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The Designers

In the world's great cities, change is a constant. The most adaptable amongst us are often those who can predict life's shifting tides, but what of those people who help create the environments we inhabit, those spaces destined to create experiences, opportunities and aspirations for us all?

In this exclusive, we report on a roundtable discussion recently organised by Bespoke Careers and PRC Magazine, staged at House of Madison, the experiential retail platform to premium kitchen and lifestyle brands. Six of Hong Kong's best-recognised design professionals gathered to discuss the issues related to work at the cutting edge. Here we share the experiences and aspirations of the designers.



Participants

RUFUS TURNBULL	Director, Studio X
SERENE LEE	Director, The Gettys Group
ALEX BRAZIER	Creative Director, Lead 8
AINO KAVANTERA	Associate, PMDL
TOM HERRON	Principal, Hassell
PAMELA KEEFE	Vice President, HNI International
SHAN VALLA BRADLEY	Director, Bespoke Careers (Organiser)
MIKE STALEY	Publisher, PRC Magazine (Moderator)

The Modern Reality

The notion of what a designer does and where their place is within the construction community has evolved with the fabric of our societies. The outdated view of someone who creates attractive spaces, where appearance trumps function, barely reflects today's reality for designers at the vanguard of their craft.

Today's leading designers create experiences, both on the micro- and macro-scale. Whereas interior design was often focused on the cosmetic, today's professionals are expected to provide comprehensive design solutions that go well beyond decoration. Likewise, today's clients expect their designers to be solving complex problems related to the performance of their businesses and brand.

"As designers we need to become guardians of our client's businesses, acting on their behalf in order to give them a genuinely competitive market edge," says Studio X director of creative practice Rufus Turnbull.

Serene Lee who is a director at Gettys Group responsible for overseeing projects outside of the Americas, says she sees interior design, certainly as it relates to the hospitality and retail sectors, as becoming more sensorial, more about crafting the holistic experience. She says this inevitably means that design is becoming much more interdisciplinary and offers a lot more opportunities for collaboration with different people, is personally rewarding and delivers greater choice to clients.

Another who argues that the industry is increasingly widening is Pamela Keefe, a vice-president of HNI International, the world's second biggest furniture company. Keefe says that whereas the world of interior design used to be local or regionally focused, modern design has become much more global.

Service providers and designers are being placed by their firms around the world in order to bring specific expertise to projects, be they in the US, Europe or here in Asia. The group concurs that there has been a strong globalisation of the design sector.

Sense of Place

Each of the participants in the roundtable agree that Hong Kong and Singapore remain the key regional centres for design. The cities account for the big number of multinational organisations who have their headquarters in either city.

Alex Brazier is Creative Director at Lead 8, a recently established architectural practice specialising in master planning, interior design and large-scale retail projects. “I would probably talk about design more holistically,” he says. “I think Hong Kong is known more as a financial hub, and it seems that there is a cultural shift going on now as the creative industries gain more momentum. It’s actually an exciting time of development for Hong Kong, an opportunity to examine its own cultural identity as a city on the edge of China and a major regional hub.”

PMDL is an architecture, master planning and interior design practice with offices in Sydney, Melbourne and Hong Kong. PMDL associate Aino Kavantera says Hong Kong is known internationally as a trading centre, a commercial centre and certainly a shopping centre, but with retail becoming more about the lifestyle than the shopping, what is required are destinations that attract people to eat and shop.

Change Makers

“The market wants innovation,” she says. “It’s demanding it.” These changes in the marketplace ensure that it is an interesting time to be a designer.

Turnbull agrees. “The traditional idea of interior design has its origins in an approach that is primarily decorative, but due to greater market competition, this approach is being challenged and will ultimately be superseded by a design process that is defined by innovation rather than just appearance. Business optimization and brand performance are at the heart of this discussion.”

Kavantera agrees, adding that there is a curiosity in Hong Kong, a city that is open to anything new. “Perhaps there is a place for new things and a new food scene people haven’t tried before.” She says. “They embrace that enthusiastically, even seeing long queues forming outside of new venues. The market is definitely ready but it is probably not here just yet.” Although the population may embrace changes to fringes of the city’s social fabric, Hong Kong remains a conservative city and is much slower to change, according to Keefe.

