



## Publisher's Note

If the 20th century was all about industrialisation, then the 21st century is all about disruption. We have entered an era where technology has transformed the very essence of our lives. And when technology and design merge, they have a great chemical reaction that enables new ideas to be more readily acceptable and endearing.

In this issue of SIGNED, we continue to expose and explore how tech and design shape our experience. Take our story on shopping, it's one of the most frequent things we do, so how is technology shaping the future of retail? The answers are as interesting as the questions. We also investigate the viability of blockchain and how it changes the process of participation in design, by making a system of individual contribution more transparent and accountable.

Back on the HKDI campus, we had a sneak preview of the amazing Media Lab, where abstract ideas are explored and adapted to create everyday solutions to entertainment. Our exhibition on silk, one of the most revered and popular materials in the world, is a fascinating journey into our history.

What is the most fun for us is seeing how design takes shape, and how design "shapes" cities and societies. We hop over to Shenzhen, a buzzing city for designers. All this sparks conversations. And the beauty of conversations is that no technology can replace simple human exchange.

From all of us at SIGNED, we wish you a great year ahead filled with exhilarating conversations.

Desiree Au  
Publisher

# CONTENTS

4

## Bulletin

Our roundup of the latest news from HKDI and top design events from around the world



28

## Different Paths

SIGNED meets two HKDI alumni who have carved out their own routes to success

6

## Exporting Shenzhen's Design Culture

The city that has grown from 'The Factory of the World' to the design incubator of the future



30

## Working Well?

How are employers using "Tesign" to keep the workforce healthy, happy and fulfilled?



32

## Adventures in Space

New technology and new design thinking have been quietly revolutionising the workplace



16

## In Praise of Silk

China National Silk Museum comes to HKDI's d-mart

22

## Keep Watching

Swiss accessory and watch design from HEAD - Genève



24

## Into the Laboratory!

HKDI's new media lab opens for the first time, putting new technology in the hands of students

40

## Future-facing Retail

Online retail is old news. A new online/offline hybrid form of shopping has emerged in Hong Kong



36

## The Chain

Blockchain technology is making data-driven design faster, easier and more accountable

The Hong Kong Design Institute is a member institution of the Vocational Training Council.  
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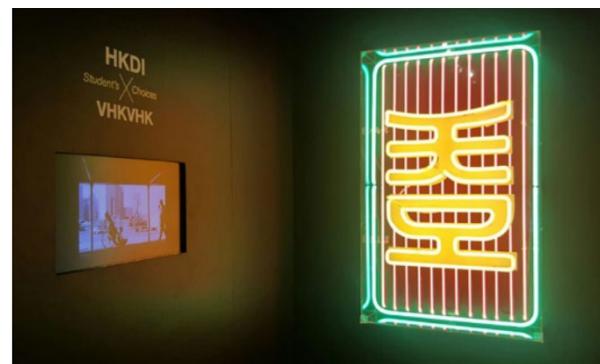
## HKDI PARTICIPATES IN DESIGN INSPIRE 2017

An international expo showcasing creativity and expression, DesignInspire partners annually with Business of Design Week (BODW) to gather ingenious elites, renowned brands and the best institutions in the world to exhibit their talent using interactive installations and other intriguing projects. HKDI

is proud to be participating in DesignInspire 2017 at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre from 7 December to 9 December, 2017. This year's exhibition focused on Urbanovation – Urban-Innovation, illuminating the ways that innovation and design solutions can make a momentous impact on urban life in the future.

### VERY HONG KONG, VERY HONG KONG

Very Hong Kong, Very Hong Kong introduced and celebrated the creative excellence and culture of Hong Kong. With nearly 200 selected entries from 11 creative categories, the exhibition displayed unique attributes of Hong Kong from the perspective of young design talents, along with a series of guided tours, talks, workshops, film screenings and music performances.



## HKDI STUDENTS SHOWCASE THEIR TALENTS AT APM SHOPPING MALL

To celebrate the creative abilities of students and graduates of HKDI, the institute organised a design festival with exhibitions and workshops for the public at APM shopping mall. Held from 30 September to 2 October 2017, the first floor of the mall hosted workshops for environmentally friendly designs, creative origami and handmade jewelry. With the philosophy of creating wealth out of waste, Tina Ho, an HKDI fashion design alumni, demonstrated ways to create new and useful designs using waste fabric, discarded computer parts, recycled shirts, wood, bags and coasters. Apart from the informative workshops, the public visited four innovative exhibitions; a denim studio celebrating the changing style of denim in its 150 year history, a section entirely devoted to paintings of Cantonese idioms, creative shoe paintings and environmentally friendly designs. On October 1, a live wall painting performance was organised by visual communications diploma students of HKDI to help the public closely observe and understand their inspirations, ideas and creative processes.



## CALENDAR



**TORONTO DESIGN OFFSITE FESTIVAL**  
Jan 15-21

Now on its 8th year, Toronto Design Offsite Festival is a cultural event featuring more than 100 exhibitions, public installations and talks around the city. Designers, enthusiasts and the public will enjoy events on everything design-related, from ceramics and architecture to fashion and photography.  
[todesignoffsite.com](http://todesignoffsite.com)



**STOCKHOLM DESIGN WEEK**  
Feb 5-11

Galleries, museums and other cultural venues all play host to events during Stockholm Design Week, a weeklong spotlight on Scandinavian design initiated by the Stockholm Furniture & Light Fair. Exhibitions, seminars, tours, cocktail parties and more will be held for journalists, designers, and buyers to network and exchange ideas on the industry.  
[stockholmdesignweek.com](http://stockholmdesignweek.com)

**OBJECT ROTTERDAM**  
Rotterdam Feb 9-11

At Object Rotterdam, the focus is the intersection of fashion, crafts, architecture, art and design. It's a platform for artists across disciplines to showcase limited edition works and one-off pieces to collectors, professionals and fellow designers. This year, the fair will be held in the historic HAKA building.  
[objectrotterdam.com](http://objectrotterdam.com)



**MELBOURNE DESIGN WEEK 2018**  
Mar 15-25

In March, National Gallery of Victoria presents Melbourne Design week, a platform for local and international designers and design-led organisations featuring talks, studio tours, exhibitions and industry events. The theme of the 2018 event is Design Effects, exploring how design delivers change for people and the environment.  
[ngv.vic.gov.au](http://ngv.vic.gov.au)

# Exporting Shenzhen's design culture

The arrival of the V&A in Shenzhen is another significant step in the city's progression from 'factory of the world' to design incubator

Shenzhen's status as a world design city will be boosted in December 2017 by the opening of the V&A Gallery at Design Society in Shekou. As well as curating world-class exhibitions at the gallery, the Victoria & Albert Museum is a founding partner of Design Society, the not-for-profit cultural and design platform created by China Merchants Shekou and located in the new Sea World Culture and Arts Centre, a sprawling deconstructed complex of interconnected public space designed by renowned Japanese architectural firm Maki and Associates. It is the first long-term association between a Chinese partner and a UK museum and it

speaks to Shenzhen's rapidly emerging credentials as a creative hub that the V&A signed on for a China foothold here rather than in Beijing or Shanghai.

The V&A prides itself on being the world's leading museum of art, design and performance; it was established in London 165 years ago to inspire British designers and manufacturers. V&A personnel in Shekou believe Design Society will prove a similar stimulus for Shenzhen design talent. "We saw in Shenzhen the opportunity to follow emerging manufacturing and creative industries that are truly embodying the current [Chinese] national agenda of promoting creativity and innovation as key drivers [to



encourage] a transition from ‘made in China’ to ‘created in China,’” says the head of V&A Gallery, Shekou, Luisa Elena Mengoni. “Shenzhen offers an ideal location for international contacts and exchanges, being strategically located in close proximity to Hong Kong.”

The venerable UK institution’s ties with Shenzhen are particularly strong, having participated in two Bi-City Biennales of Urbanism/Architecture, in 2013 and 2015. Such good guanxi benefits both parties, and both countries. The V&A has been able to expand its range of contemporary works, particularly from Chinese digital designers, while locally based companies gain international exposure. Shenzhen superstars DJI and Tencent can now boast of representation in the V&A’s permanent collections, with a drone and the 2017 version of WeChat, respectively.

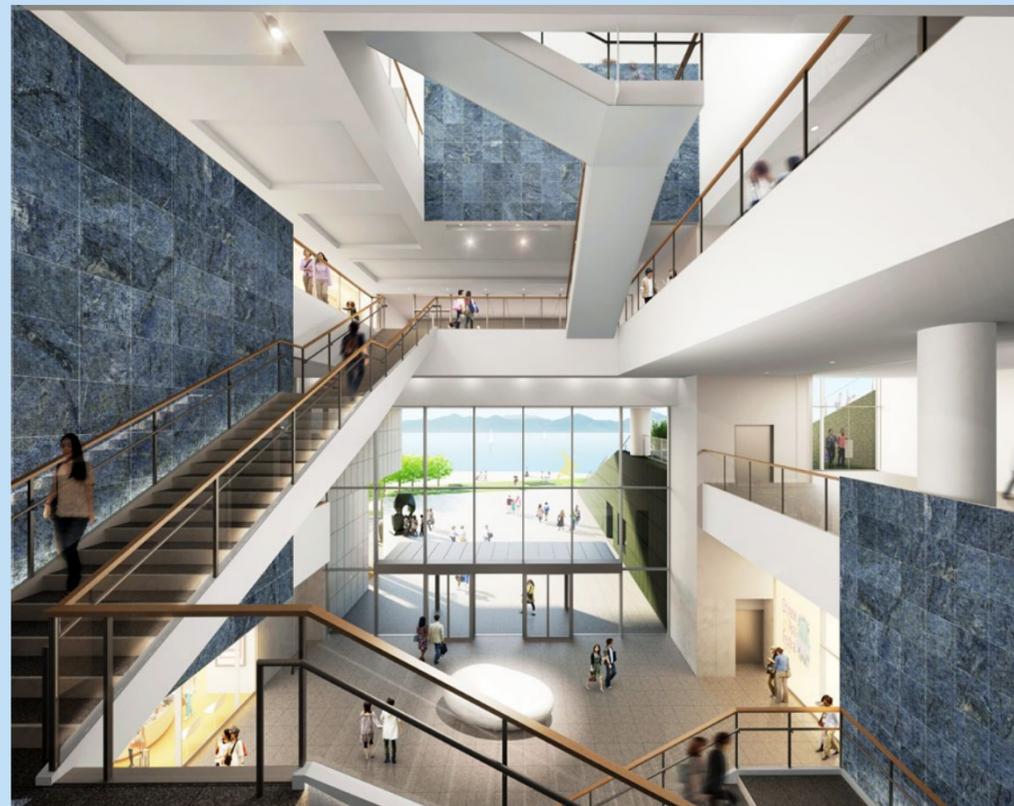
Mengoni stresses that the partnership comes at “A critical time [in Shenzhen’s art and design development], being the first and most ambitious project to fully engage with the city’s expanding design scene and extraordinary potential”. She says the innovative exhibitions and programmes it will stage are crucial to providing inspiration and critical thinking among local design professionals and students, helping to “Cultivate new talents and encourage growth in the creative design sector”.

The Italian Chinese-art specialist cites the example of Sseed’s Eric Pan, whose visit to the Decode: Digital

Design Sensations show at the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in Beijing in 2010 - the first digital art exhibition brought to China by the V&A - sparked the Sseeduino product, an easy-to-use microcontroller for digital artists. A greater awareness of, and accessibility to, international art, design and ideas breeds creativity.

The V&A is the biggest name in a vanguard of overseas design institutions setting up in Shenzhen, many of them educational. Last year Italian fashion school Istituto Marangoni opened its second China campus (after Guangzhou); as training director Joe Zhou notes, the city needs to upgrade its “Soft power” in order to sharpen its status as a fashion design capital. “Students from all over the world meet and interact through a continuous exchange of ideas, projects, stimuli and vision,” he says. New York’s Rochester Institute of Technology is collaborating with Hunan University for the HNU-RIT School of Design, Shenzhen, in another initiative to nurture the city’s talent and creativity. Locally, American expatriate architect Jason Hilgefert has branched out into education, launching Future+, an academy of urbanism, landscape and public art.

