly, kitchen designs in Singapore are taking on a Scandinavian touch, which is characterised by a generous use of wood and warm tones. Contrary to common misconceptions, wood is actually incredibly resistant against bacteria and germs. Based on a study conducted by the University of Wisconsin, 99.9% of the bacteria introduced to a wooden cutting board die within three minutes of exposure to the surface. In fact, wood continues to be a safer, more hygienic option than plastic when it comes to surfaces. As such, many kitchen designers are using woods such as rock maple, teak, walnut, cherry and oak to build a Scandinavian-inspired kitchen.

THE UPSIDE

Wood countertops can be both functional and decorative. Decorative ones are installed on kitchen islands for a warm, luxurious look, whereas functional ones, like a butcher's block, are ideal for chopping food. "Personally, aside from a stainless steel counter to hold hot items, I would choose bamboo or wood as my ideal surface for a workstation because I can use the surface for cutting food directly and preparing items," asserts Chef Tan. When properly sealed, wood countertops can withstand moisture, and you don't have to worry about putting hot pots and pans on the surface.

NOTE

Wooden countertops require regular maintenance due to their porous nature. They need to be regularly treated with mineral oil, varnish or marine oil in order to continue repelling moisture from around the kitchen.



CONCRETE

Concrete fell out of favour with designers in the late 1980s due to difficulties in the fabrication process. Back then, concrete surfaces were mostly hand-trowelled, a process that contributes to unevenness, especially on the surface and in corners. In recent years, however, fabricators offer precast counters that are made in workshops and delivered fully cured and finished. These precast molds are extremely flat and smooth. They now also come in colour, thanks to pigments that are added to the concrete mixing process. This makes concrete an extremely versatile material in the contemporary kitchen. Keep the concrete bare to achieve an industrial look, or dye it black to balance between ruggedness and elegance.



THE UPSIDE

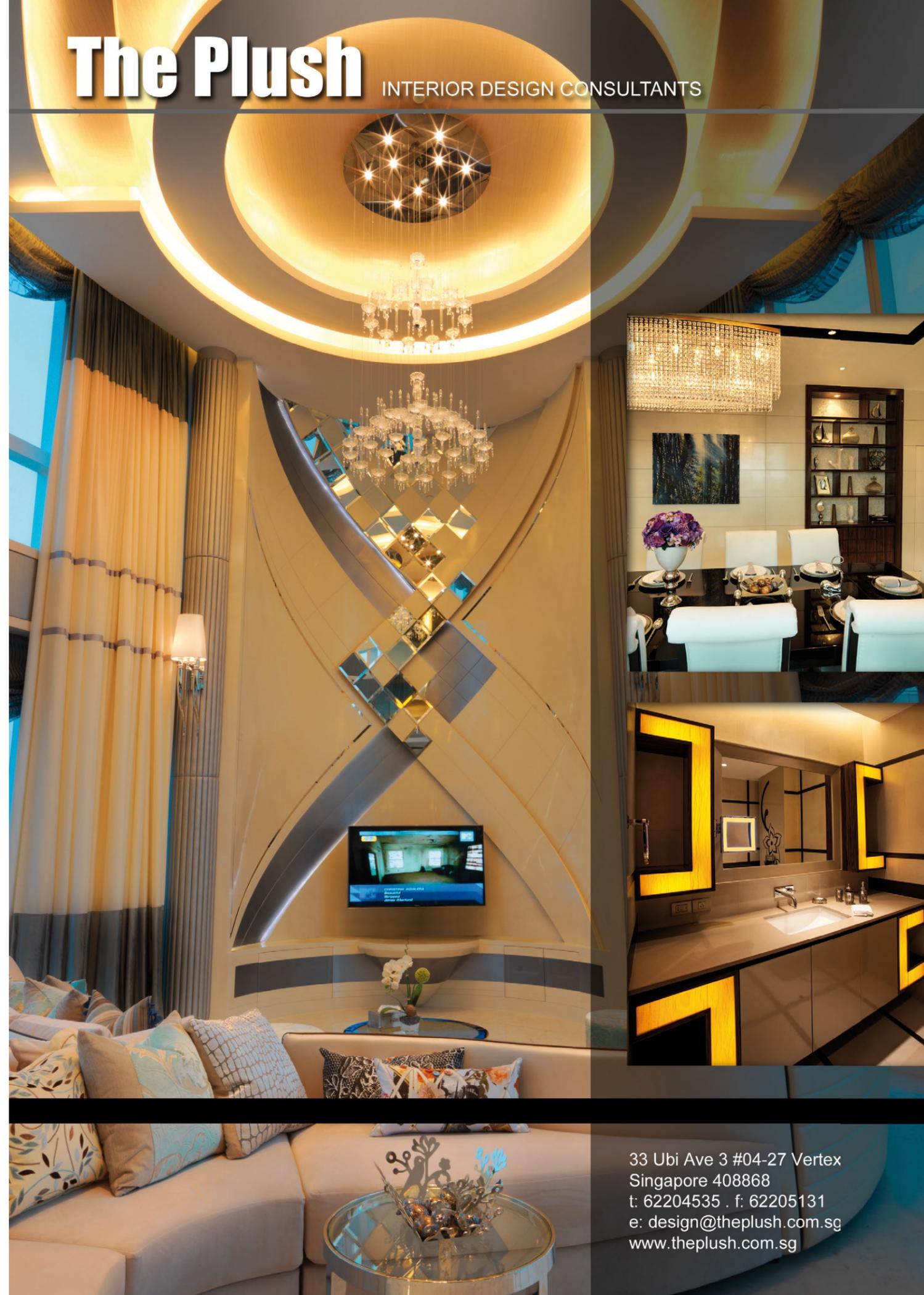
Compact, solid and durable, the concrete countertop is resistant to heat, pressure and scratches. Aside from its eye-pleasing appearance, concrete countertops are also energy-efficient: when the temperature in the kitchen rises, the concrete captures the heat and releases it when the temperature cools down.

NOTE

Despite its durable reputation, unsealed concrete can be rather porous. Concrete countertops need to be properly sealed to prevent unsightly stains, especially around the sink area. Due to its fabrication process, precast concrete countertops can be fairly pricey compared to their natural stone counterparts.

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GALLERY

ISLAND LIVING

Fu Ya Yin explains why her Häcker island counter is the star of her house parties.

Written by **ILIAS ONG** | Art Direction by **KEVIN ONG**
Photography by **VAMOS PHOTOGRAPHY**





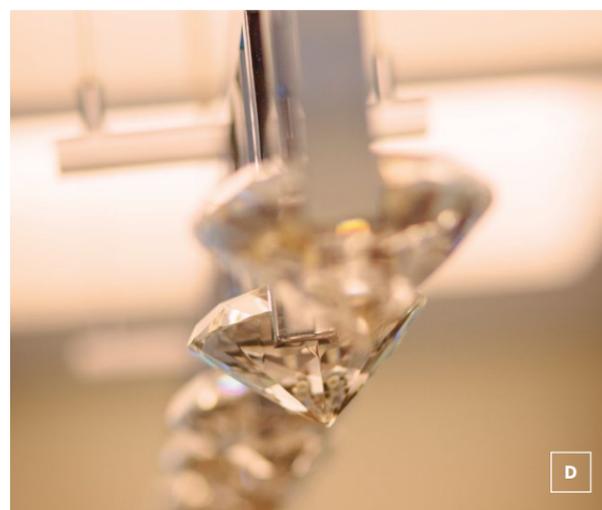
The tinkle of a piano and the sizzle of food on the hob are the two things you'll hear most often in Fu Ya Yin's Bukit Timah condominium. Music and food are big parts of her life, so it's no wonder the retiree spends plenty of time on her seven-foot grand piano and in her dining room, beside a marble Häcker island counter that's outfitted with a V-ZUG induction hob for light cooking.

Warm shades of tan, black and brown dominate the Fu residence, just the right hues to make guests feel at home. And because the couple hardly watch television, the living room is arranged to encourage conversation instead.

“The island is very useful, and it’s also so aesthetically pleasing,” chuffs the ever-smiling Fu. “The induction hob is almost flush with the table. And when I have people over, they automatically come here because all the drinks are here, and sometimes I keep dishes warm on the hob for guests to help themselves. It’s the focal point of the parties I host.”

Fu and her husband entertain guests in their home at least once a month. It could be a family Christmas party or a formal dinner with friends, but most of the time it is one of Fu’s choir groups that comes over for a practice session. The avid pianist, church choir conductor and singer doesn’t just lend her musical chops, but her cooking skills, too: *rendang*, curry puffs and *roti prata* are all on the post-practice menu, which she makes and serves on the Häcker island.

