

profile

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Designed with passion

A bold young designer who is prepared to go against the grain, the DutchCham Magazine talks to Danny Fang

To listen to Danny Fang talk about his work is to hear a man convinced that passion will produce success. The industrial designer is an optimist, and after taking the plunge to leave the Netherlands and set up his studio in Hong Kong last February, things are breaking his way.

The DutchCham Magazine caught up with Fang days after returning from last month's Shanghai Furniture Fair where the first Fang Studio product – a set of stackable outdoor chairs – was "very well received".

The outdoor seats are inspired by the nested Russian matryoshka doll. As far as the designer is aware, his nested Matryoshka Chairs are a world first.

The hand-woven polyethylene fibre cover stretches over an aluminium frame. A big, deep chair, houses a more moderate sized version and two stools sat inside its ample dimensions. The whole set weighs in at a light-weight 22kgs.

"I want to make high-end design acceptable and I want to make it achievable. If you can move the bulk just a little bit in the right direction then you are changing the world big time," he says. "It all comes down to making durable things."

The grand plan

Fang Studio, as it stands now, is Fang leading one full-time designer and a couple of interns from his studio at the government-funded InnoCentre business incubator in Kowloon Tong.

But there are grander plans that that afoot. The outdoor chair set was produced in the Pearl River Delta in collaboration with Malaysian furniture company Kian. He says he has found an ideal manufacturing partner

– both are dedicated to original design and making well-crafted goods.

After producing just a few prototypes, there are already some formative plans to collaborate on an entire range of durable outdoor furniture, from sun-lounges to lounge chairs.

Fang's own personal goals do not end there. Like a lot of creatives, he is aiming high.

"I came to Hong Kong to change the world," he says over a dim sum brunch.

"As a designer you want to change the world and I figured that if I had stayed in Europe I wasn't going to change anything. So I came to Hong Kong to combine my knowledge of trends with China's strength in production."

Fang graduated from the Design Academy Eindhoven in 1998 before passing through a number of design jobs. He has worked alongside Fair Trade companies, the Dutch Institute of Applied Scientific Research (TNO) and progressed to senior designer at Marcel Wanders Studio before taking the plunge on his own.

His background is in designing electrical, interior and lifestyle products with their own product ranges that reinforce brand identity.

Mixing ideas

A theme through Fang's work and life is mixing of ideas, blending of Western trends and Asian production. Fang himself is part Chinese, Indian, Caribbean and Dutch.

"You can send designers over here but it doesn't always mean that they can survive,"

he says. "There are a lot of people who are very condescending towards China and the way that it works."

Rather than a clash of cultures, Fang says there are advantages in the way his Chinese artisans have worked on creating the Matryoshka Chairs. A different understanding of hierarchy and different ideas about aesthetics helped create the chair's unique woven finish.

The weaving relies on a traditional craft which was dying out. Fang says the soft, rounded corners of the chairs were the toughest challenge for the production team – the older weavers still had the techniques but the younger workers just did not have the skills.



The set of chairs is softer and more feminine than the clunky, masculine furniture that tends to dominate our public spaces and our furniture showrooms. "It was the only answer you can give to

answer modern outdoor furniture," he says. "It's all smart but not sensitive." The words durable, sensible and sensitive crop up more than once during the interview.

"If you see chairs you see people. Chairs are made to fit our bodies. You see conversation," he says. "This is a family piece, the daddy, mum and little kids."

Fang is a driven man. He hates to lose. He loves to compete. After barely six months, his studio looks like it is on the way, with interest from fashion and design magazines building a buzz. With lady luck playing a hand and Fang's determination, this is one story that seems destined for a Hollywood ending. •