Design Society is not the only impressive cultural complex in a striking, internationally designed building on the Shenzhen horizon. Construction of the twin-institution MOCAPE (the Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Planning Exhibition), connected by a ‘cloud’ skylight design feature, was completed last year in the



Sea World Culture and Arts Center rendering

PICTURE CREDIT: MAKI & ASSOCIATES



The Museum of Contemporary Art and the Planning Exhibition (MOCAPE)

city’s Futian district by Coop Himmelb(l)au of Vienna. Reportedly, in a mutually beneficial creative exchange, construction robots designed by a Chinese firm will raise the architects’ next two building projects in Austria.

Another exciting initiative to have recently arrived in Shenzhen is the Sino-Finnish Design Park. A unique collaboration between Helsinki and Shenzhen, the park is based in the free trade zone in Futian District and includes exhibition spaces, a fab-lab and an incubator base for young designers. The park is already home to over thirty enterprises including design agencies and brands.

Design Society will open on December 2 with three exhibitions. Values of Design in the V&A Gallery will showcase more than 250 objects from 31 countries, framing a global debate on how values shape design. In the Main Hall, curator Carrie Chan and her team consulted digital visionaries in China and overseas, including Makerfaire Shenzhen co-founder Kevin Lau, for input on Minding the Digital, a huge interactive exhibition on the mind-blowing possibilities of the digital future. There will also be an illuminating retrospective of architect

PICTURE CREDIT: DUCCIO MALAGAMBA



Fumihiko Maki’s work.

The local design community is understandably excited. According to Victor Zhu of Shenzhen-based fashion brand Vmajor, having a design museum curated by international experts will be a great addition to the local cultural landscape, “It’s good to have people like the V&A to come here and do things thoughtfully and set up standards of aesthetics,” he said in an interview with the South China Morning Post. Jason Ren, co-founder of Little Thing in OCT-Loft, agreed it would encourage a local culture of creativity, “For decades, Chinese people only wanted to survive. Now they can consider alternatives and begin to question the mainstream.” ■

# Shenzhen's Shifting Fortunes

From sleepy border town to booming manufacturing hub to design city – Shenzhen is continually transforming itself as it spearheads China's passage to an innovation-based society.

When Shenzhen was named a Unesco City of Design in 2008 ahead of its more illustrious urban counterparts of Beijing and Shanghai, eyebrows were raised. This frenetic new metropolis, rolling over former fishing villages just north of Hong Kong was known as, at best, a manufacturing hub and, at worst, a marketplace for cheap design imitations. Workers flooded south to the Pearl River Delta to fuel its industrial base. Shenzhen was decried as the 'Factory of the World', a place where anything, from handbags to electronics, could be made, or copied, cheaply and at lightning pace.

Today, it is a different story. Criticism has morphed into admiration as Shenzhen assumes the mantle of one of the world's largest manufacturing centres. It enjoys a high-tech prowess approaching that of Silicon Valley but with the added advantage of having production on its doorstep. It is still growing – up to 12 million people at the last count – with striking skyscrapers announcing its presence as a Chinese city of international importance. Migrants are now likely to be skilled, entrepreneurial and often

foreign: Chinese from Hong Kong or Taiwan as well as Westerners armed with ideas, expertise and a desire to make money. That early vision as a home of creativity and design is finally being realised.

"Ours is a very young city," said Xu Chongguang, deputy secretary general of the Shenzhen municipal government, last year. "It is also a city that is open to new ideas." Ole Bouman, the Dutch director of Design Society, a not-for-profit cultural foundation established in the city's Shekou district, concurs. "This is still a new city. It's more existential than Beijing and Shanghai and asking questions is second nature here," he said in a 2016 interview with the South China Morning Post.

Since the border town of Shenzhen, population circa 30,000, was chosen as China's first special economic zone in 1980, local government and business have worked hand in hand to build something substantial from practically nothing. The city serves as the country's model for opening up to the world and becoming an economic powerhouse. "The supply chain is the most important

thing that makes Shenzhen the capital of manufacturing," opines Red Dot Award-winning product designer Allan Zhang of Crazybaby, a maker of earphones. "There are a lot of satellite cities around, such as Dongguan, Huizhou and Zhongshan, and they can form a complete supply chain providing almost everything from raw materials to computer components at very low cost."

The factories and supply chain were built first, and the concept of modern Chinese design germinated in the back garden of the production lines. As arts professional Brendan Cormier, who moved to Shenzhen in 2014, writes, "For years the popular image of Shenzhen was not pretty. Millions of Chinese immigrants resettled here to take up low-wage factory jobs, often leaving their families behind. Global news reports about pollution, poor working conditions and worker suicides exacerbated the city's image as an anonymous and brutal place."

Shenzhen's evolution from these raw beginnings to a more sophisticated final product in just a few decades would not have been possible without government support

and a receptive, energetic population. The framework for a design city was built with the import of ideas and professionals. The Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture was launched in 2005 (with Hong Kong's participation two years later it became the Bi-City Biennale) more recent annual initiatives include Shenzhen Fashion Week, Shenzhen Design Week and the Shenzhen Design Award for Young Talents.

Luring foreign talent and investment to the city on a permanent basis has been made possible by a generous raft of government grants, concessions and subsidies. In 2011 the 'Peacock Initiative' offered awards of up to RMB 100 million to start-up teams and firms in IT and emerging industries. Visa applications have been simplified and accelerated and in 2017 subsidies of up to RMB 3 million were available to foreign holders of Shenzhen permanent residence permits. In addition, foreign nationals and migrants from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan can now benefit, alongside locals, from the Shenzhen Housing Accumulation Fund. Numerous tax concessions,



China Guangdong Shenzhen  
Qianhai Mansion enterprises  
Diamond Museum

particularly for high-tech companies, have also made the city more advantageous to non-nationals.

These incentives, coupled with cheaper rents, have seen Hong Kong entrepreneurs crossing the border to Shenzhen's Qianhai free-trade zone in increasing numbers: at least 85 small firms have set up in the Shenzhen-Hong Kong Youth Entrepreneur Hub there. Dreams of becoming the next big startup, in the wake of Shenzhen's super-success stories Tencent, Huawei, drone maker DJI, and Seed Studios (whose founder Eric Pan was on the cover of Forbes Chinese edition in 2015 as one of 30 entrepreneurs under 30) can come true.

The Shenzhen government offered tech start-ups US\$202.9 million in funding in 2014 – while only US\$33.7 million was on offer in Hong Kong – and eligible companies located in Qianhai paid 15 per cent corporate tax, compared to 25 per cent outside the zone and 16.5 per cent in Hong Kong. Labour is also more affordable, and as one such recent cross-border migrant put it, “The people are down to earth”.

“People in Shenzhen don't have the burden of history, they want to create something of their own,” said Doreen Heng Liu, a curator at Shenzhen's 2015 Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture. “It's fast adapting compared to other cities in China. Young people really feel at home here because Shenzhen gives them a lot of opportunities.”

An estimated 6,000 design firms employing some 100,000 designers flourish in this land of innovation and opportunity. Shenzhen's cultural and creative industries are said to be growing at an average annual rate of 25 per cent and two years ago their share of the city's gross domestic product had reached almost 15 per cent. With its manufacturing base secured, design is now adding value. The full spectrum of design industries is present, from fashion, products and toys to architectural, interior and digital design.



Shenzhen Longgang Sports Center



**CIGA Design 009 Series wristwatch, Shenzhen Ciga Design Co., Ltd., Shenzhen. Recognised with an honourable mention at the Red Dot Design Awards.**



**The RBike R4 E-Folding Bike designed by LKK Design Shenzhen Co., Ltd. A recipient of an Honourable Mention at the Red Dot Design Awards.**



**Intelligent Lidar Cleaning Robot, Shen Zhen 3i Robotics Co., Ltd, Shenzhen. Winner of a Red Dot Design Award.**

The 800 Chinese fashion brands in Shenzhen, China's largest producer of women's clothing, employ some 30,000 designers. Mayor Qu Xin stated in the China Daily newspaper last year that his city has become the most creative fashion hub in China. Running the gamut from commercial to edgy, names such as Marisfrolg, Haiping Xie, Ming Yue He and Odbo have caught the imagination of fashion writers at home and abroad. Lai Rui of Shenzhen favourite La Pargay won the China Fashion Award in 2015.



The OCT Coast Creative Center

Shen Yongfang, president of the Shenzhen Garment Industry Association, proclaimed in an interview last year “Working on the internationalisation of Shenzhen brands is my life's mission”. With Marisfrolg founder Zhu Chongyun taking over Krizia in 2014, and Shenzhen Ellassay Fashion acquiring French brand Iro and a majority stake in Vivienne Tam's China brand rights this year, his job is getting easier. Ellassay chairman Xia Guoxin stressed that Tam will assemble an international design team in the city to create pieces that resonate with China's young generation.

With municipal government support, designers regularly present their work at international design festivals and fashion weeks. Zheng Qu, director of London's China Design Centre, has lauded the Moon Lamp, designed by Shenzhen-based Jerry Huang of EY-Products, as an example of a sea change in China, “The emphasis in Chinese design used to be on strong traditional elements. Now it's more about abstract concepts and functionality,” he said before the 2015 London Design Festival. “Designers from China are starting to understand that they have to tell a story with their work, it can't just be about the product or brand.”

The V&A Museum's Luisa Elena Mengoni, now based in Shenzhen, is similarly encouraged watching the city's young designers come into their own, “There's been a graphic design industry here since the 1990s to serve local factories, but individuals like Huang Yang represent the new generation and they are doing such interesting things.”. Huang Yang Design, located in trendy OCT-Loft, is known for its work with Chinese artists as well as international brands such as Uniqlo.

For the most part, it is foreign talent that is transforming the Shenzhen skyline. Prestigious architectural design firms are being commissioned to create statement buildings that underline the city's rise in the eyes of the world. The Shenzhen Stock Exchange was the brainchild of Dutch firm OMA, co-founded by Rem Koolhaas; another Dutch architect, Mecanoo, will build 12 stepped skyscrapers around a Shenzhen park. Shenzhen international airport Terminal 3's distinctive hexagonal skylights are the work of Italian practice Fuksas. Last year US firm Morphosis topped out a 350-metre-high tower, dubbing it the tallest steel building in China.

The best-known local architect practice is Urbanus, which came to Shenzhen early, in 1999. “[China's] economy had just begun to recover from a five-year recession; it was the dawn of the grand and rapid construction wave,” said co-founder Liu Xiaodu in a 2015 interview with Arch Daily. “Our first project in Shenzhen made us discover this new immigrant city; young, open and energetic but with a flat social structure. At that time there were neither strong domestic architectural firms, nor foreign design firms that rushed in to take the lead. It was a situation with no competitors and we found our space easily.”

Asked about the influx of foreign firms two decades on, he warned; “I think most Western architects have no sense of the context here, they don't understand the Chinese context. They are borrowing lots of bad Chinese feng shui, misunderstood Chinese things or cultural things ... that's not the way.”

Urbanus is the design force behind arts and design enclave OCT (Overseas Chinese Town)-Loft, a revitalised former factory compound that once made television sets. OCT-Loft epitomises Shenzhen's progress from factory town to design city, and the opening of OCT Art and Design Gallery in 2008 neatly correlates with the timing of the Unesco announcement.

Nine years later, a lot of hope is riding on Shenzhen to become a new design powerhouse, opines Cormier. “After decades of serving as the factory of the world, the city now boasts a robust infrastructure of workshops, supply chains, and know-how, a lucrative attraction for young entrepreneurs and makers.”

Cormier does caution, however, that the culture of copying and modifying which led Shenzhen to where it is today, also poses a threat, “For Shenzhen to realise its ambition of becoming a desirable design capital, it will need to prove that it is a place not only where stuff can get made but also where designers can feel some certainty that their ideas will be protected.”

There is no doubt that China's modern-day shift to an innovation-based society and economy is being spearheaded by Shenzhen. The evolution from manufacturing hub to design city may not have reached its conclusion quite yet, but the road forward has been paved.