- A. Häcker island counter
- B. Wolf hob
- C. V-ZUG Miwell SL
- D. Detail of light fixture above dining table
- E. Dining room, with Häcker side table in background



When it comes to more complicated dishes, however, Fu turns to her actual kitchen. There, she has the help of a Wolf hob with an in-built electric grill, as well as a couple of V-ZUG equipment: an oven and a steamer. “We use that grill almost every night,” the former stockbroker says. “Actually, I don’t need all three gas hobs—in fact, at any one time, I only use one! But we use the ovens a lot.”

The kitchen and dining area are so

important to Fu that they were the first areas she thought about when planning the renovation of the apartment two years ago. So she sacrificed some living room space—“Nobody sits there!” laughs Fu—and created a raised level to accommodate the island counter and dining table.

That wasn’t enough. Across the dining room, Fu placed a marble Häcker side table that counters the warmth of the wooden dining table. It’s out of necessity, Fu explains



as she pulls open one of the many drawers to reveal... more cutlery, crockery and other kitchen utensils. "I keep the more formal utensils here, and the day-to-day ones in the island's drawers."

But the objects on the Häcker side table are what's really important for the youthful looking grandmother: rows and rows of photographs of her children and two grandchildren, and the happy days when the entire family was under one roof—or, we should say, around one island. When we ask Fu which item she'll save if her home were on fire, she doesn't call out her grand piano or her many pieces of luxury furniture. Instead, her answer is instinctive: "My iPad. It's got all my photos in it."

"I've finished designing the house—no more furniture, no more gadgets, no more appliances. People do enjoy coming over. I think they feel a sense of comfort and, hopefully, a sense of peace."



F. Fu on her grand piano
G. Instead of a television set, a grand piano dominates the living room



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GALLERY

SKY-HIGH LUXURY



The latest series of condominiums from Far East Organization pays more heed to the needs of the well-heeled.

By **ILIYAS ONG**



As Singapore transforms itself from a caged nation to a playground for the ultra-rich, its luxury residences are becoming as dazzling and indulgent. But home for the man who already has everything should

be much more than fancy 'starchitect'-designed façades. Enter Inessence, a range of five Far East Organization condominiums that allows residents to design their very own castles in the sky.

Alba and Skyline@Orchard Boulevard are two such properties, found in the

prestigious Orchard Road neighbourhood. 'Bespoke' is their calling card to attract a targeted, high-net-worth clientele: everything—including walls, room sizes, furnishings and fittings, and so on—can be customised to the slightest detail.



ALBA

Renowned architect Bernardo Fort-Brescia is responsible for the striking Y-shaped design of this condominium on Cairnhill Rise. Residences start from 1,862ft², while a single penthouse, at 6,383ft², has its own sauna, jacuzzi and lap pool perched atop the 18-storey tower.

What sets Alba apart from Skyline@Orchard Boulevard is a townhouse, which sits separate from the main block, whose three storeys house a private swimming pool and a spacious rooftop patio. And, with Alba's many recreational facilities, it's a home that's fit for discerning families.





Inessence provides bespoke solutions to high-rise city living, where discerning residents can create homes plucked straight from their imagination.



SKYLINE@ORCHARD BOULEVARD

Designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Fumihiko Maki, Skyline@Orchard Boulevard is a 33-storey beacon of luxe living. Units range from 1,744ft² for a regular apartment to a whopping 9,419ft² for a penthouse suite.

What the property might lack in lot size, it makes up for with a 'layered horizontal space' typology. Pools, sun decks and gardens are placed on the ground level, while other amenities such as lounges and saunas can be found on two terraces, located on the second and 14th storeys respectively. Lush foliage rings the entire condominium, sequestering residents away from the hustle and bustle of city living.

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LUXE LIVING

| WINES & SPIRITS | GOURMET DELIGHTS | TRAVEL | DESIGN & ART |



This issue's Luxe Living section will tell you more about two pleasures in life whose simplicity belies their long journey to your table: read up on the history of spice (p64) and the proper way to store wine at home (p54). For art and travel lovers, find out more about the future of contemporary Chinese art (p80) and how to really get away from it all (p70).

WINES & SPIRITS

WINE IN THE LION CITY

For wine investors, this article answers the question, “Which region’s wines offer the best returns?” For those of us more into the pleasures of wine drinking, it also offers advice on storage and serving of this drink.

By **CHIN WEI LIEN & CHUA KIM BENG**



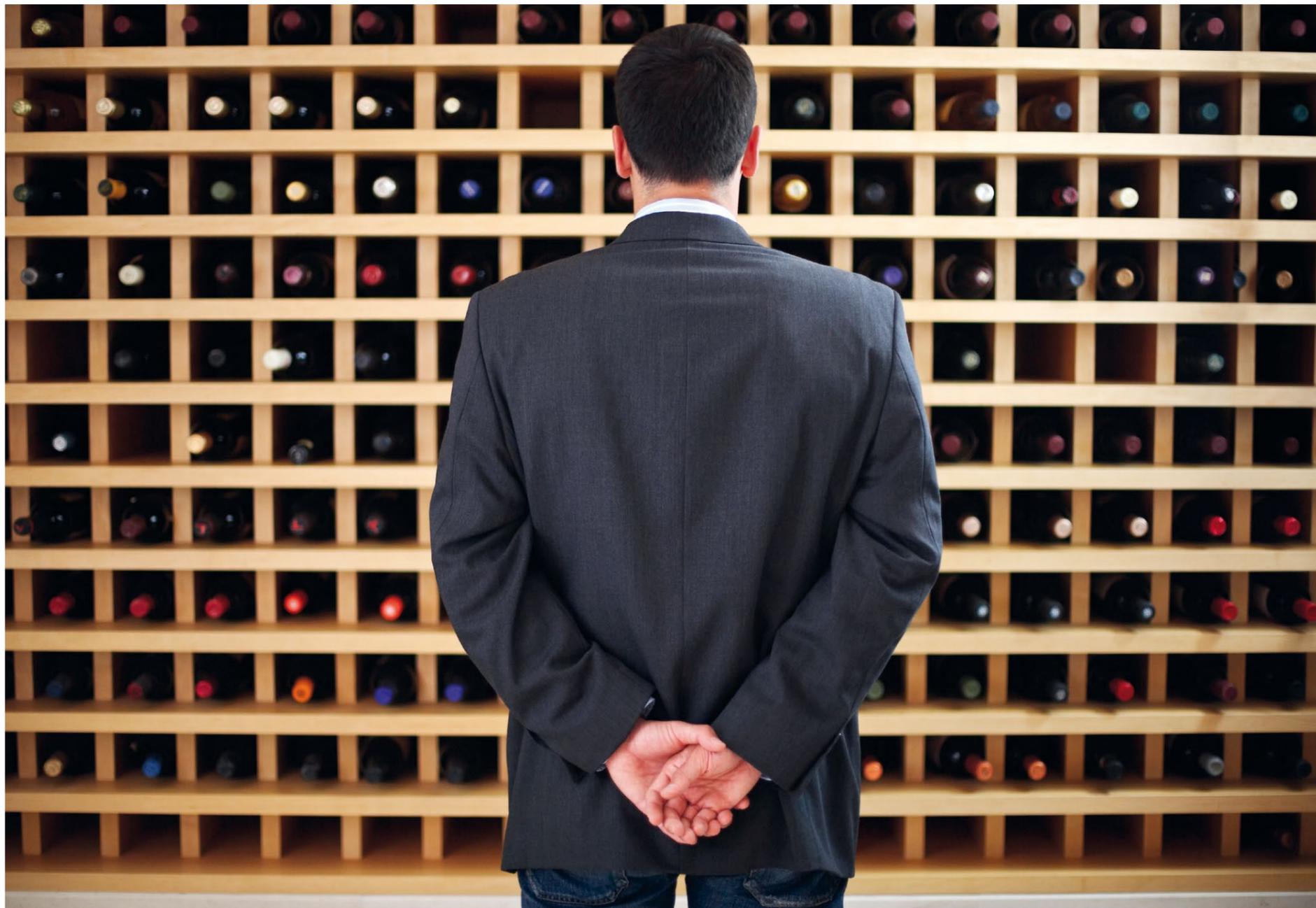
In the last five to eight years, interest in wine has grown steadily in Singapore. The numbers don’t lie: wine consumption increased by eight to 10% annually in that period. Last year alone, an estimated 12 million litres of wine were imported into the Lion City—that’s enough to fill five Olympic-sized swimming pools!

