

INDESIGNLIVE.SG

#68 | JUNE | JULY | 2014



8 886385 903073

S\$10.00

cuboes

INDESIGN®

INTERIORS ARCHITECTURE DESIGN

 **SINGAPORE INDESIGN** The Event Sat 4 Oct 2014
singaporeindesign.com.sg

TAKENOUCHI WEBB'S ASIAN ADAPTATION

MILAN DESIGN WEEK 2014 | SUYING METROPOLITAN STUDIO | SILICON STRAITS CO.LAB
BY OUTFSTOCK | SILVERKRIS LOUNGE BY ONG&ONG | WEE HOUSE BY HCF AND ASSOCIATES



INSIDE OUT

SUYING METROPOLITAN STUDIO BLURS THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIOR DESIGN, SEEING BOTH AS BLENDED PARTS OF A WHOLE, EACH MUTUALLY INFLUENCING THE OTHER.

Above: The light-filled, loft-like reception area of the office is akin to a well-put-together living area

TEXT » FELICIA TOH
PROJECT IMAGES » COURTESY OF SUYING METROPOLITAN STUDIO
PORTRAIT AND PHOTOS OF OFFICE » REBECCA TOH



IT'S NOT OFTEN IN THIS INDUSTRY that one hears an architect lauding the importance of interior design. Edmund Ng of the recently merged Suying Metropolitan Studio is one such architect. The story of the merger is one of serendipity. In 2011, Patty Mak had already been principal of established interior design firm Suying Design for 15 years, with a diverse portfolio of works spanning across India, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, China and Singapore, amongst others. Edmund, on the other hand, founded Metropolitan Studio in 2006 after a five year tenure at W Architects under the tutelage of Mok Wei Wei. "Since I learned from a great master in architecture, it was good to learn from a mentor in interior design too. The coming together of these hard and soft aspects creates something wholesome," says Edmund, who considers both Mok and Patty mentors who have honed his design thinking.

A series of chance encounters had led Patty and Edmund to meet in 2011. Aside from attending the same art-related events – both are keen lovers and collectors of art – Patty also found out that Edmund was the designer of the One Rosyth condominium – the very project she admired in her frequent drive-pasts. It didn't take long for the both of them to hit it off and eventually merge to form the architecture-cum-interior design practice Suying Metropolitan Studio.

True to their niche in premium residential property, one notices immediately upon entering their

office that its spacious interiors are immaculately styled as an abode. Instead of a corporate enclosure, the luxurious lounge is furnished with a sensuous B&B Italia armchair and anchored by a brown Minotti leather sofa. On the left, a sleek pantry feels like a kitchen featured in the latest design glossy. Art pieces and sculptures are peppered throughout the space. "Our office is not static; from time to time Patty will add to her collection and re-style the office," Edmund shares

The word 'contemporary' is something that resounds strongly in Suying Metropolitan's design ethos. Although the firm is not insistent on a particular style, a consistent approach is obvious in all their works, resulting in projects with clean lines and elegant detailing.

"In any project, we look for the potential in its context, or any deficiencies to address. We test many schemes in form and plan before presenting an option to the client," Edmund reveals of their methodology. Using the analogy of designing a Ferrari, Edmund notes, "You don't get perfect proportions the first time round. So much testing is done in the production of a Ferrari, but in architecture there isn't much room for testing. In that sense architecture is very different from industrial production, unless each project is a kind of R&D."

Architecture, to Edmund, is also clearly different from interior design in terms of its approach. "I think architects spend a lot of effort doing massing. But we don't spend enough time on the space of the



Top: (From left) Edmund Ng, Patty Mak and fellow director Anita Chu of Suying Metropolitan Studio

Bottom: The studio's sleek office pantry is a popular space for discussions among staff and consultants



“OUR MOTTO HAS ALWAYS BEEN, ‘YOU ARE KNOWN BY YOUR LAST PROJECT’”

» EDMUND NG



Top left: A curated selection of accessories complements the contemporary furnishings of the showsuite in the Corals at Keppel Bay condominium

Bottom left: The Centennia Suites condominium showsuite is a fine balance of soft textures and neat lines

Right: The One Rosyth condominium’s screened facade is not only practical, it also evokes a romantic streak with imprints of trees

unit itself. This collaboration with Patty has taught me a new way of looking at the plan: by looking at the space from the user’s perspective.”

Patty, on the other hand, is relieved that she now has Edmund to help run the office. “Edmund’s approach, be it in creative aspects pertaining to design or problem solving, is always based on solid rationality. He grapples with the fundamentals without losing sight of the issues in question,” she says, clearly holding her partner in high regard.