# SHENZHEN: A DESIGN METROPOLIS

## 100,000

More than 100,000 people are employed in Shenzhen's design & tech industries



## 40,000<sup>©</sup>

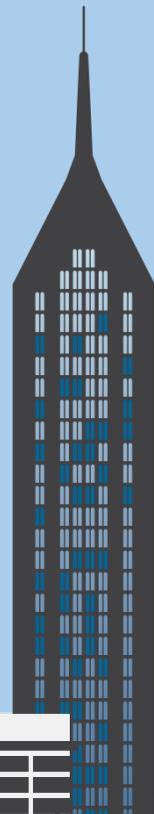
Around 40,000 patents are granted in Shenzhen every year

## RMB 11 billion

Shenzhen's worth of output in the design & tech industries

## 599

metres  
Ping An Finance Centre, became the 4th tallest building in the world in 2017



### TECH GIANTS

#### BGI

World's largest-throughput gene sequencing company

#### BYD

World's largest supplier of rechargeable batteries

#### DJI

Leader in drone technology

#### Huawei

Technology giant

#### Tencent

From mobile gaming to web commerce

#### ZTE

China's biggest telecoms equipment company

## 2005

Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism and Architecture launched

## 2008

UNESCO names Shenzhen as a City of Design

## 2017

Representatives from over 20 cities attended Shenzhen Design Week in April 2017

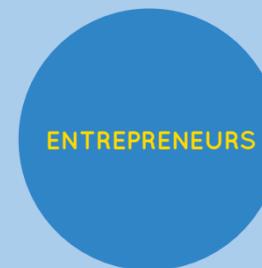


## 40%

Shenzhen-based Transsion Holdings captured 40% of the mobile phone and smartphone market in Africa in 2017, offering handsets specially designed for that market.

## 25%

Around 25% of the world's mobile phones and smartphones are built in Shenzhen



## 800

Shenzhen is home to 800 fashion brands, employing more than 30,000 clothing designers



#### Marisfrolg

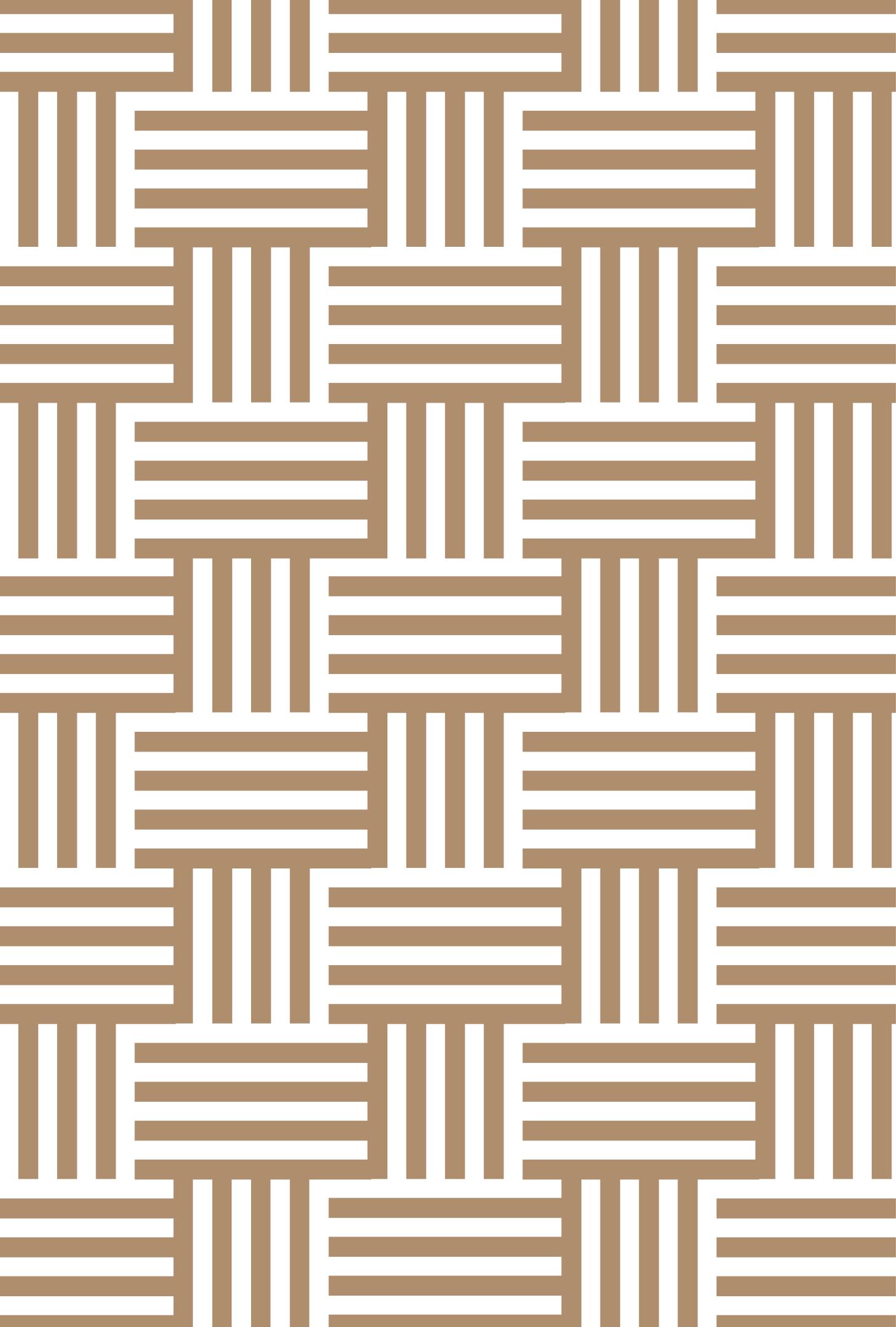
Shenzhen's most successful fashion brand

## 700

 shops in

## 106

 cities



# IN PRAISE OF SILK

Silk, a natural material that was first used in China around 6000 years ago, still outperforms even the most high-tech artificial fibres and continues to be considered the epitome of style and luxury. A recent exhibition at HKDI's d-mart explored this wonder material



In *Praise of Silk: Fashion from China* National Silk Museum Across Time featured a magnificent collection of contemporary fashion and historical costume designs. The exhibition, a collaboration between HKDI's Department of Fashion and Image Design (FID) and the China National Silk Museum, the world's largest silk museum, paid tribute to mulberry silk, the fibre that made China famous since historical times.

According to Zhao Feng, Director of China National Silk Museum, the museum's collection is unique in representing "A complete collection and history of silk works throughout different categories, periods and regions. The museum provides a rich overview of silk work throughout history, from ancient relics through to the collection of modern silks and fashion." Zhao also points out that the museum allows visitors to appreciate "The contrast between Chinese and Western cultures, as well as providing information about crafting and weaving tools."

The exhibition at d-mart covers a truly impressive timescale, from ancient pieces dating from as far back as the Wei and Jin periods, the Song Dynasty, right through to the modern era. It demonstrates the continuity in the use of traditional emblems such as birds, lilies and flowers, throughout the ages.

HKDI senior lecturer Portia To explains the significance of silk in Chinese culture, "The natural process of producing silk from silkworms was invented in China and led to the creation of the famous Silk Road." The Silk Road, of course, had an immense cultural, historical and commercial impact on every region it passed through, from the Far East to Europe, and beyond. To continues,

"Silk is naturally odour free, it is lightweight, cool in the summer and warm in the winter and is super absorbent. It continues to feel comfortable even when damp." All of these attributes are sought by modern textile manufacturers, but no man-made fabric has ever been able to combine all these abilities so effectively.

Aside from precious exhibits from China National Silk Museum, and in celebration of the recent announcement that Hong Kong-style cheongsam sewing techniques will be inscribed into the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Hong Kong, the exhibition hosted a collection of cheongsam from Cheongsam Connect. Also on display was a stunning design from seasoned couturier Barney Cheng, as well as a dazzling selection from renowned fashion label Blanc de Chine.

Taking an overview of the history of silk, *In Praise of Silk: Fashion from China* National Silk Museum Across Time allows the visitor a chance to see the future direction of the craft. Zhao Feng elaborates, "Huang Wen Ying's work reflects her thoughts on contemporary life, as well as her reinterpretation of traditional weaving and fabric designs. Computing technology allows more complex weaving pattern designs and weaving, which provides the freedom to express meaning. By using looming techniques and technologies, craftsmen and women attempt to discover the passion and warmth of life. Using a digital jacquard machine and metallic materials during the weaving process allows for the expression of complex imagery."

To coincide with the Grand Opening of HKDI's Fashion Archive, the exhibition's opening ceremony was held on 29 September 2017 with renowned fashion designer Barney Cheng as the Guest of Honour.



## Exhibition highlights

### Brocade robe with geese motif, replica of an excavated robe from Daiqintala, Inner Mongolia, Early Liao Dynasty, 10th Century

This oversized robe with narrow sleeves is representative of the traditional attire of a government official of the Liao dynasty. The replica robe features intricate brocades made using seven-colour weft yarns with a bold repeating goose motif featuring 20 pairs of geese portrayed full length and standing upright. Each holds a ribbon in its beak, indicating that this robe was made for a Tang Dynasty official above the third rank. The robe is thought to have been made during the Tang Dynasty, before being passed to Khitan officials in the later Liao dynasty.

### Olympic Travellers, Li Hailiang (2006)

*Olympic Travellers* features cut-up and warped print motifs, inspired by the *Comme des Garçons Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body* collection. *Olympic Travellers* was developed as Li Hailiang's graduation collection at the China Academy of Arts in Hangzhou. The collection became hugely popular for its appropriation of classic red, blue and white nylon bags, widely used to carry heavy loads. After completing his studies, Li trained in Paris before establishing his own studio there in 2011.

### Qipao for the Olympics, Guo Pei (2008)

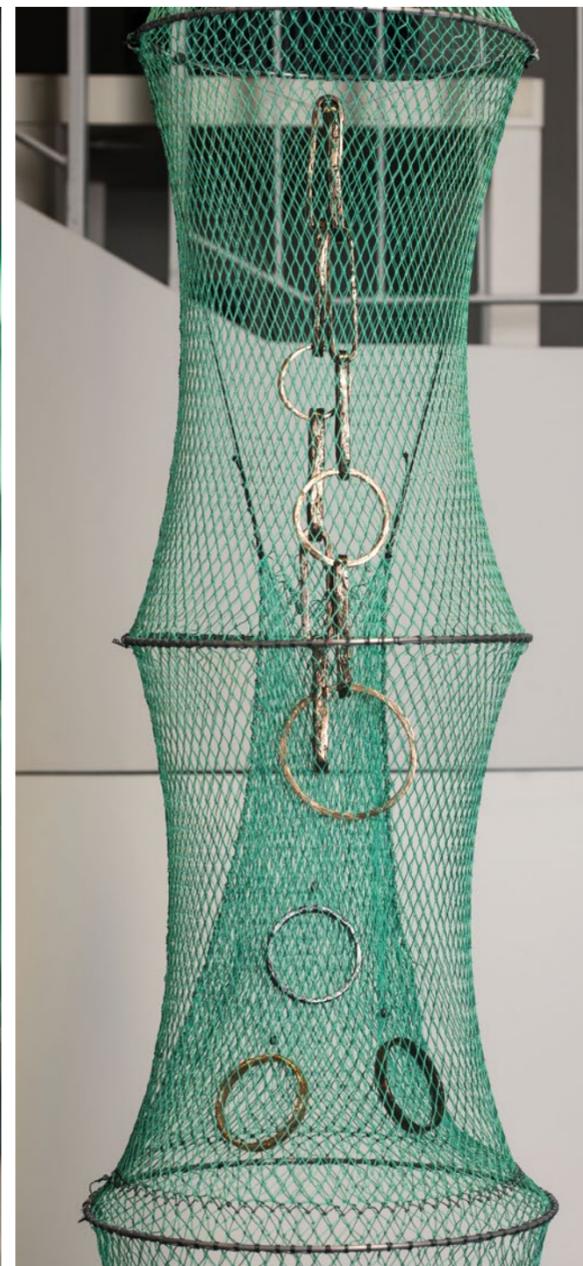
This *Qipao* by Guo Pei features the iconic lotus flower, rendered in an innovative way using luminous acrylic and mosaics. With a recognisable style based on bold silhouettes, striking colours and embellishments, Guo Pei is one of China's most well-respected fashion designers. Beloved by celebrities and socialites, she gained international recognition in 2015 when she dressed Rihanna for the Met Gala and in 2008 she created 208 different looks for the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony.