AN INCREASINGLY SOPHISTICATED MARKET

The number of importers, wholesalers and retailers has mushroomed to more than 500, supplying to the many restaurants and bars here, and wetting the whistles of locals and the roughly 10 million tourists who land on our shores each year. Wine is becoming abundant, and choices are increasingly mindboggling; almost anything can now be found in Singapore.

Along with the ever widening choice of wines comes a deeper appreciation and sophistication. Gerald Lu, the General Manager and Head Sommelier of Praelum Wine Bistro, recalls mangling the name of the simplest grape varietal (the ‘t’ in ‘Merlot’ is silent) when he worked in a top restaurant as an 18-year-old. No such gaffes from his current trainees, who are at the age when Lu made that wine faux pas. “I was caught off guard by the sudden interest in a small appellation almost unheard of in Singapore,” he reveals, impressed by the depth of interest his charges often display. To further make his case that Singapore drinkers know their wines, he cites this anecdote: “During a recent gathering with some sommelier friends, the topic of conversation turned to how so many local customers below 30 seem to be asking for and drinking better wines.”

Last year alone, an estimated 12 million litres of wine were imported into the Lion City—that’s enough to fill five Olympic-sized swimming pools!



Lu, who was the former Head Sommelier of the IndoChine Group, believes that there are three factors contributing to this situation:

- Exposure via overseas education, and vacations in wine-producing countries.
- The education system here weaning kids off local grub such as *char kway teow* and *kopi-O* and introducing them to the delights of foie gras and sauvignon blanc.
- An Asia on the rise attracting wine marketing boards from all over Europe, which are only too eager to organise wine fairs to introduce locals to their products.

WINE AS INVESTMENT

Perhaps you've been appreciating wine for a number of years and have even developed a fondness for a couple of varietals from a handful of vineyards. And you've noticed that you've had to pay more recently for the same bottle—perhaps your hobby could become something you can include in your investment portfolio. Lu has two pieces of advice.

Firstly, investing in wines is a rich man's sport. Unless you've got the dough to import bottles of Chateau Lafite by the truckload, it doesn't make much business sense trying to offload a case to earn a couple of thousand dollars—the time and effort spent isn't worth it.

Secondly, unless you're an avid collector or have a cellar the size of a three-room HDB flat, stock in wines that will drink well within the next two to three years. Second Growth wines by top producers, good producers with average vintages, and average producers with good vintages are all good and sensible buys. Before you know it, you'll have more than you can handle.

"Most wines worth investing in are French," reveals Ludovic Tendron, co-founder of Vitisasia, a company involved in the investment of fine wines through a wine fund named 'Wine Legends I, L.P.' That is why Vitisasia, which also organises dinners with celebrity chefs and top wine produc-

ers, recommends that clients purchase wines from Bordeaux and Burgundy, two renowned wine-growing regions in France.

The former is where "the most sought-after wines in the world" come from. The market there is well structured, and quantities of wine produced there, though limited, have been higher than in other regions. The latter has even more limited production, so wine from there is "not easy to get."

Tendron advises that, as a serious collector, one should do one's homework and purchase only from good vintages. In addition, it's a good idea to get your bottles rated by an expert. "Investors must pay great attention to the provenance and storage—including insurance—of their wines," he insists.

WINE INVESTMENT FUNDS

If you hate doing homework but still wish to indulge in wine, one convenient way to do it is to invest in wine funds such as Wine Legends I, L.P.

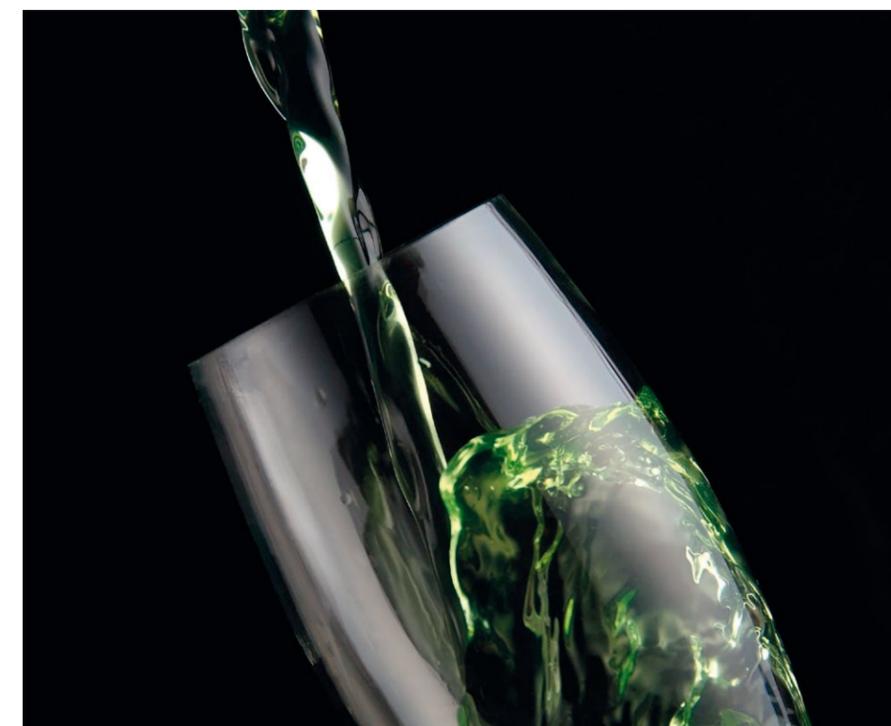
"There is a growing interest in wine investment, both locally and in the world," Tendron reveals. The current global financial crisis has actually shone a spotlight on wine investment, as stocks and bonds have been too volatile, prompting many investors to diversify and hunt for alternative asset classes.

Wine funds are not a new phenomenon in Singapore, but Tendron suggests that earlier ones didn't perform well because they were "set up with either a wrong scheme or a wrong network." He also says that most Asian investors are less sophisticated than their Western counterparts. But with the rise of Asia, there is a shift of money from Europe to Asia, particularly Singapore, and this, he feels, should turn investors here savvy pretty quickly.

And just how have wine investments performed over the years? As mentioned in the beginning of this article, the numbers don't lie: fine wines have offered a steady annual return averaging 13% in the last 15 years, compared to 4.5% for S&P 500 and 6% for Barclay's US Aggregate Bond Index.

And what of the future? Tendron is confident that such funds will continue to reap rewards for investors. "The fine wine market will trend upwards for many years as demand and consumption will continue increasing, especially in this part of the world," he asserts. One big contributor to the growth will be consumers from China. "The Chinese [currently] consume less than one litre of wine per capita per year compared with Japan, a mature market that consumes three litres per capita," he reveals. As fine wines are seen as a luxury product, and China is set to be the biggest

"During a recent gathering with some sommelier friends, the topic of conversation turned to how so many local customers below 30 seem to be asking for and drinking better wines."





Liebherr Wine Chiller

consumer of such items, there is no question the market for fine wines will grow because of the Chinese.

SAVING IT FOR LATER

The next challenge after acquiring all that wine is storage.

There are places where you can rent storage space. For example, StorHub has seven branches across Singapore, and some even come with climate-controlled rooms that are suitable for long-term wine storage.

Converting your HDB bomb shelter or a room in your landed property into a cellar is a possibility. However, finding a contractor to build double-insulated walls and floors with airtight doors and humidifiers is no easy feat. There are companies, such as Celsius Equipment, that specialise in climate control, but be prepared to fork out good money.

Alternatively, go for wine fridges. These literally cool gadgets can store anywhere between 25 and 150 bottles—there is one

appropriate for the size of your collection. They come with the necessary features to keep your wines drinkable in the long term:

- temperature and humidity control
- UV-proof glass
- alarm systems to alert you to large temperature fluctuations.

Kitchen Culture carries wine fridges by Liebherr and Sub-Zero.

IDEAL STORAGE CONDITIONS

When asked about ideal conditions to store wines in, Kimberly Verkuilen, a sommelier with Bistecca Tuscan Steakhouse, advises, “When you talk about ideal wine storage temperatures, what one usually means is to replicate the old method of wine storage in Europe prior to the days of refrigeration.”

She goes on to reveal that, in those days (and even now) in Europe, wine is usually stored in the basement or cellar, where the temperature is naturally between 14 and 18°C, with a relative humidity between 50 and 70%. Most wine refrigerators replicate these temperature and humidity ranges, especially when it comes to storing red wines. Humidity is important as it keeps the corks moist. “Too low and the corks dries out and turns brittle; too high and the cork can easily mold,” she explains. White wines and sparkling wines should be kept at cooler temperatures, ideally between nine and 14°C. Humidity should be maintained at levels similar to that for reds.