Since coming together, a new direction has developed in the field of hospitality. Fresh opportunities have been streaming in from the likes of Mandarin Hotel in Hai Kou and Capella Group Hotel in Hainan, allowing them to explore new design typologies as a firm. This, of course, is in addition to their specialty in designing the interiors or showsuites of residential projects such as The Corals condominium and Reflections by the Bay, both designed by architect Daniel Libeskind. Mixed-use development Guangzhou Knowledge City in China by Norman Foster and TwentyOne Angullia Park by SCDA are other examples firmly under their belt (they are designing the interior for the former, and the showsuite for the latter).

Differentiating between interior design and interior architecture, Patty has established through her work over the years that interior design is not just ‘dressing up’. Instead, she takes pride in editing the plan. To her, architecture is not seen as a static shell in which interior design is inserted. The relationship between the two is a symbiotic one, with one influencing the other through fluid work processes. Case in point: instead of the typical segregation of architectural and interior design departments within offices, all the staff hired in Suiyong Metropolitan are expected to straddle both fields.

Consequent to merging their practices, the office strength stands at twenty-five persons, which, to the partners, is necessary for handling the amount of work on hand. While getting the first project is admittedly always difficult, Edmund reflects that clinching their first project in Chennai (Park Residence) soon spawned numerous other residential commissions in India. Yet, growing the office is not a matter of quantity. They hope to



“WE CANNOT AFFORD TO LOSE SIGHT OF OUR EXISTENCE AS DESIGNERS IN ANY PROJECT.”

» PATTY MAK



expand the breadth of projects that they do as well. “If we’ve not seen it before or done something like it before, we want to try it out,” says Edmund.

For this reason, the studio loves to engage in showsuite design, because of the great possibilities in execution and potential in pushing the creative boundaries. “Since there is no real user, we can push the design limit to the furthest. If users are involved, they usually have pre-conceptions about what should be done,” Edmund explains.

Both avid art lovers, it is no wonder that the partners view space as ‘livable sculpture’: art that is both beautiful and habitable. While Edmund holds a preference for art that has complex flavours – darker, abstract pieces that remind him of the richness of wine – Patty enjoys modern art pieces with clear subject matters that she is able to appreciate and relate to. It appears that this is a telling picture of their partnership – both approach design with their own set of preferences and methodology. However, like any true blend, the elements of the brew amalgamate to produce a balanced concoction.

Observing that black is the colour of choice for most of the staff, we ask if Suying Metropolitan has unspoken rules on attire. Patty admits to a ‘perfectionist’ streak that Ng teasingly credits for

Left: A house in the east of Singapore that showcases Edmund’s rigorous attention to detail and composition

Right: Another house that mitigates the tropical weather with intricately detailed timber screens



“BUT IN ARCHITECTURE THERE ISN’T MUCH ROOM FOR TESTING. IN THAT SENSE ARCHITECTURE IS VERY DIFFERENT FROM INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION.”

» EDMUND NG

unofficially influencing the aesthetic of the office. “If our staff sports hair that is too funky, Patty will tell them, ‘We are not a hair salon, you know?’” Edmund shares light-heartedly.

Patty’s penchant for styling extends to clients as well. Years after designing an apartment for Charles Wong of local shoe-label Charles and Keith, Patty still visits him and promptly styles the apartment if things are out of place. This commitment aligns with the studio’s vision of seeing design as a lifestyle, and taking a journey with clients in the process.

“I mention quite often that we cannot afford to lose sight of our existence as designers in any project. At the end of the day, it is still our delivery that counts and we must stay committed to doing our utmost best,” she says.

Much of the firm’s ethos can be explained by the name Patty chose for her company 15 years ago. Shedding light on how she chose the name, she shares, “As the company is from Asia, I wanted a name that sounds Asian. [In mandarin], Su means ‘comfort’ and Ying means ‘intelligence’. The firm holds steadfast that we design from both perspectives, where neither is sacrificed to make way for the other; going hand-in-hand like yin and yang.”

This year, Suiyng Metropolitan Studio will be participating in the upcoming 2014 Venice Biennale for architecture, curated by Rem Koolhaas this year. It is a weighty project to take on, not least because it is only one of two representatives from Singapore. The pressure is on to deliver, but it’s the same for every other project that they take on. “Our motto has always been, ‘You are known by your last project,’” Edmund muses. In other words, the best is expected of themselves in each and every project, and the proof is certainly in the (last) pudding.



Top: A keen understanding of texture and detailing is also present in the firm’s F&B projects, such as Carnivore Brazilian Churrascaria at Mariana Bay Sands

Bottom: The showsuite of Riversails condominium in Singapore takes on a more youthful, contemporary vibe