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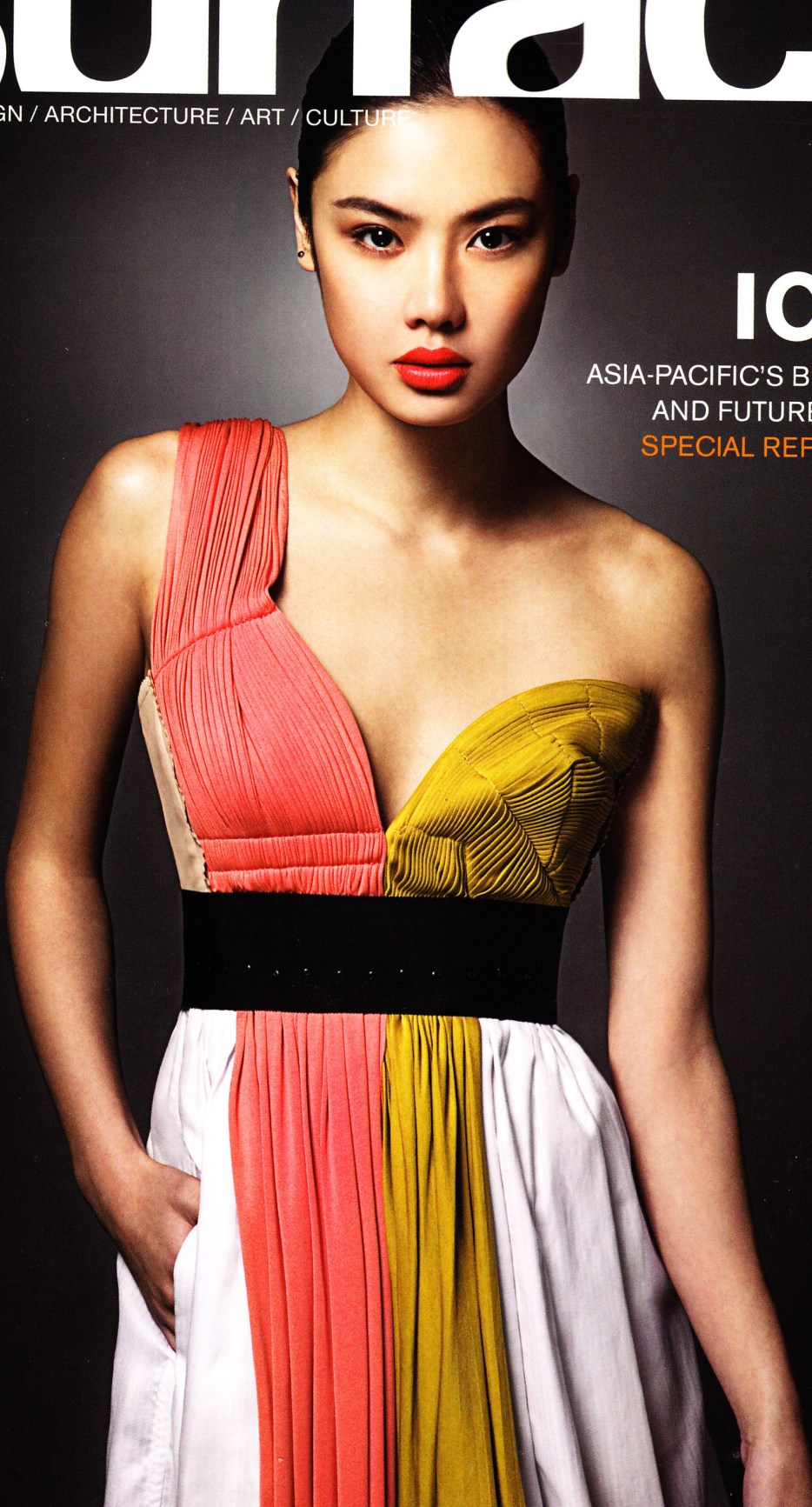
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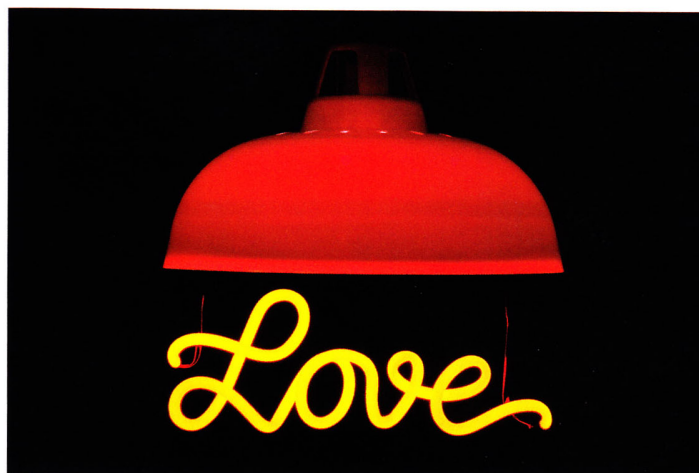
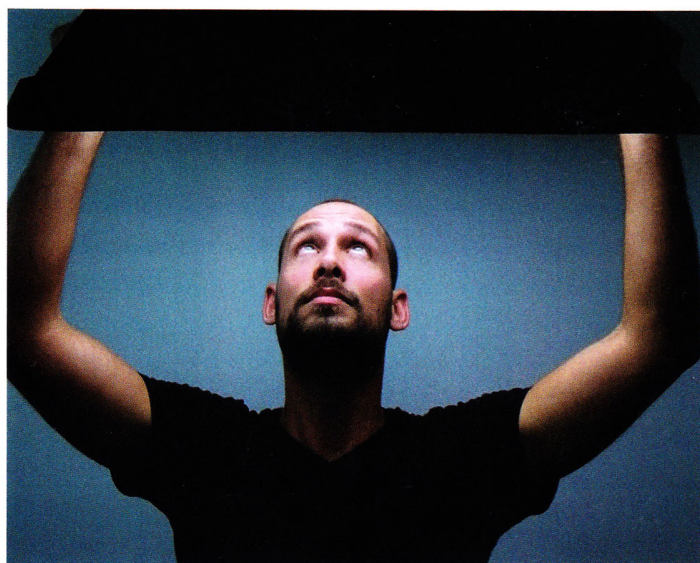
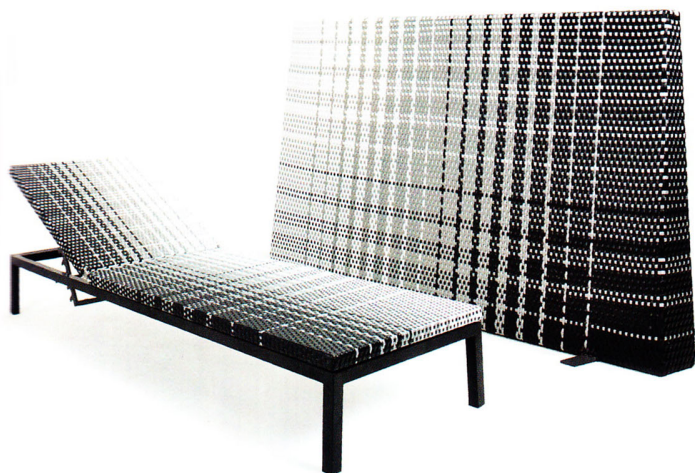
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ICONIC

