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Renowned multidisciplinary designer Alan and lifestyle purveyor colourliving are collaborating on a luxury gallery-style home to inspire visitors and launch a bespoke styling service covering art, home-wares and furniture. Chan and colourliving lifestyle curator Denise Lau spoke with our managing editor Phil Annetta about the project, its background and their plans for its future.

**Design Anthology:** Alan, you were a designer for 20 years before you started producing art. What made you do that?

**Alan Chan:** Well, I think tracing back what I've done in my portfolio, I must admit actually I should be an artist more than a designer. Because I've been very meticulous about what I do, the detailing, it's always from a very cultural background. So I think maybe I could be more successful as an artist than a designer.

And you didn't set out to create functional art either, it's exhibitional art. Was that deliberate?

I was in agency for 10 years, which taught me to very commercially minded – everything has to have a strategy. For everything we produce there's a target audience. So I think that caused me to be more disciplined in a way and more concerned about others' behaviour instead of being too personalised. But that means I have a very artistic kind of sensitivity. And that's what made me today, that's how I can create all this. This is not only about design – it's about culture, it's about understanding of different ways of life.

Have you found that those fields influence each other?

They do, they do. They've always been like brothers and sisters, like a pair of chopsticks. No matter how commercial, whether I do packaging for a tea company or an interior for a five-star restaurant, although it's a commercial product there's a lot of cultural study, strategic study, before I can get to the commercial space.

Are you trying for something that's culturally relevant?

The way I was 'brought up' was at an international advertising agency, and all my immediate bosses were expats. So I was trained and taught to learn and appreciate from a Western perspective the Oriental culture. I always had a third eye like a tourist looking at a different perspective on things, because I'm local, so they're kind of big two pairs of eyes to look at one thing together. I think that's very unique.

So you two started collaborating a couple of years ago. Did you just feel that it was a very natural kind of connection?

**Denise Lau:** We've actually known each other for a long, long time socially. One fine evening we were sitting next to each other at a friend's dinner and Alan started sharing his vision of the new space he was going to create, which is the Space 27 gallery, and I just thought what he told me was amazing, it's something that no Hongkonger has ever done or has a heart to do.

And at that time we were new in doing furniture, so Alan suggested we partner and have some furniture showcase in the gallery. And I thought that was a great idea, because I really treasure every opportunity to showcase furniture to those who appreciate the beauty of the design, so I immediately said yes, and that's how we started. And then as we met more and more we started sharing each other's business visions and our passion towards art and culture, and we suddenly came up with this idea of collaboration here.

So how does this build on Space 27?

**AC:** Well, it's not really 27, it's more me as a person. I mean, I did the logo CA. C stands for colourliving, A stands for Alan Chan. And it's funny now, after I came up with this concept, I started to realise C stands for culture and A stands for art. So God planned it, don't ask me! I mean, Denise was so generous in restructuring this space. This was completely rebuilt, to fit the concept of building a personalised home. Showrooms are very boring, it's like a three-dimensional catalogue. Sterile. This is not a showroom – this is a living place, as if somebody lived here, that's how I want to cultivate it.

**DL:** ...but a living place full of stories and memories from Alan when he travels.

It's quite eclectic but it does seem unified, and maybe that's what unifies it, that it feels a bit lived-in.

**AC:** It comes from one single person – Alan Chan. Denise has so much trust for me, the way I picked the furniture based on her collection, and put things together as one single-minded person, and that's me. Even my assistant cannot touch it – I'm the one who did it. For example, for the display shelf, I put everything on the floor and I started to look at it as a piece of blank canvas, and I started to paint on top with objects, colour and form, and that's how it ended up like this. It's a piece of painting.

**DL:** And tomorrow may be different.

**AC:** Yes, we'll do it on a weekly basis.

And Denise, are you happy to leave Alan to do whatever he needs to do?

At colourliving we've always had a vision of curating a luxury lifestyle, but most important is how to execute the installation. So I think Alan's ideas are great. I'm not a very eclectic-styled person, but when Alan started presenting his ideas to me it just boosted my adrenalin – it was really good, very exciting. And I think the whole design trend is moving in this direction, mixing and matching and giving the space your own personality.