Tom Herron is a principal at multidisciplinary international design practice HASSELL. “In interesting shift we are seeing is a movement away from design briefs that are being driven firstly and fundamentally by operational requirements. Organisations are more and more seeing the importance of a brand, DNA or culture not just being expressed and experienced by their clients or customers with commonplace expressions of branding or identity. Cultural identity must go beyond branding and manifest as a unique day-to-day experience for talent, as well as clients and customers. And, the operational models and briefs need to support this.”

“Hong Kong is still a regional hub that attracts top talent. As the regional economy continues to grow, clients have increasing pressure to differentiate their work, hospitality or retail environments from their competitors in order to attract the best talent, as well as new customers or clients. In-turn, there an increasing demand for innovation from the designers they engage to give them a competitive advantage.”



Considering Culture

How can the trend to a more experiential style manifest locally? Lee says it always goes back to what is culturally relevant. “Hong Kong has long aspired to internationalised design and this will continue,” she says. “What is becoming interesting is what you see contextually in say, Yau Ma Tei or in Tin Hau, I’m talking specifically about hotel experiences, small locations that are all about innovation and getting the local community involved and creating a very bespoke experience which pulls away from convention. Rather than the designers creating something new this allows evolution from within the community.

“In terms of cultural experiences, it’s all about local innovations. It’s about taking in and getting the local community involved, creating a very interesting experience, which is supposed to create affection, while leaving it to the community. We are not going to reinterpret it or redefine it so much.”

She says the era of big landmarks has passed. The only way to keep travellers coming back to Hong Kong is rediscovery, having new places to discover. Perhaps in this way Hong Kong needs to rebrand itself so travellers know there is much more to the city than half a dozen iconic tourist experiences.

Hearing Voices

Among the roundtable participants, there is an acceptance of a need to include different voices. Brazier notes that one challenge design professionals face in Hong Kong is the linear hierarchy and a seeming unwillingness to voice one’s opinion unless permission has been given.

“I think it gets really interesting when the clients get into a relationship with the consultants. Once you have gone through the process it is very much based on loyalty and trust. When you’ve crossed that bridge it can go really, really well and you get more benefit and often a lot more work from it,” says Brazier. “But you have to get through that difficult process first.”

While the larger practices are interacting with tertiary institutions, offering internships and other initiatives to gauge the brightest talent emerging into the market the speakers note that there are some dramatic changes afoot. Herron notes that at HASSELL, there is an effort made to design the work environment to help graduates ease from university into the work force.

Lee says: “The biggest challenge to recruitment is that nobody actually wants a full time job. They want to be consultants, freelancers. What young people crave now is constant change, they want the full experience.”



AINO KAVANTERA



TOM HERRON



SHAN VALLA BRADLEY



RUFUS TURNBULL

Work-Space Evolution

In an industry being buffeted by change, there is another potential layer of difficulty: the nature of work itself is also evolving.

“In Australia, you put 3,000 people in a building with no assigned space but everyone is comfortable,” says Keefe. “They work here, they work there and they take the spots they want. In Hong Kong, everybody wants their own space. It doesn’t matter if it is tiny but they want their own space.

“And there is more work-life blending here than anywhere else. It’s not this is my office, and this is my home. Everything is blended and because they work all the time. They are at their office but they are on Facebook, watching a video or playing music.”

The concept of space is linked to another more pressing concern for designers, that of sustainability. While Hong Kong and mainland China seem further behind North America or Europe, the opportunities in Asia – and Hong Kong, in particular – are substantial.

“When you look at what we do in terms of mixed-use developments, you’ve got an MTR station with a retail podium on top and residential towers above. The density of that creates a very efficient product for a city, and you can get accreditations you wouldn’t get in the West thanks to the physical makeup of Hong Kong,” says Brazier.



A Look Ahead

In an industry in flux, in a rapidly developing region with changing visions, perhaps the only constant is change. For the roundtable designers and their take on the industry, these are reasons to be excited. They see nanotechnology, 3D printing and artificial intelligence as the spur to revolutionise the practice of design by reducing costs and increasing design options.

“It gives us a lot of flexibility as well to do more,” says Keefe. “It used to be every furniture manufacturer, ‘No, you have to stick with standard sizes’. This is really going to change the industry and how we do the design, and give us flexibility. Even 10 years down the road, when you think about it, technology is exponentially growing.”

And that means continued disruption, but also continuing opportunity for new players, new ideas and continual reinvigoration. “The design consultancy market is evolving,” says Turnbull. “Over the past year or so we’ve seen the highest-quality, most progressively minded developers start to engage smaller, more agile design firms, who are coming into the market with fresh ideas. This is creating fantastic opportunities for both consultants and developers.”