NO WINE FRIDGE

If you do not have a wine refrigerator at home, Verkuilen advises you to store your wines on their side. “This way, the wine inside the bottle stays in contact with the cork, thus keeping it moist,” she explains.

She further advises that the bottles should be kept in a dark but cool area. “I realise that, in Singapore, this can be hard with so many people living in apartments,” she ventures. “I’d choose the coolest room or one that gets the most air con, and store

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“When you talk about ideal wine storage temperatures, what one usually means is to replicate the old method of wine storage in Europe prior to the days of refrigeration.”

my wines in the darkest corner, away from any light source.” If you store wine in the dark but the place is constantly hot and humid, the chance of your wine spoiling—due to the deterioration of the polyphenols in them—will be great.

Without a wine refrigeration system at home, Verkuilen reckons you ought to abandon any grand plan for cellaring and ageing wines for the long term and concentrate on purchases that will be drunk within the next year or two. As Singapore is in the tropics, its climate is not suitable for wine storage. “I do not think there are wines that keep well in this climate, as all wines basically need the conditions I have listed above,” she insists.

DRINK UP

“One comment that I hear frequently is that red wines in many restaurants are served too cold,” reveals Verkuilen. “They tell me the wines should be served at room temperature.” However, she clarifies that the room temperature should be that of a French basement or cellar in the spring or fall, where the natural temperatures are between 14 and 18°C. The term does not refer to the ambient temperature in a typical room located within Singapore, air-conditioned or not!

The ideal temperature range for serving white wines is between eight and 12°C (depending on the varietal), four to eight degrees Celsius for sparkling (depending on the sparkling varietal), and 14–18°C for reds. It is always better to allow a wine to gradually come up to the ambient temperature, assuming the ambient temperature is not warmer than 24–26°C.

When drinking red wine outdoors in Singapore, where the temperature always hovers around 30°C, place the bottle of remaining wine a cold water bath (cool water with a couple of ice cubes) to keep the wine cool and not to take on too much of the ambient heat.



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WHAT WINE WORKS BEST?

According to Lu, the first rule of buying wine is: buy what you like. "My take is that there are no 'top' or 'perfect' wines. The best wines are the ones that are memorable, which were enjoyed at the right place and time with the right people," he asserts.

That being said, he believes there are some wines that work better in Singapore:

DESSERT WINES

"Singaporeans are possibly the only people I have encountered who can finish an entire bottle of ice wine without the need for actual desserts," claims Lu. Late-harvest wines, Botrytised wines and ice wines and Moscatos, with more intense sweetness, are personal favourites of several of Lu's pals.



FRESH WHITES WITH A HINT OF RESIDUAL SUGAR

Singapore is a foodie's paradise, where about 90% of our favourite dishes come in some degree of spiciness. "Sugar is a natural counter to spiciness," Lu reveals, hence these white wines provide a good balance to the dishes. These wines include Kabinett-style Rieslings from Germany, aromatic Sauvignon Blancs from Chile and New Zealand, Gewürztraminers from France, and Pinot Grigios from Australia and New Zealand.



FRESH, FRUIT-FORWARD REDS

Despite the hot weather, Singapore remains an Asian city where, for cultural and health reasons, red wine is in higher demand. "Once again playing on our fondness for residual sugar, reds with nice, bright fruit are always a crowd-pleaser," Lu elaborates. Pinot Noirs from California and Central Otago, Grenache-based wines from southern France, and South Australian Shiraz work well here.



BIG, BOLD REDS

"Many older drinkers, whose palates have been elevated to ultra-tasty levels by the multi-racial availability of cuisines in Singapore, require big and powerful wines to keep up," says Lu. Cabernets from Napa Valley, big Left-Bank Bordeaux (Pauillac, St Julien, St Estephe and Margaux) and Australian Cabernets usually fit the bill.



GOURMET DELIGHTS

THE SPICE OF LIFE

Treasured for more than five millennia, spices remain as prized today as they were in 3,000BC.

By MARGARET WEE

When approached by a waiter in a starched uniform bearing a pepper mill, one rarely considers the provenance of the world's most traded spice as it is sprinkled liberally over a perfectly cooked steak. The pepper inside that mill, however, has changed hands many times and travelled thousands of miles before arriving at the table. Indeed, the story of pepper is the story of other prized spices such as cardamom, saffron and cinnamon—one of trade, culture and wars.

ANCIENT FIGHTS

Spices have been prized since time immemorial. From as early as 3,000BC, Arabian traders made long journeys across arid deserts in caravans pulled by donkeys and camels to transport spices between southern Asia and the Middle East. With the rise of the Roman Empire, the Arabs' trading activities were taken over by the Romans, who sailed across the Indian Ocean to trade in pepper, cinnamon, nutmeg, clove and ginger. Under Roman rule, access to spices was limited to the upper class, thereby creating the world's first luxury goods market.

So expensive and coveted were spices between the 12th

and 18th centuries that explorers sailed halfway around the world and countries fought for control over international trading routes. Portuguese seafarer Vasco Da Gama found pepper and cinnamon in India, while Christopher Columbus introduced the Spanish to allspice, vanilla and red peppers from the West Indies. Spain, Portugal, England and Holland went to war over the Indonesian Spice Islands, which were the provenance of spices such as cinnamon, clove and nutmeg.

MODERN PRICES

Countries no longer take up arms over spices, but their value has not diminished, mainly due to the amount of labour needed to produce a marketable quantity.

The most expensive spice on record is saffron, which retails between US\$1,000 and S\$11,000 per kilogram. Saffron is mostly cultivated in Iran. It is sold in strands, which are actually the stigmas or female reproductive organs of the saffron crocus flower. Each plant has only three stigmas, which are individually handpicked; hundreds of thousands of flowers are needed to make up a single kilogram. The good news is that only a few strands of saffron are needed for flavour and colour.

Mainly cultivated in Indonesia, Madagascar and China, vanilla is the world's second most expensive spice. Vanilla blossoms must be hand-pollinated within 12 hours of their opening, and growers must wait six months for the fruits to mature on the vines. Each vanilla pod is individually handpicked, after which the process of curing and grading begins. This explains the price of vanilla—in 2004, the spice sold for as much as US\$500 per kilogram due to poor weather and political instability.

Coming in third on the price scale is cardamom, which was selling at US\$23 per kilogram in March this year. Known in India as the Queen of Spices (the king being black pepper), cardamom is mainly grown in southern

India. The cardamom plant flowers for nine months of the year and its pods ripen slowly. They must be picked when they are exactly three-quarters ripe, then washed and dried. White cardamom is left out in the sun for several days to bleach, but green cardamom, which is preferred by chefs, is picked when the pods are immature and dried for one day and one night in a heated room. This helps it retain its earthy and sweet flavour longer than other varieties.

WHAT USE ARE THEY?

But what exactly are spices such as saffron, vanilla and cardamom good for?

The earliest evidence of the use of spice in daily life is found at the Great Pyramids of Giza, where hieroglyphs depict workers eating garlic and onions for strength. Spice trading stories abound in the Bible—Joseph's brothers sold him to travelling spice merchants, and Queen Sheba paid tribute to King Solomon with a gift of spices, among other valuables.

Spices were also used to treat diseases. Hippocrates compiled a list of more than 400 medicines made with spices and herbs, many of which are still used today. To ward off scurvy (although they didn't know exactly how it worked), Chinese sailors in the 5th century would grow ginger plants in pots aboard ships.

FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD

Arguably, the most popular use for spices was and still is food flavouring. During the Renaissance, pepper was used to mask the taste of meat that had gone bad, while nutmeg was grated over food as seasoning. Today, cuisines such as Indian, Eurasian, Peranakan, Mexican and Greek feature spices such as cardamom, cloves, turmeric, saffron, pepper and cinnamon prominently in their dishes. Indian cooking, for instance, uses a lot of turmeric, cardamom and