ASIA-PACIFIC'S BIG NAMES, PLACES
AND FUTURE STARS IN DESIGN

SPECIAL REPORT: HONG KONG





WALKING THE TALK

Dutch-born, Hong Kong-based designer Danny Fang is no lightweight, even if his chair designs are surprisingly so.

WORDS CHRISTOPHER DEWOLF

Asia is full of expat designers, but Danny Fang, 35, describes himself a bit differently: "I'm a design immigrant," he says. Four years ago, working as the head of the product department at Dutch design studio Marcel Wanders, Fang realised he needed to set off on his own if he truly wanted to make an impact in the design world. And the place to do that? "It's not in Europe or even the US," he says. "It's where all the production takes place – Asia."

Since moving to Hong Kong in early 2007, Fang has made a name for himself as a designer of inventive, adaptable furniture. Two of his most recent series of chairs, one called *Gepetto* and the other *Gradient*, both won Design for Asia and Perspective awards last year.

Gradient is a response to one of his earliest designs, *Matryoshka*, a set of outdoor furniture that fit together like Russian dolls. "I realised I was an idiot – I'd designed a shape and tried to wicker it," says Fang. So instead, he designed a chair with a gradient pattern that highlights the material and the manual labour it takes to craft it.

Gepetto, by contrast, is a stackable plastic chair that evokes the stout, wooden frames of Ming Dynasty Chinese chairs. The gas-assisted injection moulding method allows different widths of plastic to be used, achieving the same feel and quality as wood. (The chair's name is a tribute to Pinocchio's father.) "What makes it really special for me is that we won awards for both chairs, because one is really about craftsmanship and the other is high technology," says Fang.

Both chairs capture the essence of Fang's philosophy: design with purpose. "Why does the world need another chair? If you can answer that question, you have the right to make one," he says. "What you make should be something you genuinely want to give to people."

Part of that means tackling projects that won't earn him much money. While he has a growing stable of clients, including Malaysian furniture company Kian and Chinese company More Than Legs, Fang also devotes much of his time to non-profit design endeavours like Butcher's Deluxe, for which he redesigned a typical Hong Kong market lamp, which will be auctioned for charity. "As long as I can hold my own pants up, I want to help the community," says Fang. "I'm very opinionated and I have a big mouth. I have to back it up with something." ■