

perspective

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INSPIRING ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN

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A LIFE ALOFT

Hidden away in Cape Town's Hout Bay, South African fashion and interior designer Jenni Button's eclectic, light-filled home is a celebration of different influences and textures



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Exclusive interview —
Pinnacle Award winner
Dr Ronald Lu

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HK\$48
US\$18
€15



To make 1+1 infinite

By combining the force of designers and partners online and offline, Kiesly Tsang, founder of Design 1+1 – a digital platform showcasing Hong Kong design – aims to create infinite opportunities for local talents

TEXT:
Leona Liu
PHOTOGRAPHY:
Courtesy of Design 1+1

Kiesly Tsang

To find out who you are and what you want to do with your life could be a lifetime conundrum for some people, but for Kiesly Tsang, founder and principal of Design 1+1 and a Hong Kong-born designer herself, there was never any doubt as to what she was destined to do – to promote local design and designers.

A digital platform launched last June, “Design 1+1 simply means that design is a process of combination that associates the product with the designer, which leads to infinite potential. To me, design is not only about solving problems, but about creating possibilities,” explains Tsang.

Though it’s no big revelation that designers are turning to digital platforms to develop their businesses, what really distinguishes Design 1+1 from individual designers’ platforms are the actual interactions it intends to achieve offline, among designers, architecture and interior firms, developers and the public.

Through its business model O2O (‘Online to Offline’), the project attracts customers online by displaying products, while real transactions happen offline – which, in the case of Design 1+1, happens to be Hong Kong design retailer Aluminium. “We hope to explore meaningful projects with reliable partners and create something special while having fun,” says Tsang.

The idea stems from the young designer’s musings on the idea of ‘made in Hong Kong’, a term which is barely heard of these days. “The fact is there are many excellent local designers who make fabulous products in Hong Kong,” argues Tsang. “The reality is ‘Made in Hong Kong’ exists, it’s just there isn’t a good channel to disseminate it.”

Local designers in Hong Kong have long encountered difficulties in the face of the boom in international luxury brands, turning the city into a shopping paradise for everyone and everything except local design and designers, it would seem. According to Tsang, who is also self-studying psychology, “Aside from the value inherent in the products themselves, consumers seek psychological fulfilment when shopping, so how is local design going to satisfy the need?”

Her approach to the issue is to tackle it from more than one angle. In addition to providing more exposure for outstanding local brands and designers, Design 1+1 intends to tackle the creativity problem Hong Kong is facing.

While Tsang incubated the idea, it was harsh reality that catalysed the birth of Design 1+1 as an online entity – after failing to find an affordable space in Sheung Wan to open a store, she turned to the internet, just as many young designers do. But while driven by the desire to share her work, Tsang also places high value on real-life human interaction, such as that between customers and designers, thus leading to the online/offline aspect of Design 1+1.

The launch of Design 1+1 clearly benefited from Tsang’s ‘just do it’ spirit. “When I came up with the idea, I just implemented it without thinking about it too much. There are too many uncertainties in this ever-changing world,” she admits. “We’ll continue to focus on our area of expertise, the design phase and keep improving everything else to make the module better.”

Design, she says, is like standing on the shoulders of giants, a process of injecting fresh elements into our predecessors’ experience and knowledge, which will eventually endow old objects with new life.

In addition to Design 1+1, Tsang’s eponymous design studio, Kiesly Tsang Concepts, focuses on interior and decoration projects – one outcome of her online venture is that its emphasis is on the public, the product, the community, and engagement with different parties, and her view on design has expanded from an individual to a collective understanding.

Of course, hand-in-hand with the excitement of introducing Hong Kong design to the world comes the challenge of running a business, finding the best partners, achieving sustainable turnover and moving forward. Tsang is pragmatic in her view of it all: “It’s like a journey,” she says. “We’ll probably only find out where we get to in the very end, but the pleasure lies in the process.”

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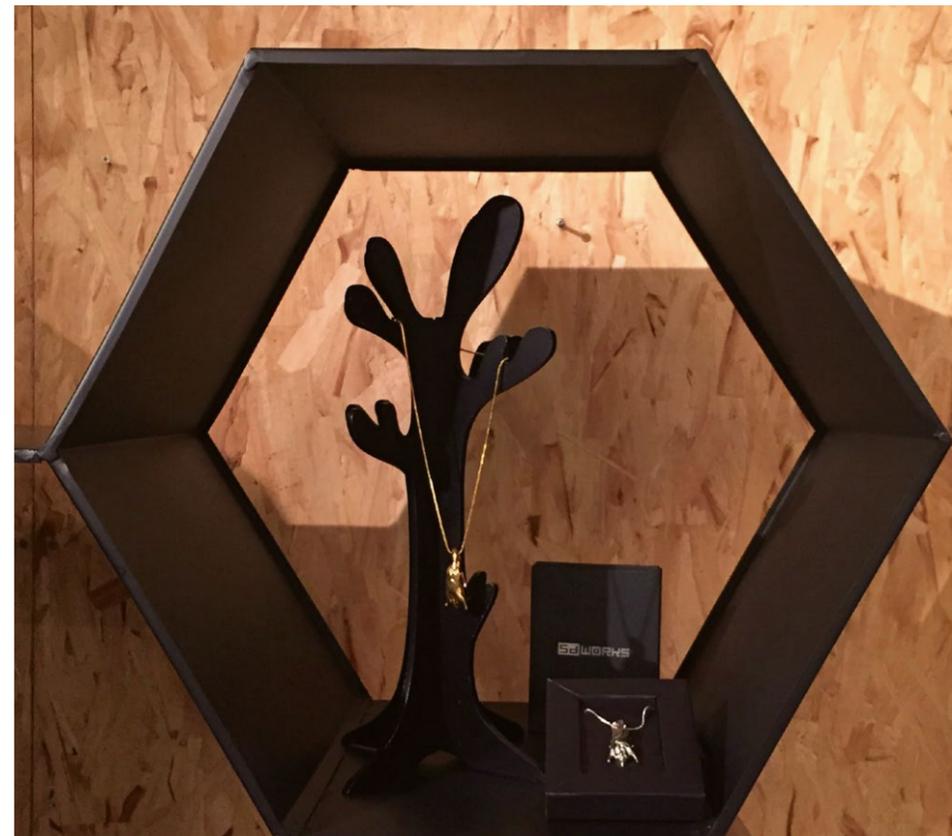
Products from Rcube Design by Hong Kong designer Raft Wong, who’s interested in simple design and loves to use natural materials



A digital platform launched by Kiesly Tsang last June, Design 1+1 aims to promote local Hong Kong design and designers with an ‘O2O’ – ‘Online to Offline’ – approach



Hachill, a Hong Kong-produced sunglass brand whose name originates from the Cantonese pronunciation for sunglasses, is one of the local brands represented by Design 1+1



SD Works, represented by Design 1+1, is a platform which assists design students from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University to launch their ideas into the real world