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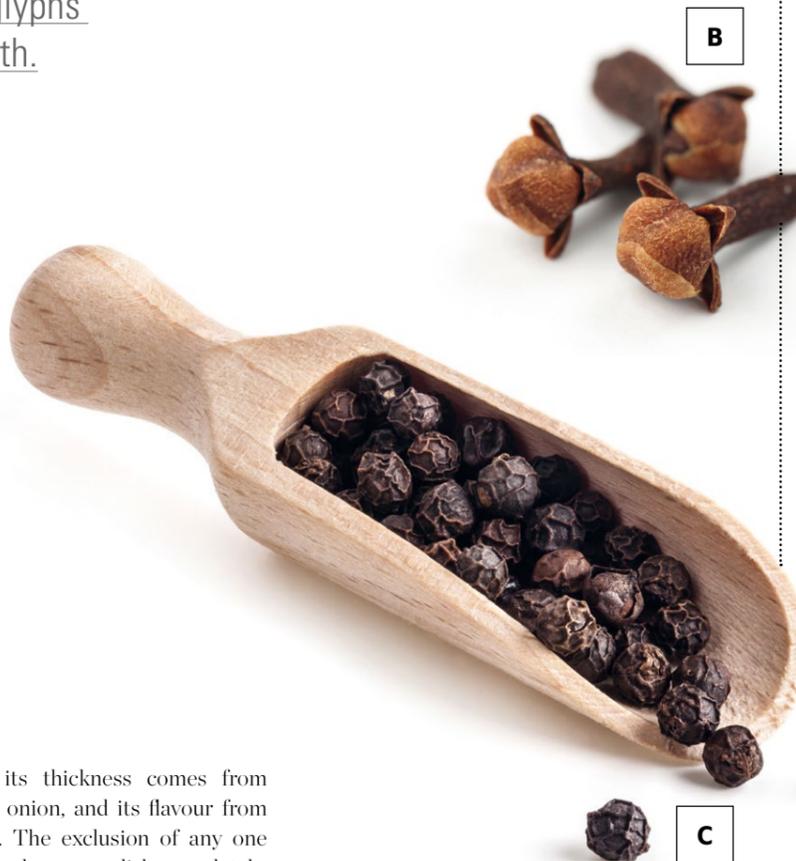
cumin, while Moroccan cuisine uses black and white pepper, paprika (a spice made from dried ground bell and chilli peppers), cumin and cinnamon. And although some may think that Italian food is more about herbs than spices, nutmeg, saffron and vanilla feature prominently in that cuisine.

Spice is the backbone of Indian cooking, providing structure and foundation for the cuisine, says Vinod Kumar, Executive Sous Chef of fine dining restaurant Rang Mahal. Almost all Indian cooking uses at least one spice in the dishes, with each spice contributing a distinct flavour and aroma to the dish. "Take a well-known dish like tandoori chicken. It uses a blend of spices as a marinade before it is char-grilled in the tandoor. Without the spices, it would just be a typical grilled chicken meat," he insists. Curries, too, need their spices. "Turmeric is used predominantly in curries to lend colour and flavour. If you exclude this spice, you are not eating curry. It would be like excluding cheese from a pizza," he explains.

Peranakan food, which is influenced by Indonesian, Chinese and Malay cuisine, relies a lot on spices such as cinnamon, star anise, candlenut, cloves and cumin. "Each ingredient contributes to a single taste, feel, touch, smell and look," says Chef Lionel Chee of Eurasian-Peranakan restaurant Casa Bom Vento. For instance, curry lemak derives its rich yellow colour from yellow



A



C

ginger, while its thickness comes from candlenut and onion, and its flavour from the curry leaf. The exclusion of any one of these spices changes a dish completely, attesting to the magic that occurs when spices work together. Chef Chee notes, "Even an inexperienced customer can taste the difference if something is left out."

The sheer variety of spices can be daunting. However, Chef Chee has this advice: "Try each individual spice in your mouth and you will know how to use them."



D

HERE'S A LOOK AT SOME OF THE MORE COMMONLY USED SPICES IN ASIAN COOKING:

A TURMERIC comes from the eponymously named plant, which is a member of the ginger family. Its rhizomes (horizontal underground stems) are boiled and dried before being ground into an orange-yellow powder. Turmeric has an earthy, slightly bitter and peppery flavour, and is used in Vietnamese, Indonesian, Middle Eastern and Indian foods.

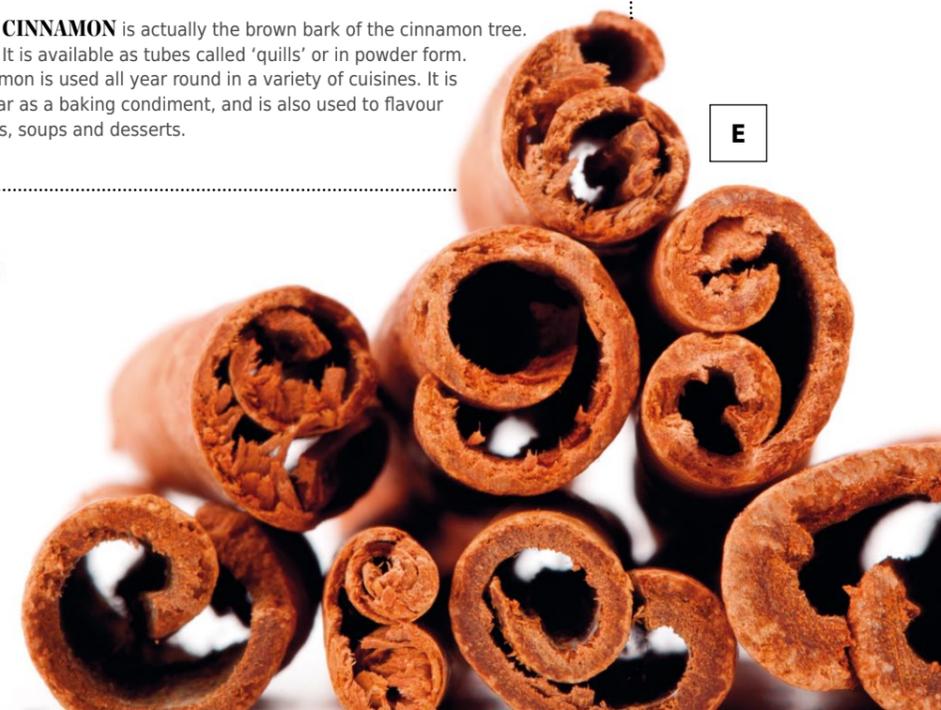
B CLOVES are the unopened flower buds of the clove tree. They are handpicked while they are still pink, and dried until they turn brown. This strongly aromatic spice resembles tiny nails, and is used sparingly as it can overpower a dish. It is mainly used to add flavour to meats and curries, as well as sweet desserts such as apple pie.

C BLACK PEPPER is the world's most traded spice, and arguably the world's most frequently used as well. Regardless of its colour—black, white and green—all pepper comes from the same vine. The variations in colour depend on when they are harvested. Black peppercorns are fully matured and have a strong flavour. For peak flavour, grind pepper only as needed, as it loses its flavour as soon as it is ground.

D CUMIN SEEDS are small and unassuming, but they pack a strong and rich aroma. A little cumin goes a long way, so it is used sparingly. Despite its pungent flavour, cumin is widely used to bring out sweetness in a dish, particularly in Mexican and Middle Eastern cuisine.

E CINNAMON is actually the brown bark of the cinnamon tree. It is available as tubes called 'quills' or in powder form. Cinnamon is used all year round in a variety of cuisines. It is popular as a baking condiment, and is also used to flavour sauces, soups and desserts.

E





RECIPE

CHEF VINOD'S TANDOORI LAMB CHOP

Tandoori is a method of cooking that involves the use of large, charcoal-fired, earthen ovens. The intense heat generated inside the tandoor seals the natural fats and flavours within the meat, rendering it tender and full of flavour.

INGREDIENTS

4 racks of lamb
 1 tbsp ginger paste
 1 tbsp garlic paste
 3 tbsp lemon juice
 1 tbsp red chilli powder
 3 tbsp mustard oil
 1 tbsp garam masala
 1 tbsp coriander powder
 ½ tbsp cumin powder
 ½ tbsp sweet paprika
 ½ tbsp white pepper powder
 A pinch of nutmeg, grated
 Salt to taste

FOR THE MINT YOGHURT CHUTNEY

250g fresh yoghurt
 8 sprigs fresh mint leaves
 2 sprigs fresh coriander leaves
 2 green chillies, chopped

FOR THE GARNISH

2 pcs onion rings
 1 small slice of bell pepper
 1 lemon wedge

METHOD

- Gently mix all ingredients for lamb (except lamb racks and garnishes) together in a mixing bowl. Wrap the bowl with cling film and leave it at room temperature for 30 minutes. Remove marinade from bowl and rub it all over lamb racks evenly.
- Position lamb racks onto skewers and place them in a tandoor for about 10 minutes (or a domestic oven preheated at 220°C for seven minutes).
- Meanwhile, make the mint yoghurt chutney. Place mint leaves, coriander leaves and chopped green chillies into a blender and blitz to a smooth paste. Combine paste with yoghurt and whisk till well combined. Set aside.
- Remove skewers from tandoori oven, and remove the lamb racks from skewers. Place two chops on a plate and garnish with onion rings, bell pepper slices and a wedge of lemon.
- Serve immediately while still hot, with mint yoghurt chutney on the side.