### Lady's dress, replica, Wei and Jin Periods and Sixteen Kingdoms, 220-460AD

This combination of a *yi* for the upper body, and a *shang* for the lower body is representative of Han style dressmaking, popular during the Wei & Jin Periods and Sixteen Kingdoms. The set comprises undergarments of a top and skirt, a second top, a long-sleeved tie-dyed purple top, a yellow damask skirt and an embroidered cropped-sleeve wrap top. The cropped-sleeve wrap top is embroidered with chain stitch, referencing excavated textiles from the Loulan excavation site, Xin Jiang. The tie-dye pattern on the purple top references Han Jin-period dye, excavated in Yingpan, Xinjiang. The patterned silk used for the yellow skirt is modelled on research from the Niya site, Xin Jiang.

### Embellishment in Red, Deng Yuping (2015)

A Professor at the Fashion Department of the Guangxi Arts Institute, Deng Yuping's designs reflect the diversity of Guangxi's many ethnic groups. *Embellishment in Red* adopts colours and motifs traditional to the Zhuang tribe. These details complement modern three-dimensional tailoring and are combined with zippers, to give the garment a modern utilitarian touch.



# KEEP WATCH-ING

During September, the exhibition Swiss Accessory and Watch Design by HEAD - Genève came to HKDI with a vision of the future for watch and jewellery design

**H**KDI's exhibition of Swiss accessory and watch design, in collaboration with Geneva School of Art and Design (HEAD - Genève), brought an exquisite collection of refined watches and accessories produced by students and recent graduates of the world-renowned Swiss design academy to Hong Kong for the first time.

The exhibition at HKDI's Experience Centre, which included over 100 pieces, featured watches, jewellery, eyewear and leatherware designs. The exhibits were complemented by scenography by HEAD - Genève alumna Juliette Roduit, which paid homage to Hong Kong's heritage as a maritime trading hub and made reference to the treasures that have travelled from alpine Switzerland. The exhibition's opening also featured a guest lecture by HEAD - Genève Director Jean-Pierre Greff and jewellery and watch designer Nicolas Mertenat, who is a professor of product design and jewellery & accessory design at HEAD - Genève. The two speakers took the opportunity to introduce the latest style trends and most recent innovations in design and craftsmanship.

The exhibition highlighted the famed Swiss excellence in precision and craftsmanship, which HEAD - Genève continues to cultivate by providing students with mentoring from master watchmakers from brands such as Baume & Mercier and Piaget. HEAD - Genève is ideally located for students learning the craft of jewellery. According to Jean-Pierre Greff "Switzerland has a huge influence in the field of Jewellery and watch design. This is why HEAD has chosen to focus its training in Product design on these specific fields." That influence is built on Switzerland's long history of watchmaking. According to Elizabeth Fischer, professor in charge of fashion and jewellery design at HEAD - Genève, Swiss excellence in watchmaking dates back to "After the Protestant reformation, when the church banned jewellery, people were still allowed to wear watches, in fact watches were still allowed to be quite elaborately embellished." Timekeeping had previously been the preserve of the church, with bells tolling to tell the time, but with the development of the watch it became possible to own a personal timepiece.

Since the 18th century, Switzerland has been exporting watches around the world, often producing designs to match the particular cultural sensibilities of overseas markets. However, now that high-tech wearables are increasingly popular, is the traditional craft of watchmaking under threat? According to Fischer, "Technology is both a threat and an opportunity, the tech giants have strength in big data and networks, so designers must think out of the box in finding ways to blend craft and technology. Besides, many younger customers want something unfussy and functional, not everyone wants to wear a computer on their wrist." Fischer argues that "Jewellery is tied to ritual and tradition" despite all the technology surrounding us, "We still have relationships to others and live together with others, we exchange jewellery to mark special occasions and big life events."

According to Greff, "Switzerland remains the leader in fine watchmaking and upholds centuries-old practices always brought up to date in state-of-the-art developments. The productive link between engineering and design is a hallmark of Swiss design, and watchmaking is a good example. Switzerland has a long tradition of excellence in several fields of design such as typography and graphic design, furniture and architecture and, recently, game design. It's a small country, but its players reach far and wide thanks to high standards of education and work. The Swiss tradition is minimalist, cost-

## EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS



**Arthropode, Ring, Aline Sansonnens (2015)**

This collection of intricate jewellery pieces with intriguing mechanical elements combines the hues and textures of stone, metal and wood. These rings are designed to lead a double life, being worn on the fingers or sitting on a surface as ornaments. A refined example of sophisticated mechanical craftsmanship.



**Mädi, Leatherware, Jennifer Berger (2015)**

These handbags are constructed from cleverly folded sheets of leather, held together with decorative rivets. A rotating clasp references traditional Swiss folk art, not a single piece of stitching is used in the construction.



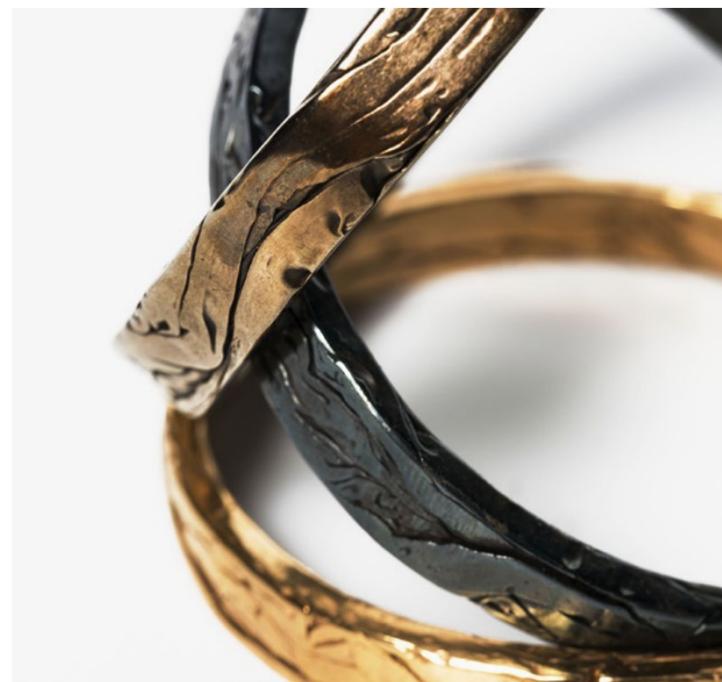
**Module-Or, Bracelet, Célia Marchianti (2013)**

The structure of this ring is based on Le Corbusier's "Modulor" unit of measurement for architecture and furniture, an anthropometric scale derived from the height of a man with his arms raised. The ring's expandable inner rubber loop allows the ring to fit any finger.



**Murmure, Watch, Seila Alvarez (2016)**

The advent of dusk, as it is signalled by a murmuration of swallows in the blue-pink evening sky, inspires this BA graduate watch collection. The centrepiece is an exquisite complication movement, while the collection features two simpler designs capable of showing dual time zones.



**CAN be beautiful, Bracelet, Juan Sebastian Galan Bello (2013)**

Embracing the growing influence of sustainable design, *CAN be beautiful* is the result of an innovative handcrafting process that transforms ordinary tin cans into a pliant material that can be worked into beautiful jewellery. Pieces are finished with red, yellow or blue-gold coatings, giving the material the sheen of a precious metal.



**Set Up, Shoe Accessory, Noémie Nivelet (2016)**

This novel shoe accessory allows the user to do away with shoelaces, replacing them with customisable metal, leather and wood ornamentation. The collection was among the top ten selection for the Accessory Design Prize at the 2017 Hyères International Fashion and Photography Festival.

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Their faith in the powers of invention and the manifold shapes that result is limitless. Their work constitutes a plea to keep boundaries open



**Jean-Pierre Greff**  
Director, HEAD - Genève

efficient, and based on reliable design.”

This tradition promises to keep the Swiss watch and jewellery industries in good stead. According to Fischer, jewellery and watch designers will need to be alert to the challenges and opportunities that new technologies offer, but there will always be a need for expertise and skill in fine craftsmanship.

Fischer went on to tell Signed that “This exhibition complements the two institutions’ ongoing collaborations and student exchange programmes.” And Jean-Pierre Greff agrees, “While HKDI and HEAD share common interests in the field of product design, specifically in the expertise of watch design, they both have specific expertise and skills to bring in. As far as HEAD is concerned, this helps broaden the students’ and professors’ vision on the evolution of design today in Europe and Asia. It’s indeed a great opportunity to throw bridges between cultures, outlooks and visions, share experience and promote mutual understanding.”

Greff also commented on the ongoing benefits of collaboration between the two institutions, “Thanks to this opportunity offered by HKDI, HEAD can specifically showcase the expertise of its graduates. It is also an opportunity to share with the public the various business and collaborative models set up by HEAD with industrial and brand partners. Designers are increasingly called upon to work globally, and exhibitions such as Swiss Accessory and Watch design by HEAD – Genève have a role to play in this international context.”

And the benefits of the exhibition go far beyond the two institutions involved. Greff explains that visitors were able “To experience the excitement of these young designers who, in spite of the fact that we live in a world overflowing with goods, have the capacity to keep on inventing creative and innovative ways of enhancing our daily lives with their product designs, who find beauty in the mundane, who value the past but interpret it with a twist, who dare to mix industrial processes with craft skills, engineering with poetry, the familiar with the unexpected, who find new paths for old ways, who place their hope in the future. Their faith in the powers of invention and the manifold shapes that result is limitless. Their work constitutes a plea to keep boundaries open.”

# INTO THE LAB ORATOR Y!

HKDI's new Media Lab is a platform where students can interact with the latest technology; a hub for exploring new ideas and finding new solutions

In recent decades, the media lab has become one of the most important drivers of innovation in the way we produce, share and consume information. Looking at the global context in which Media Labs operate, 2017 has been a massive year for technology. Tech fans have been given much to enjoy, from 360-degree cameras appearing on the consumer market like never before, to Microsoft's groundbreaking venture into mixed reality, which blends Virtual Reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technology. According to Fountry, a creative software technology design company, "Mixed reality is an overlay of synthetic content on the real world that is anchored to and interacts with the real world." Imagine pointing to your fridge and having a grocery list and recipe book pop up based on what's inside. Video content can be made to pop up alongside museum displays, or a talking head can appear and deliver extra context alongside any text the user looks at while using a VR headset.

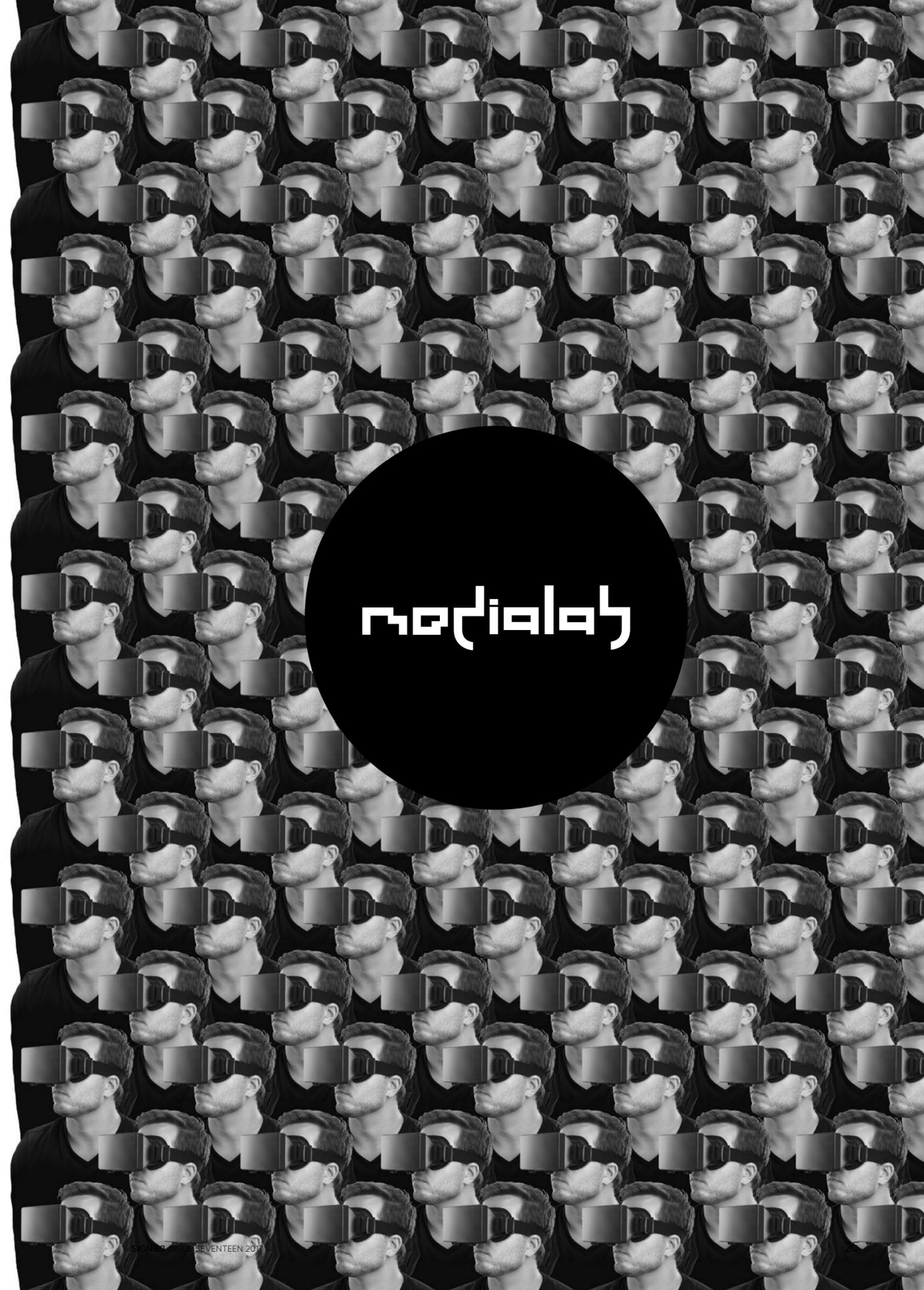
Virtual reality devices have become more accessible

