

Designing quality homes of stature and practicality

PURVEYOR OF FINE LIVING

ED ONG

DWELL INTERIOR DESIGN



photography ANGELA GUO art direction KAFFY TAN

From a “little rented desk facing the toilet” that served as his first office 13 years ago, founder and creative director of Dwell Interior Design Ed Ong has certainly come a long way. Today, the 45-year-old runs his four-man design studio in an airy two-and-a-half storey conservation shophouse in River Valley. Dwell has found its success catering to a niche market, one Ed describes as “the mid- to high-end residential segment”, a clientele that comprises industry leaders and the well-heeled.

Ed stumbled into the interior design industry, after the approaching arrival of his first child forced him to give up attempts to start a business, in order to find a stable job. He joined a big-brand interior design company as a complete rookie, but managed to secure three projects at the first interior design event it participated in. By his second year with the company, he was top designer.

Although this wasn't the predominant culture at the company, Ed developed a personal style that was design-centric, which garnered him a solid client base, thanks to frequent referrals. He discovered he had an innate talent with layouts. “I was able to secure most of my projects by sketching interior layouts in front of clients, instead of going back and taking two weeks to do them. It gives them a much deeper appreciation of design, because they are able to see my thought process with every line I draw, so trust is built from the first meeting.”

It was his clients who gave him the idea to strike it out on his own, which he did, after three years at his first

company. He started Dwell in 2005.

Key to Ed's understated designs is a practice that he terms “line discipline”. He defines it as the act of picking out a line in a home's layout, and designating it as the “hero wall” where all feature elements, such as TV console, display cabinets and bookshelves, are aligned. In doing this, that hero wall becomes the main feature in the home, and this also ensures that movement within a space is minimally obstructed with random free-standing elements.

The confidence to stick to his personal approach was acquired with time and experience. “In the beginning, we listened too much to clients on their choice of theme, materials... But we realised that what clients want may not be the best thing.

“Sometimes, they think that to have a robust countertop, they require a very thick counter material. But as we are from the industry, we are aware of new materials

available that are sleeker, but still as hardy.”

After close to two decades in the industry, he has noticed that the tastes of Singaporean homeowners have become more defined. “Ten years ago, the most a client could articulate was his desire for a practically designed home with clean lines,” he says. Now, clients are more informed, and are able to specify particular looks, such as Scandinavian, or raw with luxurious elements, or a Ritz-Carlton, even a Kardashian.

The challenge for the designer in this age of information, says Ed, is to be similarly well-exposed and to stay open to ideas and styles.

He also owns The Kitchen Society, a private cooking school which his wife, Hsin Yi, helps to run. Classes taught by private chefs and food writers are held in the kitchen space of the same conservation shophouse that his design studio is based in.

On the future of Dwell, Ed shares that the focus will still remain on residential projects. “The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of our clients, and to add depth to interior design.” ▶

BELOW

Noce House, a three-storey semi-detached home designed by Dwell, recently won in the Luxury Design category at the A'Design Award & Competition for the 2017-18 period, a global juried competition that honours the best in the field of design.