TRAVEL

SPLENDID ISOLATION

Getting away from it all for a well-deserved rest should mean just that. Pristine sandy beaches, gently lapping azure waves and the sound of silence disrupted only by the gentle clink of ice on glass are the perfect ingredients for a dream escape.

By **ALISON MARSHALL**



P rivate island holidays offer the chance of relaxation in exclusivity, and today's destinations are as luxuriously appointed as they are naturally beautiful. Five-star hotels may have all the right facilities for the business traveller, but they lack seclusion and solitude needed for utter relaxation.

With vacation time becoming increasingly more precious, and the search for destination perfection never ending, a holiday on a secluded and exclusive private island is an enticing option. Owners of picturesque idylls are more than happy to allow access to their cloistered hideaways to an affluent few.

These islands guarantee picture-perfect views from beautiful villas with extravagant interiors. The natural beauty of these getaways is matched by luxurious pampering, including a lavish menu of gastronomic delights. The freshest seafood and local produce are expertly prepared by experienced chefs for the ultimate bespoke gourmet picnic or romantic dinner, which can be enjoyed on a secluded beach, accessed only by private speedboat.

From tip-top spas to exciting excursions, everything you could possibly want is at your fingertips. Whether your idea of relaxation is a blur of back-to-back sporting activities or a snooze under an azure sky on a silk-covered day bed, time is your own to do what you enjoy.

There are private islands for all sorts of reasons, from a party destination for a bevy of friends to holidays in splendid solitude. Whatever the requirements, there are picturesque oases around the globe that fit the bill.

Here are four such island paradise.

MUSHA CAY, BAHAMAS

PERFECT FOR: That magical special occasion
Exclusive use from \$850,000 a night
www.mushacay.com

Relax with 23 of your closest friends at the spectacular private island resort of Musha Cay, part of the Islands of Copperfield Bay. The property of American magician David Copperfield, many describe this as the ultimate holiday destination.

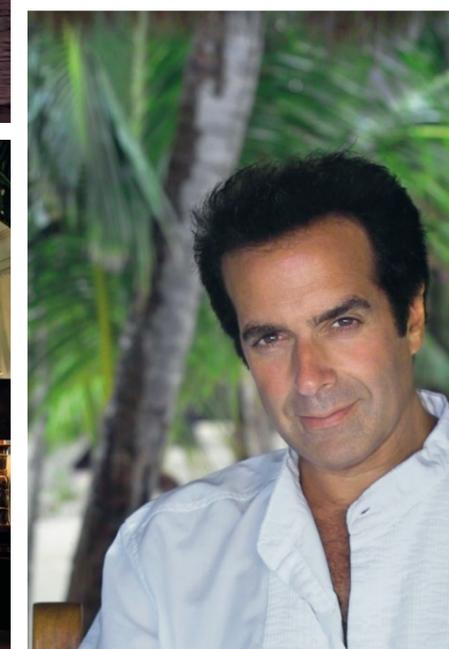
If your idea of excitement is to simply wiggle your toes in the pristine white sands or enjoying a private picnic on one of the island's 40 unspoiled sugar-sand beaches, there are more than 700 acres of lush, natural beauty of the Bahamas to enjoy.

Rare tropical flowers line the paths to luxurious guesthouses, which are enhanced by stunning antiques and exotic treasures collected by Copperfield on his world travels. And the island's five guesthouses offer something for everyone, from High View, nestled on the rocky outcrop, to Beach House, which offers a sense of complete freedom thanks to its wall-less concept. The stunning suites all feature four-poster beds and his-and-her bathrooms, while wrap-around mahogany decks allow guests to enjoy the breathtaking views from every angle.

While the surroundings provide a feast for the soul, nourishment of a more practical kind is as sumptuous as the environment. The freshest seafood can be served simply and informally on the beach, while vintage wine can be savoured over a formal dinner—every dining option is available to suit each party, whether a large-scale celebration or some romantic assignation.

An hour's flight from Nassau, Miami or Fort Lauderdale takes you to Georgetown Airport in the Exumas, where a 15-minute charter flight takes you to Copperfield Bay's private landing strip. Sailing sorts may prefer to take to the sea for an hour's crossing over the waves.

If you prefer your own transport, Georgetown Airport can easily handle private jets, while Copperfield Bay can play host to yachts up to 200 feet in length.



NORTH ISLAND, SEYCHELLES

PERFECT FOR: Nature lovers
 Exclusive use from S\$79,000 a night
www.north-island.com

Reportedly the honeymoon choice for the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, North Island is a natural wonder, where endangered species of the Seychelles' flora and fauna are reintroduced and given a place to regenerate.

Ecology meets luxury at this beautiful oasis, where, as much as possible, materials used to rehabilitate the area's natural beauty are used to capture the essence of this exquisite dream destination.

Guests on North Island can enjoy the very best of everything nature and man have to offer. Accommodating just 22 guests at maximum, the island's thatched villas are handcrafted from wood, local stone and glass. Raised a metre off the ground to take advantage of the cooling island breeze, each self-contained 450m² haven features air conditioning for the hot-blooded, and fully retractable sliding doors for uninterrupted views of the emerald lawns and turquoise seas.



Photos courtesy of Wilderness Safaris



Villa 11 is a favourite with guests, boasting a 1.2m x 2m bath—an ideal couple's retreat—complete with a ledge for the mandatory champagne bucket.

Relaxation is key here. Roofed by up-turned Casuarina trees, the sunken lounges of the Island Piazza offer sumptuous comfort and a 360-degree view of the stunning bay and lush, vegetation-covered mountain. With an abundance of local produce, chef Troy Smith offers a no-menu concept

by speaking to guests upon their arrival to find out their gastronomic preferences, then developing a new menu each day!

While the opportunities to bird-watch and go on guided walks with the resident ecologist are bound to enthrall all, thrill seekers can let off steam with scuba diving and sea kayaking, or work out in a state-of-the-art gym overlooking the ever-changing colours of the sea.

CALIVIGNY ISLAND, GRENADA

PERFECT FOR: Living the high life
 Price upon Application
www.calivigny-island.com

Located off the coast of the spice isle of Grenada, Calivigny Island is a luxurious retreat, bordered by pristine white beaches and the crystal-clear waters of the Caribbean.

Under the bluest of skies, you can enjoy the stunning views in absolute privacy and

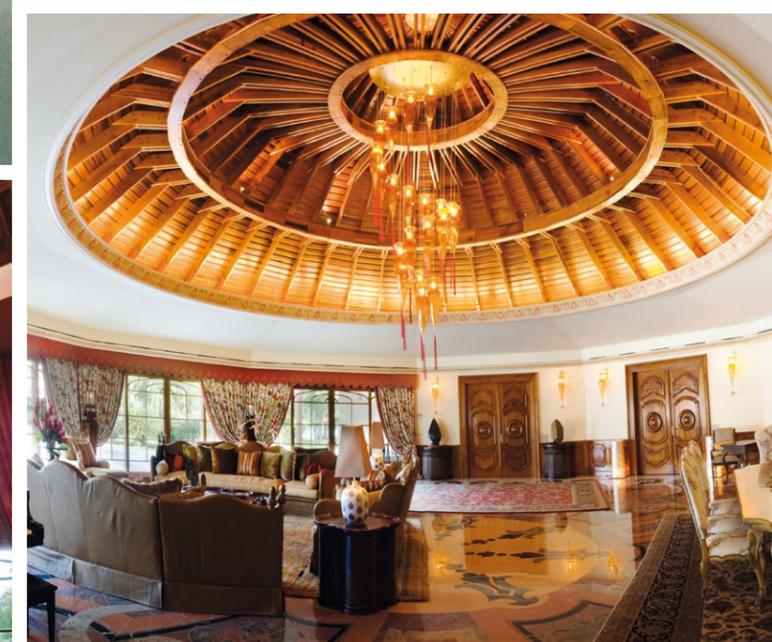
solitude. Just five minutes by boat from Grenada, Calivigny boasts no fewer than six sandy beaches, which are enough to placate even the most self-conscious of sunbathers. To ensure absolute exclusivity, bookings are only taken for one party at a time.

After an arduous day of sunbathing and swimming, enjoy a massage at the hands of an expert therapist, or swim up to the pool bar for a cocktail or two as the setting sun illuminates the Caribbean's natural beauty to full effect.

The centrepiece of the spice isle's sumptuous accommodation is a stunning beach house, which contains 10 lavish suites. This architectural masterpiece blends Balinese and French colonial styles, accentuated with wonderful interiors dreamed up by renowned fashion designer Oscar de la Renta.