due to the efforts of technology giants such as Samsung and Google, each of which has launched their own product. Samsung's VR headsets and Google's Cardboard, which blends your phone's high-tech screen with super-affordable low-tech accessories made from folded card, have made costly VR equipment obsolete to all but the most demanding consumers. Anyone can now choose to access one of countless VR experiences at a tiny cost. And this brings to light a peculiar phenomenon; the explosion of new technology, despite its obvious merits, has not been accompanied by same frenzy of press that announced the first iPhone to be "game changing". This indicates the skill with which designers in media labs around the world have been able to blend their designs into everyday life, to the extent that they often go unremarked upon.

The potential for innovation that media labs deliver is immense. The opportunities such labs bring are unpredictable and increasing all the time. The social networks Snapchat and Facebook are both set to launch



medialab





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The opportunities such labs bring are unpredictable and increasing all the time

AR art platforms in real-world locations in 2018, a race has developed between social media companies to incorporate ever more AR entertainment into their users' experience. Instagram has emulated features from Snapchat and Facebook has borrowed features from Instagram. The pressure to innovate, to be the first among the competition to deliver new features and to avoid being left behind by delivering homegrown versions of competitors' popular features, has propelled the development of new media technology at an accelerating rate.

Tech developed in media labs around the world has more practical applications too. Tech giants and startups alike have been quick to realise the educational potential of immersive VR and AR environments. For example, the Los Angeles startup Gliblix is using 360-degree live video of medical procedures to teach surgery to medical students. Dubbed "The Netflix of surgical education", Gliblix allows students to feel as if they are in the room while surgery takes place. Wearing a VR headset, students can pan around the operating theatre and focus on whatever details are most pertinent to their individual studies.

So, it is clear that media labs have become the 21st century's leading technology pioneers. The media lab at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) is now in its fourth decade. This lab focuses on how "Humans experience and can be aided by technology." The MIT lab has been examining the, currently quite primitive, state of VR avatars - which are a potential obstacle to delivering immersive, relatable VR experiences to users. The lab has developed "Bio-signal sensors" that detect the user's emotional state so it can be communicated via expressive avatars called Emotional Beasts. Through careful iteration and development of Emotional Beasts, the MIT team has pulled the VR avatar out of the uncanny valley and made VR more believable and more relatable.

And now, a new Media Lab is opening at HKDI. What sets the lab at HKDI apart from its peers, is a focus on technology that is down-to-Earth and that will be useful in everyday life. A great example of this ethos is the conductive paint project developed at the HKDI Media Lab by an exchange student from from ECAL (Ecole Cantonale d'Art de Lausanne). As its name suggests, conductive paint is able to carry an electrical current and can be applied to almost any surface; wood, metal, fabric, even paper. The project aims to capture all the user's senses; imagine a menu printed with conductive paint that can bring up a display of nutritional information when you run your finger over a listed item. Or how about a place-mat at an upscale restaurant that, when lightly tapped with a finger, can display a world map complete with information on the provenance of all the ingredients in your mushroom risotto?

The incorporation of all these features in everyday life is not meant to be gimmicky, but rather a real enhancement of your dining experience. This goal reflects a desire expressed by Olivia Yip, HKDI lecturer and the Media Lab's Associate Director, for her students, "When they're good enough as a designer, when we place technology in our everyday lives, the goal is for it to become seamless." The tech should be unseen. She likens this to the invention of the iPhone which, once hailed as a revolutionary device, is now seen as just another smartphone among the many available on the market. Sure, you can use it to shoot a film or write a novel, it can act as your personal assistant and lets you video chat with anyone anywhere in the world at any time. But Yip believes that the smartphone has become so embedded in everyday life that it is no-longer seen as a piece of technology, but as an extension of the self. She adds, "Your iPhone is half your brain. Without it, you wouldn't even know which class to go to next!"



As part of another project, Media Lab students are researching the application of virtual reality (VR) experiences in cinema. Yip notes that "We have a strong feeling that films are currently such a passive experience; in a world saturated with visual stimuli, movies are not as exciting as they once were. So, finding ways to capture the curiosity of the audience has become a really big and exciting thing for our students to explore." The project aims to explore the application of VR technology in the future of cinema in order to engage new audiences in immersive environments within a cinematic narrative. The research at HKDI centres around developing cordless technology that will allow multiple VR users to occupy a single virtual environment while interacting with realistic VR objects.

With online streaming services eating away at the market share of traditional cinema, film producers have long

looked for ways to entice people back into movie theatres. HKDI Media Lab aims to develop an unpredictable new type of experience that far exceeds that of gimmicky 3D cinema. In its current form, the project allows users to step into scenes from an archive of clips from the Hong Kong movie industry and, rather than passively watch, experience the movie from the point of view of the protagonist. The real challenge for the future is designing this experience to feel as seamless as possible.

Whether this research will result in the development of new technologies that will eventually reach mainstream use remains to be seen. For now, we can only speculate over what will be the next big thing in new media. But there's a good chance that it will emerge from HKDI's Media Lab, where the students' potential is limited only by their imaginations!

# DIFFERENT PATHS

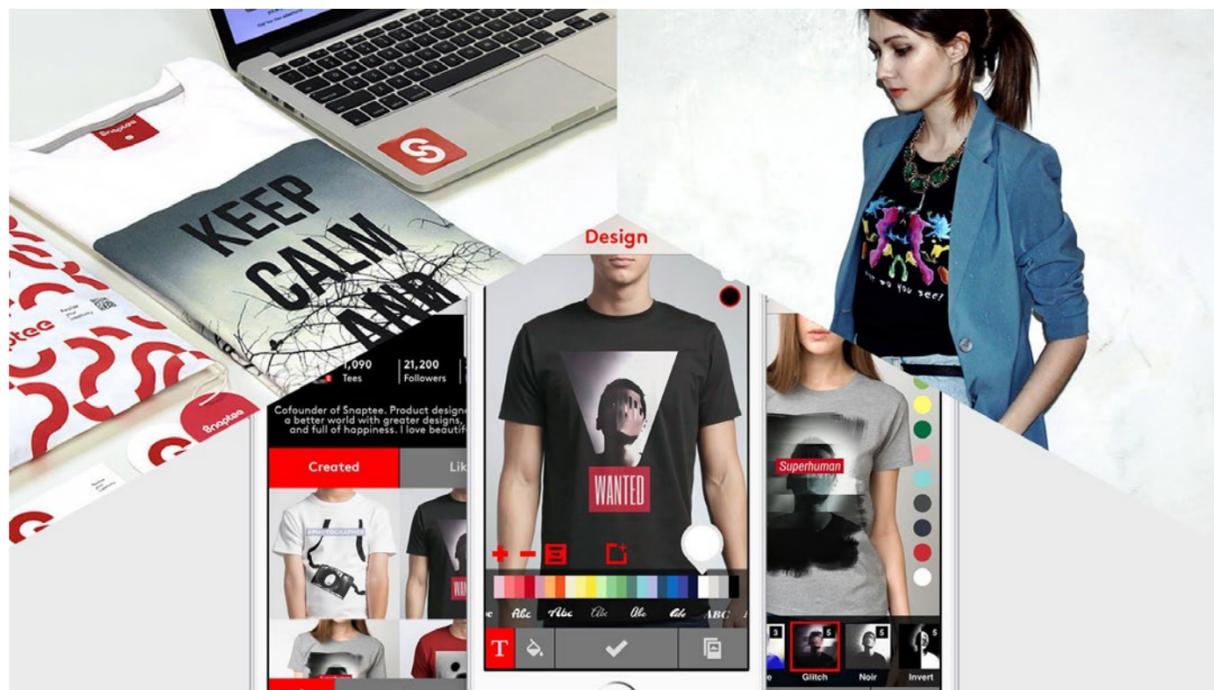
HKDI Alumni Gary Lee and Chak Yun Hei have both been quick to carve out promising careers in design, but each has had to discover their own path to success

## Gary Lee

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Design thinking is one of the ‘go to’ skillsets to found any startup

**H**KDI alumnus Gary Lee always knew he wanted to build something, “When I was a kid I used to tell my parents I was going to be an inventor. I think working on my own product and working on problems I like to solve as a full time job was always wired in my mind. So, starting a company was a natural step for me.” Having like-minded peers was a big benefit, “I grew up with a group of friends whose share a similar mindset, we always chatted about new technology, product ideas and business ideas.” As well as expanding his group of peers, HKDI helped Lee to apply his enthusiasm to a formal design process, he explains, “Design thinking is one of the ‘go to’ skillsets to found any startup. Research, defining the problem and developing ideas are all fundamental to a startup.” Lee founded Snaptee, a mobile app that enables you to create your own custom T-shirts with just a few taps on a smartphone, around five years ago. An advantage of working with a small R&D team, is that Lee is still directly involved in the development of his product. He goes on to say, “First of all I don’t consider Snaptee a success yet, we still have a long way to go. And, let’s face it, it’s not easy and most of the time it’s not fun.” However Lee says it’s important to “Do something you love, and which you are willing to do even without a paycheck because you will need your passion to overcome the problems you’re going to face. Having a good product is a requirement, but that alone will not automatically make your company success.”



## Chak Yun Hei

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Technology moves and changes so fast, before I moved jobs I asked myself ‘am I part of that change, am I doing new things?’

**A**fter graduating with a Higher Diploma in Product Design and Technology in 2001, Chak Yun Hei led a team at Canon Electronics Business Machines (H.K.) Co., Ltd. The role put Yun Hei at the heart of a huge corporation, where solving design problems was just one stage in a process that ended only when a product was packaged and shipped to meet a strict production deadline. At Canon, Yun Hei designed the X Mark II Calculator, winner of the Red Dot: Best of the Best 2013 award. Later, Yun Hei moved to TCL Corporate Research (Hong Kong) Co., Ltd as the Head of Design. “Now I have more freedom to pursue ideas,” he explains, “But increased freedom requires increased control.” He is a fan of Tesla’s tightly controlled but innovative design ethos, which he explains as “Design from first principles, focus on core values and functions.” Yun Hei’s change of jobs has been a turning point in his career which allowed him to reflect on why design and technology are important to him. “Technology moves and changes so fast, before I moved jobs I asked myself ‘am I part of that change, am I doing new things?’ Students should bear in mind that technological development is cumulative, in the next ten years, tech will develop exponentially. It’s important not to be left behind as what is designed today will be the basis of the designs of the future. Students need to be alert, pay attention to change.”