**AC:** We did it very informally too. I just brought in things that I liked. It could be five-dollar objects I picked up in a flea market, a half-a-million-dollar piece, that's how I did it. I don't have a standard budget, what I'm putting here. I mean it's... love isn't conditional. You start to calculate what you get out of it, it never works.

Even my stuff, I picked this Fritz Hansen chair up from Copenhagen. It's a very expensive vintage piece, even my colleague asked me, 'Mr Chan, you have six pieces, are you sure you want to put the most expensive ones out?' I said I want to put the more expensive one here. Why? Because I want you to know this is good stuff. Not because it's expensive, but it's something you've never seen in your life. I even want the Fritz Hansen company to come and look and say 'Wow, where did you get this? We've got to have it in our museum!'

But I'll put things out next morning, next week, next month, things that I think feel like 'this is the moment, this is the weather, this should be here, this is the colour scheme'. I'll just change it.

**DL:** And I think also our clientele, they're looking for the best of the best, and they're looking for unique stories, so I think whatever Alan puts in here will wow them because of his discerning taste and what they're aspiring to.

And this serves as a model for the bespoke styling service that you're offering.

**DL:** Yes, for the very niche crowd. And I also think the Hong Kong gift scene is really boring. If you want to find meaningful gifts for friends and family, it's hard to know where to go.

**AC:** It's so repetitive. They're selling in volume, but what you see in your home you saw in another friend's home. But here, many things are one-of-a-kind. Those collars in the display case from the 1930s were made by the British during the colonial days in India, and I bought them from Paris. They came as an original set in the case, from an Indian tailor's shop. I mean, how on earth would you think about displaying collars in your home, and it looks great!

**DL:** And you need the luxury of time and also the eyes to find these things.

Is that what you're offering here? The luxury of the time that you've taken in curating, that other people don't have?

**AC:** Well we may be able to provide the ability to inspire people about what life can be, what life could be, what life should be, this is the point. In the time you're here you're being inspired. We educate the market. We don't come and say, 'Buy this chair, buy this vase, this is good, it's famous.' There's no need.

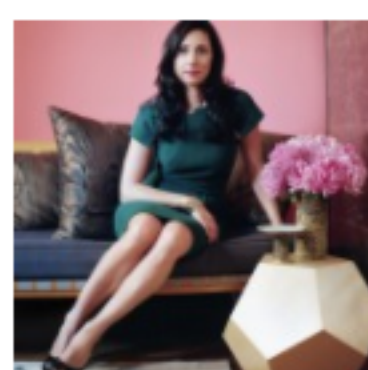
And where would you like to take this?

**AC:** Well, hopefully we'll expand this to make a bigger area and then maybe it would become a creative hub for people from all fields, from marketing, artists, singers to painters to come and for this to become a club environment for creative people. I think we need an equivalent FCC for creative people, so we're thinking of that down the road. To come in for a drink and make new friends or share some ideas. This is what I would like to do.

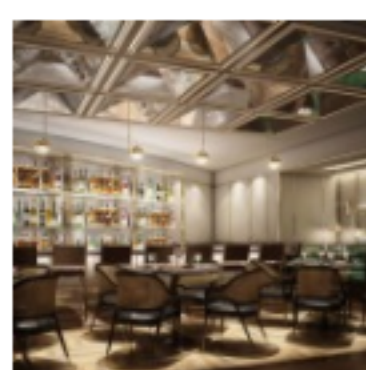
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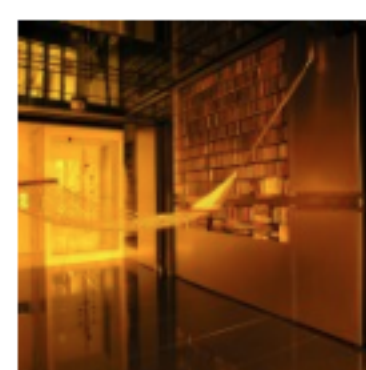
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