Photos courtesy of Calivigny Island



Calivigny can accommodate up to 20 people on an 81-hectare property that provides absolute solitude. If your guests prefer to enjoy the delights of the sea rather than island living, the 173ft sailing yacht Atmosphere can accommodate another dozen.

Visitors to the island can also enjoy a trip on the 44ft picnic boat or a 27ft Boston whaler (perfect for fishing trips), both of which ensure that the seas surrounding Calivigny become as entertaining a playground as the island itself.



Photos courtesy of Makepeace Island

MAKEPEACE ISLAND, AUSTRALIA

PERFECT FOR: Family reunions and celebrations
Exclusive use from S\$17,000 a night
www.makepeaceisland.com

A recent acquisition of British business tycoon Sir Richard Branson, the heart shaped topography of Makepeace Island promises guests will fall in love with this idyll of bare-foot luxury. The beautiful island is located just off Australia's Sunshine Coast, with easy access to the cosmopolitan beaches of Noosa, although with its own 500,000 litre lagoon pool and hot tub that seats 15, guests may be happier to relax in exclusivity.

Makepeace features three luxurious two-bedroom villas that come with a waterfall and fishpond in the impressive foyer, while the bathrooms have palm gardens and



carved volcanic bathtubs. For those with larger families, Bali House offers four luxurious double bedrooms attached to the main entertaining Wantilan (meeting pavilion), which overlooks the river—the perfect place to lie languorously on a silk-covered day bed during the mid-day heat.

Whether your party comprises of one person looking for solitude or a crowd of 22, Makepeace is for exclusive use only. Here, every desire is met. If you are musically inclined, there's a wide range of instruments available; those who prefer to relax through sport can take part in fishing or tennis. Of course, gourmet food and drink can be arranged—something no Singaporean can resist. For the ultimate in outdoor entertainment, guests can enjoy a movie under the stars as staff convert the garden area into a commercial standard cinema, complete with cosy chairs and popcorn.

For many, the idea of not being in touch with business life is enough to increase stress levels. Wifi cover allows enough contact with the office to take care of those vital e-mails, but the stunning views and never-ending supply of Nespresso take the sting out of the ordeal.

If you feel the need to escape the seclusion and tranquility of this 25-acre hideaway, take a private flight to explore the spectacular coral gardens of the Great Barrier Reef, or enjoy a bird's eye view of the coastline from a helicopter.

Underwater, you can often see many of the 250 species of fish swimming around the ex-HMAS Brisbane, a spectacular dive site; or venture deeper to Wolf Rock—home of large schools of grey nurse sharks.



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DESIGN & ART

MODERN ART FROM THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

The meteoric rise of contemporary art from China led to record prices at auction houses in recent years. But now that this art form is experiencing a slight dip in popularity, hear what advice gallery owners and critics have for these artists.

By **LOUIS HO**



LONDON, ENGLAND - A photographer takes pictures in front of a painting entitled 'Head of an Old Man' during an exhibition preview of work by contemporary artist Zeng Fanzhi on 16 Nov 2012 in London, England. The piece was part of Zeng Fanzhi's first solo show in the UK, which ran at the Gagolian Gallery until 19 Jan 2013. (Photo by Dan Kitwood/Getty Images)

Perhaps the late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping summed it up most pithily: "To get rich is glorious."

Zeng Fanzhi, by that criterion, would probably represent one of the most celebrated (read: richest) figures among the superstars crowding China's art scene today. In 2008, one of his works smashed the record for contemporary Chinese art at auction: an anonymous buyer bid a staggering HK\$75.4 million (US\$9.7 million) for 'Mask Series 1996 No.6.' The painting features a group of Zeng's signature masked figures sporting the red neck scarves associated with China's Young Pioneers standing poised against a stark yellow background. It suggests the mutual alienation—central to Zeng's oeuvre—between personal attitudes and public personae, individual sentiment and collective ideology. The highlight of Christie's Asian Contemporary evening sale in Hong Kong that spring, the painting's sale prompted an outburst of spontaneous applause.

The following March, an article in *The New York Times* profiled Zeng's lavish new studio, a 2,200ft² space boasting Qing and Ming antiques, a personal gym, and a traditional landscaped garden. Blue-chip artists such as Zeng, the piece suggested, were recession-proof and immune to the global financial crisis then bubbling. More recently, a feature in *British GQ* revealed the extent of the artist's penchant for *la dolce vita*: "A slight man, Zeng dresses soberly in designer polo shirts, black Armani slacks and the most expensive limited-edition Nike training shoes. He wears a Rolex Submariner, smokes Cohibas and drinks vintage Bordeaux. He has Hermès soap in his bathrooms, and plays Mozart and Bach whenever he has visitors."

In many ways, Zeng's ascent to the upper echelons of the art world parallels the arrival of contemporary Chinese art on the international stage: a dizzying efflorescence of the self-consciously new, the conspicuously brash, and the eminently commodifiable and consumable.



LONDON, ENGLAND - Chinese contemporary artist Zeng Fanzhi stands in front of his painting, 'Praying Hands,' during an exhibition preview of his work on 16 Nov 2012 in London, England. The piece was part of Zeng Fanzhi's first solo show in the UK, which ran at the Gagolian Gallery until 19 January 2013. (Photo by Dan Kitwood/Getty Images)

Blue-chip artists such as Zeng, the piece suggested, were recession-proof and immune to the global financial crisis then bubbling.

THE RISE OF XIANDAI YISHU

It wasn't always so.

Under Maoist orthodoxy and, later, the ideological excesses of the Cultural Revolution, traditional ink renderings of mist-rolled landscapes, birds, flowers were replaced with paintings of Chairman Mao. By one 1979 estimate, some 2.2 billion images of Mao Zedong were churned out during the Revolution—or three for every Chinese citizen then.

With Mao's demise in 1976, the tide began to turn for China and its art. Deng Xiaoping's political revival saw the beginnings of social and economic reform, and the 1980s, in particular, witnessed an explosion of experimentation: 'decadent' Western artistic styles, ranging from Impressionism and Cubism to conceptual and performance art, were now available. It was, in the words of a prominent art historian, "as if a century of Western art had been restaged in China."

The phenomenon came to be known as the '85 *New Wave* movement. Many self-consciously avant-garde groups began springing up all over the country, with some 80 collectives scattered across 23 different provinces and cities. The climax of this development in Deng's decade must surely be the unveiling of the *China Avant-garde* show at the National Art Museum in Feb 1989. Involving nearly 300 works, it was the country's first nationwide exhibition of contem-

porary art, or *xiandai yishu*. Forget the visual propaganda of the previous generation; on show was a range of new forms, formats, media and materials. However, three hours after the opening, a young female artist, in what turned out to be an impromptu performance piece, produced a gun and fired several shots at her own installation.

Xiandai yishu had arrived—literally—with a bang.

FOREIGN RECOGNITION

In particular, 1993 was a bumper year for Chinese art. Two major exhibitions of contemporary Chinese art premiered in January.

China Avant-garde: Counter-Currents in Art and Culture opened at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (‘House of World Cultures’) in Berlin. It was—like the earlier show mentioned in its title—the first showcase of contemporary Chinese art in Europe.



ASIAN CONTEMPORARY ART (EVENING SALE), Sale 2602, Christie's Hong Kong, 24 May 2008
Lot 157, YUE MINJUN (Born in 1962), 'Gweong-Gweong', signed and dated 'Yue min jun; 93.7' in Pinyin (lower right) oil on canvas, 182 x 250 cm. (71 5/8 x 98 3/8 in.),
Painted in 1993, Estimate On Request, Price Realised HK\$54,087,500

“Chinese art rests on three legs. One is traditional brush and ink painting. One is realism, a concept imported from the West at the beginning of this century. One is the international language of contemporary Western art.”

disenchantment. The piece quoted Li Xi-anting, the doyen of Chinese art critics, on the phenomenon of contemporary art in China. “Chinese art rests on three legs,” he explained. “One is traditional brush and ink painting. One is realism, a concept imported from the West at the beginning of this century. One is the international language of contemporary Western art.”

REAPING THE REWARDS

That international language, clearly, was as much about money as aesthetics.

In 2011, worldwide auction revenues surged to a record US\$11.5 billion, rising 21% to cross the US\$10 billion mark for the first time—stimulated by cash-rich Chinese buyers. China overtook the US as global leader, generating US\$4.8 billion in sales figures, constituting a 40% share. Over the last decade or so, the buoyant Chinese market has propelled both artist and dealer alike into the ranks of the nouveau riche.

The New York Times noted that, in 2004, just one of the 10 best-selling living artists was China-born. By 2007, according to Art-price.com, that number grew to five, with Zhang Xiaogang leading the pack.