# Are you working well?

It is nothing new for employers to recognise the importance of a healthy and happy workforce. But now, new technology is changing the way that we approach wellness in the workplace.

In the US alone, around US\$8 billion is spent on corporate wellness programmes annually, and that figure is growing every year. This reflects an explosion in the size and importance of the global wellness industry. The term wellness has come to be applied to everything from fitness programmes to cosmetics, fad diets and alternative remedies - not all of which are directly related to the strict definition of wellness; “A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being [rather than] merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (terminology which the originators of the wellness movement borrowed from the World Health Organisation constitution). With this in mind, it is ever more important for employers to differentiate between trendy but ineffective pseudoscience and genuinely effective initiatives. After all, a workforce that is physically, mentally and socially healthy, is an invaluable asset for any organisation.

Technology has a role in making this important distinction. Data integration can deliver valuable insights into a company’s wellness programme in order to discover what works and demonstrate the specific impact of any strategy being put in place. The importance of data integration is proven by that fact that health insurance companies have started investing in digital health startups. For example, Singapore’s CXA Group, an employee benefits and wellness marketplace platform this year raised

US\$25 million in capital, in-part from RGAx, a subsidiary of Reinsurance Group of America. Meanwhile Guardian Life Insurance Company of America has invested in PokitDok, a software suite which delivers tools for making appointments with doctors.

The data collected on employee wellness represents part of a triad of technologies that are coming to define the current approach to workplace wellness. The other important parts of this triad are wearable tech and mobile applications. Wearable tech, including health trackers like Fitbit, are increasingly popular in everyday life. They also allow for easy collection of the employee health data that is so valuable to the employer. Barclays recently provided subsidised Fitbit devices to 75,000 of its employees as part of their Global Wellness Programme. In their most simple form, these trackers can count how many steps the wearer takes each day, while some models include heart rate monitors and even GPS tracking that can be used to record activities as diverse as running, cycling, kitesurfing or cross-country skiing.

Mobile apps are the final piece of the puzzle. While data integration and wearables can be used by the employer to monitor employee wellness and are useful in discovering what kind of wellness initiatives are useful, mobile apps provide the incentive for the employee to take part in the first place. This is achieved through the gamification



of wellness. Gamification is a range of techniques that has been applied to everything from the marketing of confectionery to the US Army’s recruitment programme. Gamification takes advantage of people’s natural desire for social activity by applying aspects of game design different areas of life. Want to learn a language quickly and easily? Turn it into a game.

The gamification of wellness keeps the employees enrolled in corporate wellness programmes engaged by turning wellness into a social activity and even introducing an element of friendly competition. Walkingspree is a gamification programme that uses a step-counter to let employees join in ‘virtual walks’ while still in the office, WeFitter similarly tracks how active an employee is throughout the day. Both involve an element of gamification. Both allow employees to see and compare their activities against those of their peers, providing encouragement, providing support through the social-network format of the app and - importantly - providing the small amount of pressure to join-in that keeps users engaged. As an added incentive, both apps are supported by health insurance companies, offering reduced premiums based on how active the user’s lifestyle is. And the extra exercise results in healthier workers, fewer days off sick and more profit for the employer.

If being pressured into doing exercise in return for more affordable healthcare sounds a little dystopian, then it is a relief to know that corporate wellness programmes are also addressing the happiness and emotional security of the employee. After all, a happy and stable employee is bound to be more useful to the company than a tired and stressed one. With this in mind, companies such as Google and LinkedIn give subsidies to their employees to subscribe to Headspace, a popular meditation app. And there are currently thousands of apps that aim to help the user maintain a regular sleep

pattern by helping them stick to a routine, tracking the user’s vital signs or even playing relaxing music as they drift off to sleep. And for employees turned-off by the gamification of physical activity, there are apps such as YouEarnedIt, a simple social app that gamifies emotional support, awarding points every time an employee posts a appreciative or supportive message to a colleague.

Wellness programmes are expanding to cover all aspects of the employee’s life. For example, more and more employers are recognising the importance of helping their workforce control their finances. While your bank balance may not initially appear directly related to wellness, it has an impact on everything from diet to stress levels, all of which has an eventual effect on wellbeing. At its most basic, a corporate wellness programme may include simple financial education, but it can also involve a variety of financial planning apps. OnTrees, the most popular financial planning app in the UK, directly accesses the user’s bank account, delivering warnings via their smartphone if they, for example, are spending too much on partying and will be left having to choose between paying rent and eating healthily by the end of the month.

With so many options available, there is one more important factor for employers to consider: the customisation of wellness programmes to suit the individual worker. Gathering data on what is effective and what is not can help here, but success requires insight from the employee themselves on what will increase their physical and emotional wellness. For technology-led corporate wellness programmes to remain credible, they must amount to more than corporate jargon and gameplay - the results have to be visible to the employee. When done properly everyone benefits from workplace wellness, from the shareholder to the office worker.





# Adventures in Space

A new way of approaching the design of office space, seamlessly combined with up-to-date technology, has been quietly revolutionising to the way we work



'Buzzihub' by Alain Gilles, an instant meeting room or personal cocoon.

**A**t a tech firm in Boston, the two-level office is linked by a metal slide, so employees on the upper floor can literally swoop into meetings on the floor below. In London, a digital technology company has installed whiteboards around the space for on-the-spot brainstorming - and a zero paper-storage policy (no archaic filing cabinets here.) In Wisconsin, a company that deals in micro markets - think upscale vending machines - made news earlier this year by inviting their employees to be microchipped; the upside - a scanner 'reads' the staffer's wrist, gives easy access to the building, and makes orders in the cafeteria a breeze to bill.

This is the face of today's corporate environments, where seamless technology, efficiently configured workspaces and boundary-pushing elements combine to create what experts describe as a place where communities can form. "I prefer to take a Utopian view," said Jodi Williams, associate vice president of CallisonRTKL, a global architecture and design firm which recently released a report entitled *The Future of Work*. "We are going to see the office as a place of community. It's not just where we work. It's a place where we come together to generate ideas and to be the company."

The first step, say architects, has been to bust through the conventions of a stereotypical office environment. So

where an office in the past might have had a reception desk and waiting area, a conference room, suites for executives and cubicles for everyone else, a tiny kitchenette hidden in the corner - that has all been turned on its head. So much so, in fact, that Brynne Rinderknecht, a commercial interior designer based in Singapore and New York, says that today's young workers are seeking "A collective experience, similar to what they can find at Burning Man," she said, referencing the huge alt-culture art and music fest that takes place once a year in the Nevada desert. "They want a space to find their creative flow."

Much of the evolution in office space design, says Rinderknecht, is owed to the way people today work: laptops or iPads instead of desktops, couches and coffee shops instead of desks - or standing desks instead of conventional seated ones. "People want more options to move their bodies around in creative spaces," she said. So offices are increasingly being configured to reflect that. Where possible, there are open airy spaces with greenery and lots of natural light, communal areas for quick meetings - which she describes as "Cross-pollination spaces" and little "Pods" where staffers can work quietly or take a call.

That was the overall approach adopted by Brent Zeigler, principal and president/director of design at Dyer Brown in Boston, and senior architect Karen Bala when they worked

CREDIT: ALAIN GILLES



on the company for which the signature piece of furniture is the slide. “It was one of the things they wanted to differentiate themselves,” said Zeigler. “As they are trying to attract talent in Boston, they needed something that would make potential employees walk through the space, perk up and say, ‘That’s different.’” It’s not just a gimmick, though; the designers say that staffers routinely use the slide.

Zeigler’s point underscores the general sentiment behind much of what’s happening in office space design these days; firms - especially tech firms - are in great need of talent. To attract, and retain top talent, they need to provide a compelling and innovative work space.

At their Boston project - a 60,000 square foot branch of French ad tech company Criteo, the client “Wanted the two floors to be activated by the groups on both floors,” said Bala, who sourced the slide from a company that specialises in adult - and not regular playground - slides. There are also pink cushioned cubbies where employees can cosy up with their laptops and get some private work in, as well as a ‘Zen Room’ for some true alone time.

“The building blocks of offices are essentially the same as they have been over the past 10 or 15 years,” said Zeigler. “What’s changed is the way they’re mixed throughout the floor. There is much more flexibility now and less of a line between front of house and back of house, between public and private spaces.” Bala agreed, stating that spaces are now “Less specific, and need to be more flexible.” A key word they use to describe how a business space should feel is

agile. A case in point - Reed Hastings, billionaire founder of Netflix, doesn’t have his own office at the entertainment behemoth’s Los Gatos, California headquarters. Instead, he takes meetings in one of the umpteen communal areas in the building, or in their sprawling restaurant-style cafeterias.

Technology has to be seamlessly woven in. So in place of a boardroom or meeting room where employees are fussing to connect with a video screen or a monitor, the room should be wired in such a way that participants can lock straight in and be able to easily share screens and other resources with their colleagues. And one thing that many office workers are asking for is personal climate control, with a way to maintain a specific temperature in a person’s immediate space. Also, the kitchen/cafe is a big central hub instead of a place where people stash their lunch and duck in to grab a quick cup of coffee. Indeed, in some modern offices, the kitchen area can resemble a genuine restaurant environment, even featuring a barista.

Certainly, while the argument could be made that these innovations might look right on-point in a burgeoning tech, creative or media firm populated by millennials and with oodles of venture capital funding, it’s easy to think that they might not be as practical for more traditional environments such as banking, insurance or medical practices. But Williams, of CallisonRTKL, says that the direction office environments are headed is more about effectiveness and keeping staffers productive than simply incorporating some nifty and cool new thing. “It’s fundamentally about a desire

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Any office space should incorporate a couple of key things at least, including good indoor air quality and access to daylight.

to drive productivity,” said Williams. “There has been lots of research about the impact of wellness and wellbeing and the end product that is the outcome of any business.” To this end, any office space should incorporate a couple of key things at least. These include good indoor air quality and access to daylight. Then, designers can predicate their plans on the idea, Williams said, of “Activity-based work” - a ‘Phone Booth’ for private calls or to take a break, formal conversation spaces, a collaborative work space. Going even further, she stresses the importance of furniture that “Supports the physical body.” This means seating areas where someone can comfortably sit with their laptop instead of having to hunch over. High-backed sofas can help break up a zone - and designers need to think about ways that a visitor to the office can be led through a space without distracting employees. “It’s important to think as much about what’s behind the person as what’s in front of them,” said Williams, adding that an oft-overlooked detail is how glare from the sun can hit computer screens in the middle of the afternoon.