Almost simultaneously in Hong Kong, the blockbuster *China's New Art, Post-1989* kicked off at the territory's City Hall. Featuring 54 artists, such as Zeng Fanzhi, Wang Guangyi, Fang Lijun and Zhou Chunya, the show gave the rest of the world a taste of the politically and socially satirical works of a new generation of Chinese artists.

That summer, at the 45th Venice Biennale, 14 Chinese artists participated in a section titled *Passaggio a Oriente* (‘Passage to the Orient’). They included Wang and Fang, as well as Ding Yi, Xu Bing, Geng Jianyi and Zhang Peili. This is significant, as an official Chinese pavilion would not appear in the Biennale until 2005. The first ever Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, organised by Australia's Queensland Art Gallery, also took place that year in September, and included the work of eight Chinese artists.

The New York Times Magazine would close out the year with a lengthy write-up of what seemed to be Asia's most exciting export: young Chinese artists. “Their Irony, Humor (and Art) Can Save China,” the headline read. The cover reproduced Fang Lijun's ‘Series 2, No.2’, which features a quartet of Fang's bald, squinting figures, one of whom seems to be howling right at the viewer, a confrontational assertion of

In a separate study on cultural production in China, which included a list of the priciest works of contemporary Chinese art as of late 2009, Zeng's ‘Mask Series No.6’ occupied the top spot, followed closely by a set of Cai Guo-qiang drawings for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, which sold at Christie's in 2007 for US\$9.4 million. Of the 14 works on the list, a whopping five were by Yue Minjun: ‘Gweong Gweong’, his 1993 piece, was fourth, while ‘Execution’, came in sixth.

At the same auction that saw Zeng's painting fetch an applause-inducing sum, Yue was setting his own record: ‘Gweong Gweong’ sold that evening for just slightly over HK\$54 million (US\$7 million), the highest amount yet paid for one of his paintings. The work was purportedly the first in which the artist included a caricature of himself grinning away. The now famous self-portrait—close-cropped hair, eyes scrunched shut, mouth wide open to expose two rows of perfectly even, white teeth, its expression lodged somewhere between a manic grin and a grimace of pain—would assume iconic status, as familiar these days as Warhol's soup cans.

Yue is just one of the many new breed



BEIJING, CHINA - Contemporary artist Yue Minjun laughs as he poses in front of his 2006 painting, 'Seen in the Grass Land,' in his studio on 12 Feb 2006. (Photo by Lucas Schifres/Bloomberg via Getty Images)

Like the country's economy, which had taken flight with dizzying speed in the last two decades, China's art market developed so rapidly that observers began warning of the boom becoming a bubble.

of Chinese artists who came to prominence in the aftermath of Tiananmen. And like many of these artists, his art made him a wealthy man.

THE TIANANMEN EFFECT

China, post-1989, seemed like a different place.

Occurring just after the *China Avant-garde* show, the Tiananmen Square massacre snuffed out the democracy movement of the 1980s, and ushered in what one commentator described as an era of "consumerism, the commercialisation of cultural production, and the expansion of the mass media and popular culture." This new epoch, characterised by consumerism and globalisation, would have game-changing implications for the practice of art in China. The 1990s was marked by a fashionable preoccupation with the cynical and the commercial.

Like the country's economy, which had taken flight with dizzying speed in the last two decades, China's art market developed so rapidly that observers began warning of the boom becoming a bubble. When Yue first sold 'Gweong Gweong' to a Hong Kong buyer in the early 1990s, he received US\$5,000 for it; a decade and a half later, its value had increased by more than 1,300 times!

The bubble had to burst sometime: last year, total auction values for both mainland China and Hong Kong declined by some 30%. Sales at auction houses, regardless of whether they were local (such as Poly Auction) or international (such as Christie's or Sotheby's), plummeted by up to 60%.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Sundaram Tagore, of the New York-based Sundaram Tagore Gallery, which boasts outposts in Hong Kong and Singapore's Gillman Barracks, feels that the market is

a self-adjusting entity. "It's a natural process," he remarks. "What goes up will one day come down, especially if it's gone up during a heated market. Since the 1980s, Chinese artists have made enormous contributions to the field of world contemporary art. When the dust settles, we will look through the lens of art history in order to assess the value of these contributions. Right now, money is playing a big role, but that may not be the case in the future. Art history will likely determine what is of value."

The Business Times journalist Helmi Yusof concurs. A keen observer of the arts scene in Asia, he notes that "some big names no longer command the prices they did before." He believes that the future lies in a return to the sort of avant-garde work that characterised China's art scene in the 1980s. "Interestingly enough, young, emerging artists are producing terrific work in various new media, especially video," he reveals. "Art has become a genuine signifier of status and refinement among China's wealthy, so that bodes well for the continued health of the market."

Dr Xue Liqing, director and curator of ShanghART Singapore, an international gallery with a presence in Gillman, likewise points to experimentation as the key to future growth: "The direction for contemporary Chinese art, if there is just one, lies in diversity."

Perhaps Deng Xiaoping's prognosis hit the nail on the head in more ways than one. If wealth equals prestige, then an abundance of artistic capital is—no less than economic prowess—a sign of China's new prominence.

"Since the 1980s, Chinese artists have made enormous contributions to the field of world contemporary art. When the dust settles, we will look through the lens of art history in order to assess the value of these contributions. Right now, money is playing a big role, but that may not be the case in the future."



ASIAN CONTEMPORARY ART (EVENING SALE), Sale 2602, Christie's Hong Kong, 24 May 2008
Lot 156, ZENG FANZHI (Born in 1964), 'Mask Series 1996 No. 6', signed and dated 'Zeng Fanzhi; 96' in Chinese (lower left), oil on canvas diptych, 200 x 360 cm. (78 3/4 x 141 3/4 in.)
Painted in 1996, Estimate HK\$15,000,000 - HK\$25,000,000, Price Realised HK\$75,367,500

OLD SCHOOL COOL

| THE LAST WORD *by* ILIYAS ONG |

Fusing old-world charm with modern chic was a trend Loh Lik Peng pioneered in Singapore. Three boutique hotels and a handful of hip restaurants later, Loh has brought his unique aesthetic to London and Shanghai. He reveals his inspirations and his favourite designers.

You're known for mixing and matching the traditional with the modern. How did you cultivate this aesthetic?

I am a huge fan of heritage, so for me it's fundamental to the work I do. Everything we aspire to in the future has a relationship to our past; that anchor brings meaning to our heritage projects.

Where do you source for antique furniture?

You can find me shopping at vintage shops such as Mr Keng's place on Craig Road and CK Collection on Serangoon Road. In London, I love visiting the Lots Road auctions.

Who are some of your favourite furniture designers?

My favourite designers are Hans Wegner [Danish furniture designer] and Arne Jacobsen [Danish architect and furniture designer].

Yours were the first few designer boutique hotels on the island. Were you afraid that Singapore's stodgy international reputation at the time wasn't favourable to such bold ideas?

It never occurred to me, actually! I was just doing my own thing and creating something that was a reflection of my own tastes at that time. The idea that I might offend the wider Singapore idea of good taste never crossed my mind. Luckily, it was well received.

Now that you've branched out to London and Shanghai, what can you say about the differences in design



taste between those two cultural capitals and Singapore?

Singapore is still a small city in comparison, so trends here spread fast and tend to be less neighbourhood-based. This is because virtually everywhere in Singapore is accessible to everybody. Places like Shanghai and London tend to have more distinct neighbourhoods, where concepts can be very localised. That's because they are very large cities and people tend to stick to the locations they know well. So the East End of London is very distinct, design- and taste-wise, from the West End, and folks from each area seldom go to the other parts of the city. In Singapore, everybody moves about.

How has Singaporeans' taste for design and art matured over the years?

At every level, creativity is being encouraged and nurtured. Singapore now has specialist art schools and strong support from the government for the creative industries. In the last 10 years, Singapore has also made huge strides in upgrading the hardware and facilities for the artistic and creative industries, from the setting up of the Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay to the School of the Arts, so we have definitely made a lot of concession for it to mature. We have matured a lot, but we are not quite there yet.

You're also responsible for some of Singapore's most talked-about restaurants. How important is interior design in such spaces?

Very, very important! It's fundamental to everything we do. Without design, we won't stand out from the crowd.

What are the first few things you think about when designing a new restaurant?

What concept would fit the space, and also if there are any nice, original features to the place that we can preserve or perhaps even highlight.

If you could pick one building in Singapore to redesign, restore, or renovate, which would it be?

The old Supreme Court! I used to work there when I was a lawyer, so that is a local landmark that I've always loved. I can't wait to see it transformed into a museum.



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