Still, with all the cutting-edge innovations in an office space, designers warn against things becoming too casual, quirky or trendy. These are, after all, still places of business. “It’s not about putting in fun and games,” said Neena Verma, designer with New York-based design firm Mapos. “It’s about figuring out the goals of the company.” Like



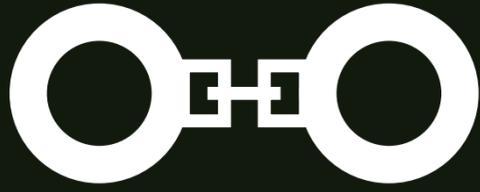
CREDIT: CALLISONRTKL

An office meeting space designed by CallisonRTKL



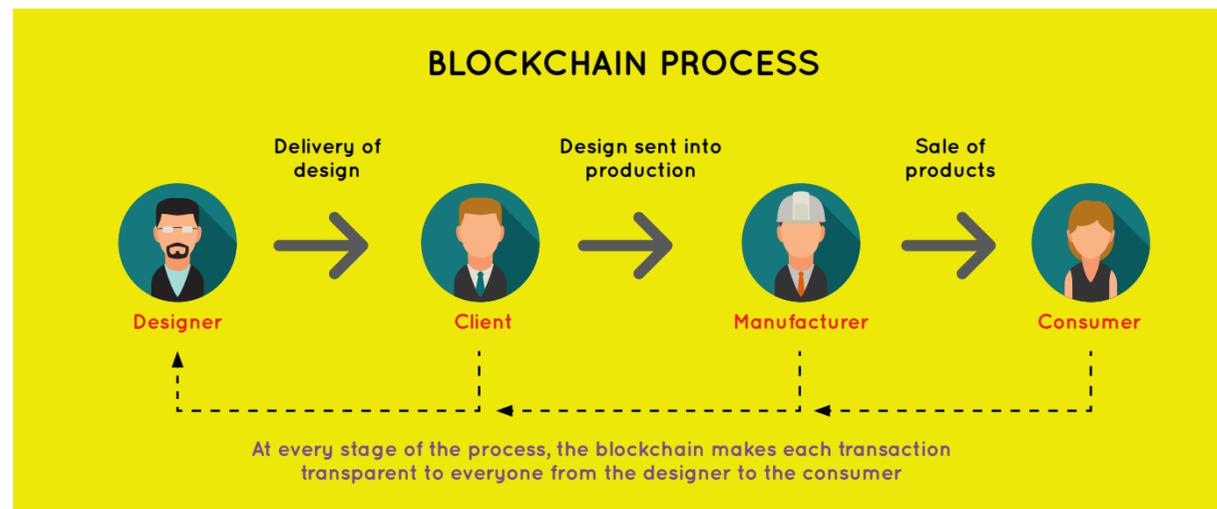
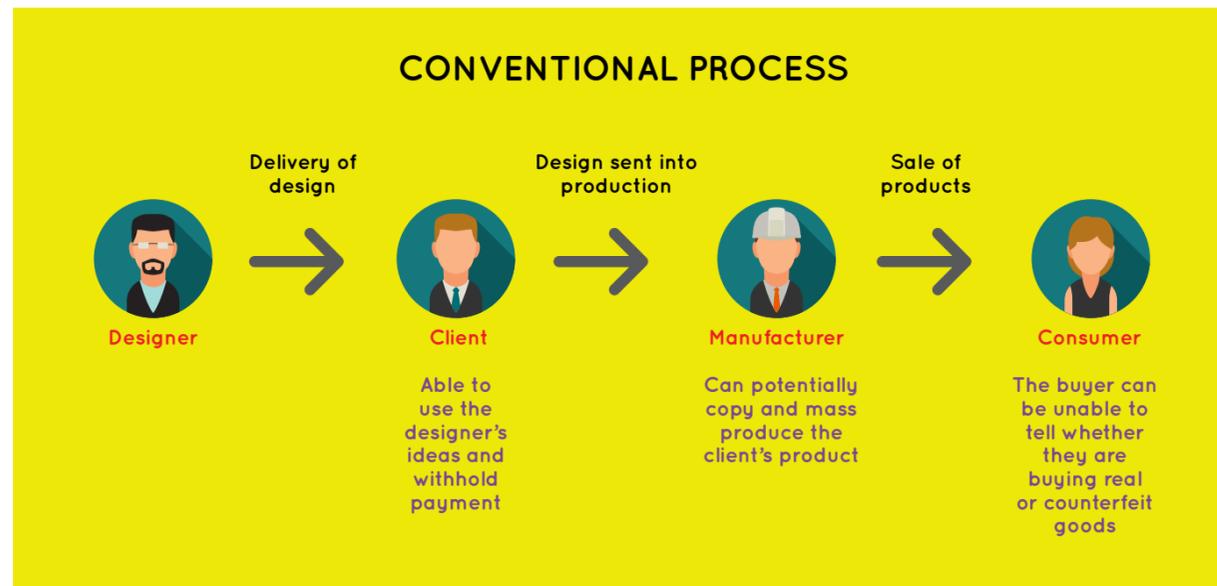
many designers, Verma rails against many of the cliches that have sprung up around contemporary work spaces - staffers whizzing by on skateboards, typing reports on a treadmill desk, brainstorming in a ball pit. “Some of those are things you see in the movies,” said Verma. “Regardless of the field, more people are embracing the idea of comfort, and having their employees feel comfortable, where there’s an eye towards colours that are soothing, or seeing furniture that’s a lot more residential in style than a typical office set-up.”

Ultimately, the most significant change is really in how a business views its space now, compared to years ago, where it might just have been a place to house people while they worked on outdated equipment and poorly-designed furniture. “It’s proof that more and more companies are seeing space as valuable to business,” said Verma. “It’s a way to treat talent and to increase efficiency, aesthetics aside. Businesses are becoming really aware in a wonderful way of how to use a space to their advantage. They are being adventurous but it’s dangerous to design for the sake of just being casual.”



# The Chain

Blockchain has begun to revolutionise the world of tech. Surrounded by digital technology, big data and social media, information has never been so readily available to us - but that information is often disorganised and inaccessible. Blockchain offers the opportunity to design new ways to organise that information and to put it to good use



The blockchain as misunderstood as it is revolutionary. A blockchain, isn't so much a new technology, as a technique for organising and communicating data. It has been compared to the invention of double-entry accounting, which allowed for the development of the financial markets that dominate the modern world, from commerce to politics. However, the blockchain has the potential to be applied far more widely than just in finance, and it holds the possibility of revolutionising the way that designers work together to complete projects.

Put briefly, a blockchain is a ledger of cryptographically secure records, known as blocks, that each contain the details of a transaction - whether that be a financial transaction or an exchange of information - a timestamp and a link to the block that preceded it. This ledger can be shared between an arbitrarily large number of users, and each user is able to contribute to the ledger. Most importantly, the blockchain is designed to be intrinsically secure. As all users have a copy of the full ledger and every block can be traced to the one before it, it is practically

impossible for a single user to fake a transaction without it being immediately detected.

Of course, the most widely-reported and broadly discussed application of the blockchain to-date has been a financial one; Bitcoin. Invented by a mysterious pseudonymous creator going by the name Satoshi Nakamoto, Bitcoin is described as a decentralised digital currency. It exists beyond the control of central banks and governments and, depending on who you ask, it is either the future of how we will all use money, or it is a ponzi scheme that is creating an unsustainable investment bubble and benefitting criminal gangs.

However, when we cut away the hype and hysteria surrounding Bitcoin, we discover that the underlying blockchain technology is finding new applications everywhere. The exciting thing about Blockchain is that it is a foundational rather than a disruptive technology. The internet is, for example, a disruptive technology; since its inception, the internet has enabled the disruption and reorganisation of industries from retail (Amazon and

Taobao) to transport and logistics (Uber and GoGo Van). Conversely, Blockchain has limited disruptive potential. Instead, as a foundational technology, it is enabling entirely new ways of working to be developed from the ground up. Applications already being explored include new types of insurance, data storage and retrieval, online voting... it's easy to see why these applications don't generate quite the same level of hype and enthusiasm that Bitcoin does; being inherently unglamorous and often technically impenetrable to the layman.

According to Burkhard Blechschmidt, Senior Director with Cognizant's Strategy & Transformation practice, many organisations make the mistake of approaching Blockchain "From the 'we have a new technology, now what can we do with it?' point of view." Blechschmidt cites the example of a leading automotive manufacturer that "Vetted 200 blockchain start-ups without investing in a single one." While there are many ideas floating around for disruptive uses of blockchain, "None (of those 200) could prove significant business impact and value."

On the other hand, in the world of design, Blockchain is starting to be adopted in genuinely useful ways. With an increasing amount of design work existing only in digital form, preventing the copying of a work and making sure it is attributed to the correct author is a problem that, until now, has never really been solved. Blockchain offers to change this state of affairs. Ascribe is a service for designers

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**Hyperledger exemplifies how designers can identify systematic design problems and use blockchain to design applicable solutions.**

and other creators of digital works - the system attaches a blockchain to any type of digital work, which acts as an impossible to forge certificate of authenticity. Every time the work changes hands, the blockchain is updated, acting as a rock-solid record of that work's provenance. Ascribe was created with digital artworks in mind; artists and creatives need to be able to keep track of who is using their work and get paid when it is used by others. It is an infinitely better system than relying on, for example, an auction house evaluator to authenticate and determine the value of a work. However, the principles on which Ascribe operates are even more useful in the design world.

The automotive industry relies on hugely complex design processes, with specialists working on the many disparate areas of car design from pneumatics to upholstery. Add to that supply chains that require parts to be manufactured in specialised plants spread around the world before being assembled into a finished product and shipped to markets around the globe and you get a picture of how complex it must be to track each stage of the process. And when a part goes wrong in a customer's

car, correctly establishing where in that process an error has occurred can make the difference between a quick fix and a costly product recall. Blockchain is the perfect solution to coordinating this whole process. The same principles being applied by Ascribe will allow designers and manufacturers to collaborate and communicate efficiently, even working across different continents. And this application of the blockchain is no-longer mere speculation. The automotive giant Daimler AG, which manufactures Mercedes Benz and Chrysler cars, recently joined the Hyperledger Project - a project led by Linux Foundation which aims to collaboratively develop open source tools using blockchain technology - with the specific goal of using blockchain to optimise the car design and manufacturing process.

Blockchain is not going to be a disruptive force that rapidly changes whole industries. It is a tool that can be used to make those industries work better. As such, it can be viewed as a design problem. Hyperledger exemplifies how designers can identify systematic design problems and use blockchain to design applicable solutions.

Here is a real-world example, which started with a problem identified by Grammy Award winning electronic music pioneer Imogen Heap. Heap, a long time advocate of digital technology with a particular interest in the potential for collaboration between digital artists explains that "A visual artist had all of his (online) videos taken down for using just 30 seconds of one of my songs. The label that exclusively licenses one of my songs likely had a bot looking for copyright infringement that automatically took it down." Using such bots is a brute-force method of enforcing copyright which has proven itself prone to scuppering many a collaboration between well-intentioned artists collaborating online. Moved by this situation, Heap formed Mycelia, a think tank dedicated to designing blockchain-based solutions that "To empower a fair, sustainable and vibrant music industry ecosystem involving all online music interaction services, to ensure all involved are paid and acknowledged fully." The problem to be solved by Mycelia boils down to information; data - in this case sound files - gets shared in huge quantities online that cannot conceivably be tracked manually. Automated data management - the bots Heap mentions - are currently the only solution. But when it comes to ascertaining who has the right to use which data and how, bots can only block users of that data en masse, inevitably causing issues for some users with a legitimate right to manipulate that data. Blockchain appears to be the only method that will potentially be capable of keeping track of all that data without locking it down and making it inaccessible to those who legitimately need to use it. As big data swirls around the internet, information has never been so accessible, but it has never been so difficult to manage. This is a problem that needs a design solution, and designers are increasingly looking to blockchain as the right tool for the job.

# Future-facing Retail

The data gathered using facial recognition is invaluable to traditional retailers with bricks and mortar stores; it is finally levelling the playing field between the data-gathering-led online retail giants and those still operating traditional retail locations. And as traditional retailers search for a formula that can help them survive in a digital future, a new online/offline hybridity is emerging

Imagine walking up to the cashier at a department store and, without presenting a credit card or handing over cash, simply flashing a smile by way of payment. It sounds absurd, but soon, you may find yourself doing just that. Ant Financial, part of online shopping giant Alibaba, is introducing a system that uses facial recognition to identify customers and lets them pay simply by smiling at a 3D camera. The system is already being rolled out; it's now available for diners at KFC in parts of China. This technology is one example of the growing use of facial recognition by retailers.

There are two main benefits for retailers using facial recognition technology; firstly, it allows security cameras to automatically spot known shoplifters and alert the staff. However, the application of facial recognition that promises to have the most profound impact is the ability to track the activity and habits of every individual customer. Here's a scenario; you enter a store for the first time, a camera sees your face and creates a new customer profile on a server. The shop's in-store WiFi picks up the presence of your phone and matches your profile to your online identity. Cameras track what items you look at in the shop and which parts of the store you linger in. When you go to the cashier and hand over your credit card, your profile is matched to a name, spending history, demographic details and so on. And then, the next time you go online, you're served personalised adverts based on what you looked at in the shop. The next time you walk into a shop connected to the same network, precision-targeted in-store promotions pop up on your phone screen and the cashier greets you by name.

This scenario relies on existing technology. While very few retailers are prepared to be forthright about the extent to which the above scenario happens in real life, a 2015 survey of British retailers showed that one in four UK shops use some form of facial recognition technology. And that figure is higher on some sectors than in other; 59% of UK fashion retailers now use facial recognition on their customers. The application of this kind of data gathering is changing the way we shop. But it is part of a process that has been going on for decades.

## BIG DATA TECHNOLOGY:

Long before online shopping became widespread, retailers with bricks and mortar stores used digital technology to maximise their profitability and to improve the experience of their customers. Over the past twenty years, those same retailers have raced to compete with a new generation of giant online marketplaces such as Amazon, eBay and Taobao. It was often a losing battle, fought on the online retailers' high-tech home turf. However, this competition for market share may be reaching equilibrium. And in the process, a new hybrid form of shopping is being designed that blends the best elements of the online and offline worlds. A hybrid of up-to-date technology and traditional marketing knowhow.

It is an indicator of how far we have become acclimatised to the sharing of our personal data, that back in the 1990s, supermarket loyalty cards were viewed with a level of suspicion that now looks quaint. Back then, the term big data had only just been coined, and the technology that makes big data possible was in its infancy. However, retailers were already realising the power of collecting information on consumers. By tracking a customer's shopping habits, it was possible to more efficiently target adverts and to design in-store visual merchandising that would persuade individual customers to spend more money. The payoff from the point of view of the customer was receiving special offers earned by spending money in-store. This was a driving force in the development of, now ubiquitous, networking technologies. However, the idea that retailers were tracking the habits of their customers generated a surprising amount of anxiety, which was openly expressed in the media of the time.

Since launching in 1994, Amazon has expanded from a specialist online book retailer to become the world's biggest retailer by total sales and market capitalisation, selling just about every product imaginable and flirting with everything from manufacturing their own electronic goods to launching experimental drone delivery services. In response, traditional retailers clamoured to launch their own online services and struggled to compete with the online giants. Even in the early days, those giant online retailers had already learned a lot from watching the bricks and mortar shops' experiments with big data. We're all familiar with pop-up ads telling us that "Customers who bought this product may also be interested in..." we've all browsed online for a particular product only to find every web page we look at afterwards swamped with adverts for that same product. Those are just the most straightforward manifestations of personal data being leveraged in order to target individual consumers and the most visible face of the technology that has been devised to manipulate and exploit that data.



Shoppers, however, have not become entirely inured to their personal data being shared, and this concern is still a factor that holds back the digital retail industry. Indeed, it is a barrier that is hard to overcome with technology alone. However, the scale of online retail gives an indication of just how much data is gathered by the likes of Amazon and Taobao; this year, online retailers had a little over 10% share of global retail sales, their share is up from 7.4% just two years ago and is due to increase by half again by 2021.

Regardless of the advances in computing and network technology driving the growth of big data in the retail industry, its aim remains the same; to gather market intelligence that will allow retailers to target shoppers with

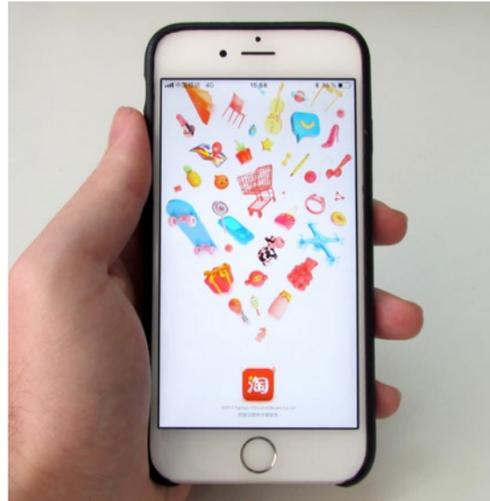
products that there is a high probability they will want to spend money on.

## BACK TO BRICKS AND MORTAR:

Clearly, online retail is far from reaching market saturation. Nevertheless, there is an increasing trend of online retailers, from the aforementioned retail giants down to sole-traders selling handicrafts, aiming to improve their turnover by, if not entirely eschewing the high-tech approach, at least combining it with investment in a real-world presence. The primary reason for this is simple; as one such retailer explained to Signed, "Real world presence creates a degree of visibility that generates sales later online." Investment

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The mainland Chinese population has embraced online life with Chinese survey respondents shopping online an average of 63 times a year, or 5.25 times a month



in this kind of pop-up presence presents a financial risk to a retailer of any size, but it is becoming an increasingly necessary risk if retailers are to stand out from the crowd - there is no more crowded marketplace than the internet. An added positive of such pop-up stores, is that shopping districts that were threatened with being eviscerated by competition from online retailers are being given a new lease of life by this vibrant new retail trend.

That online retailers are recognising the value of real world presence underscores the importance of designing a shopping experience that amounts to more than just browsing and purchasing. And this is an area where traditional retailers have the upper hand thanks to centuries of experience designing shopping experiences. This goes far beyond simple visual merchandising, involving architecture and systems design. In London, Burberry's flagship store on Regent Street and Ralph Lauren's New York Fifth Avenue store both now feature coffee shops, Hackett's London store even features a gin bar. Hackett's Managing Director, Vicente Castellano has described this as "A great incentive to increase browsing time and ultimately increase sales." However, not all retailers have such short-term views on the matter, George Graham, co-founder of designer boutique Wolf & Badger, has claimed that "For us, it's really about driving more footfall and more regular visitors to the store." For retailers who have invested in real-world presence, visibility is key, and from visibility sales will follow, online or off.

#### BUCKING THE TREND

In order to design a retail experience that encourages the maximum number of shoppers to part with their money, it is important to know what affects people's decisions on where they shop. Technology can help here, but technology alone is useless without a well designed strategy for its implementation. Luckily, there is a solid body of research to

inform this design process - much of which can help retailers deal with challenges unique to Hong Kong's shoppers.

A 2017 study by Hong Kong Trade and Development Council revealed that 51% of Americans prefer to shop online, while the mainland Chinese population has embraced online life with Chinese survey respondents shopping online an average of 63 times a year, or 5.25 times a month, a huge increase on the 1.43 times a month reported when the same survey was previously carried out in 2013. However, Hong Kong seems to be bucking the trend.

According to the Hong Kong Government's Census and Statistics Department only 23% of Hongkongers shop online, compared to 81% in the UK, 78% in the US, 73% in Germany and 67% in Mainland China. Furthermore, of those 23% of Hongkongers who shop online, online spending represents only 4% of their overall non-housing spending.

Concerns over data security remain the biggest barrier to the adoption of online retail in Hong Kong. When we approached them for comment, one Hong Kong based online fashion retailer reported, anecdotally, that over and above concerns about fakes or product returns, their customers expressed a distrust of online payment services such as PayPal. Despite PayPal being viewed as the industry standard internationally, in Hong Kong it seems to lack the popular recognition that it has overseas. While there are many other payment platforms available, the difficulty in persuading Hong Kong's shoppers to use payment methods that are standard in other countries stymies the attempts of overseas retailers wishing to expand in the territory. Meanwhile, 29% of Hongkongers who don't shop online said they would consider doing so if more payment options were available. Moreover, 30% of Hongkongers questioned cited data security as their main problem with shopping online, while a much smaller number of those questioned (22%) were more concerned about product



quality and accidentally buying fake goods.

This data, based on well-conducted studies by reputable organisations, is invaluable to Hong Kong's online retailers if they wish to use technology to design new shopping experiences. Those retailers have responded, like their international counterparts, by turning to real-world, on-street presence to boost their fortunes. However, where for international brands, improved visibility is the primary motivation for setting up bricks and mortar stores, for Hong Kong brands the reasons are led by research on local conditions; only 13% of Hongkongers cite not knowing which websites to use as a reason for not shopping online, and only 9% of consumers claim to find bricks and mortar stores more convenient than shopping online.

#### HYBRIDITY

The result of all of the above has been a new form of online/offline hybrid retail experience emerging in Hong Kong, designed to cater to the particular peccadilloes of the city's market. A prime example is Hong Kong-based clothing retailer Grana. Grana is primarily an online business, taking advantage of the ease of selling overseas and the low overheads that come from operating online. The company makes the most of Hong Kong's position as an international shipping hub to minimise the cost of importing materials and to maximise the ease of delivering goods to the US, Europe and the rest of Asia. However, the brand also operates a 'fitting room', an (almost) conventional shopfront where shoppers may try on clothes, chat with staff and get a feel for the brand. This all serves to overcome the specific concerns that evidently hamper online retail in Hong Kong - the 'fitting room' will even take returns from customers dissatisfied with their online purchase. The difference between the 'fitting room' and a conventional shop becomes apparent as soon as a customer wishes to make a purchase. At this point, the customer is led to a computer screen, where they must set up an account before completing the transaction online and arranging for their purchases to be delivered.

To see shoppers leaving Grana's 'fitting room' empty-handed, to go home and await the delivery of their new clothes, is a strange upending of the notion that online is more convenient than shopping in real life. However, the whole experience builds trust between retailer and consumer while also allowing the customer's data to be gathered. And as the buyer has to set up an account in the process, it is likely to lead to return custom.

#### PRIVACY CONCERNS

In the age of instant online availability of almost any item we could wish to shop for, it is more important than ever to design an experience that will aid the shopper in navigating the myriad choices on offer. Technology can help in matching consumers to whichever item they want to buy (even if they don't know they want it yet). It can help speed up transactions and improve customer service. But, these technologies are tools to be used wisely. With the adoption of facial recognition and other data gathering technologies, the same privacy concerns that hold back the growth of online shopping could easily begin to alienate the customers of traditional bricks and mortar stores. For example, a recent survey of shoppers in the UK found that 77% of respondents said they found the idea of a salesperson knowing their spending habits in advance, based on data gathered using facial recognition 'creepy'. On the other hand, that same survey showed that many shoppers appreciate the potential benefits that this technology could bring, such as personalised special offers. Retailers must strike a delicate balance in using this technology effectively; there is no way that customers can opt out of being scanned by facial recognition cameras once they are installed in the shop, and the last thing retailers want is to discourage people from entering the store in the first place. Even with all the technology now available, it seems that the personal relationship between shopkeeper and consumer is something that cannot be easily replaced.



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## years of Bauhaus

It's incredible that a few years of inspiration can continue to influence the world one century later. The Bauhaus School of Design was founded in 1919 and lasted only until 1933 when it was closed down under pressure from the Nazi party.

Its design principles of Streamlined Modernism have continued to remain relevant to this day, having such great flexibility that Bauhaus has become, without dispute, the most triumphant style of Modernist design and architecture.

In 2019, Bauhaus celebrates its centenary in a frenzy of exhibitions, talks and more. The Bauhaus school has influenced an array of the 20th century's most thoughtful artists and designers such as Wassily Kandinsky, Josef Albers and Mies Van de Rohe to name but a few.

In the run up to the eventful year, you can partake in Bauhaus' wide influence by spotting Hong Kong's last remaining Bauhaus building; the Central Market. Throughout 2019, a major series of exhibitions titled Bauhaus Imaginista will visit museums in China, Japan, Russia and Brazil, leading up to a landmark exhibit in Berlin's Haus der Kulturen der Welt. To experience this ever-evolving and highly relevant school of design, visit [www.bauhaus.de](http://www.bauhaus.de) for all the upcoming highlights.

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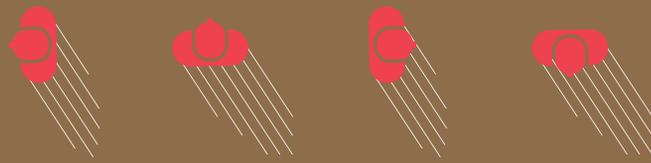
**Bauhaus design principles  
have continued to remain  
relevant to this day**

# Venus in knitwear

In September, Keith Kwok Kin Ming - 2017 HKDI Higher Diploma in Fashion Design graduate from the Department of Fashion and Image Design - was named overall champion at the 7th Hong Kong Young Knitwear Designers' Contest. His collection Transition of Venus takes its name from the extremely rare phenomenon in which the planet Venus passes between Earth and the sun. Transits of Venus always occur in pairs, eight years apart, with pairs of transits separated by long intervals that alternate between 121.5 years and 105.5 years in length. During its transit, Venus appears as a dark spot crossing the face of the sun.

Venus, usually the second brightest natural object in the night sky, is important in many cultures, revered in Roman culture as the goddess of love, sex and beauty. Neither a child of mortal parents, nor offspring of the gods, Venus was believed to be born from sea foam. Kwok's collection is inspired by the seascape, a grey, black-blue and golden colour palette is combined with various knitting skills to create a fractured texture that recalls the breaking waves of the ocean as well as the hot sulphurous surface of the planet Venus.





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