设计。思

当代的现实

设计师工作范围及在建造业的位置，与社会基本结构一同演变。昔日认为设计师只懂创造花巧多于实际空间的看法，几乎无法反映当今顶尖设计师的实际工作。现今领先设计师以在微观和宏观尺度创建经验而自豪，室内设计昔日以美观为主，但当今的从业员须提供比装饰更高一筹的综合方案。同样地，现时客户期望设计师可解决关乎其企业及品牌表现的深层问题。

「作为设计师，我们需要为客户的业务担任护航角色，替他们营造真正有竞争力的市场优势。」Studio X 创意总监 Rufus Turnbull 先生说。

Gettys Group 美洲地区以外业务董事 Serene Lee 小姐表示，她认为室内设计，尤其是零售及款待业，变得日益感官化，更强调塑造整体体验。她指这必然意味着设计逐渐跨领域，提供更多机遇让各种专才合作，达至个人成就感之余，亦使客户有更多选择。

另一位认为设计行业日益扩阔，是世界上第二大家俱公司 HNI International 副总裁 Pamela Keefe 小姐。她观察到室内设计以往曾经是当地或区域为中心，但设计全球化已成大趋势。服务供应商和设计师们受客户或雇主派遣到世界各地，无分美国、欧洲还是在亚洲；席间无一不同意设计全球化趋势的锐不可挡。

变幻往往是世界上最优秀城市的生存之道。当中适应力最强，就是是那些可洞悉先机之士，但又该怎样评价那些协助创造我们所居住的环境，缔造为大众塑造体验、机遇及实践抱负的人？

最近《PRC 建设》与 Bespoke Careers 在湾仔一间豪华家具及厨具品牌专门店 House of Madison 中，联合举办了一次圆桌讨论，集合了本地六位优秀的设计专才，一起讨论及分享如何保持行业的领先地位。本刊非常高兴地可以和读者分享这几位设计大师的经验与未来前瞻。



MIKE STALEY



SERENE LEE



ALEX BRAZIER



PAMELA KEEFE



塑造目的地

会议的出席者均表示同意，香港及新加坡仍然是亚洲区内的主要设计核心，分别在两地设立总部的跨国机构占大多数。

Alex Brazier 先生是最近成立、善于总体规划、室内设计及大型零售项目的建筑事务所 Lead 8 的创作总监。「我会以较全面角度看待设计；我觉得香港一直以来作为金融中心的地位广为人知，然而出现了文化转变令创意工业逐渐抬头。香港正处于关键时刻，可借机审视自身作为中国沿海城市及主要亚洲枢纽的文化身份。」

PMDL Architecture + Design 是一间集建筑、总体规划及室内设计事务所，分别于悉尼、墨尔本及香港办事处。公司代表 Aino Kavantera 小姐表示，香港在世界素享有贸易中心、商业中心及购物天堂美誉，但随着零售开始讲究生活方式体验，脱离纯购物模式，需要设立可吸引人流的餐厅及商店。

改革为未来

「市场想要创新，而且渴求强烈。」Kavantera 说。市场上的变化令设计师面临翻天覆地的革新。

Turnbull 同意上述看法：「室内设计的传统概念以装饰性为主，这种手法现时正面临挑战，最终会被由创新而非外观作主导的设计过程所取代。业务优化和品牌形象正是这次讨论的核心。」

Kavantera 女士同意，并认为香港对新奇事物接受程度高。「举例说，某处有一些大家从没尝过的新玩意或新食品，港人总会趋之若鹜，大排长龙也在所不计。市场绝对准备就绪，但这种购物革命尚未出现。」尽管港人或会接受城市社会结构边缘上的变化，但骨子里香港仍是个保守的城市，改变步伐缓慢，根据 Keefe 的看法。

Tom Herron 是跨领域国际设计事务所 HASSELL 的主理人。「有趣地，我们看到有些趋势不再首先根据营运需求主导来设计项目。公司越来越重视宣扬品牌、DNA 及其文化，多于由顾客的体验来表达其品牌特征。文化身份必须超越品牌建立，为我们客户及其顾客打造出独特的日常经验，并由营运模式及指引负责支援。」

「香港仍然是可吸引顶尖人才的区域枢纽。随着亚洲区经济继续增长，我们的客户受到越来越大的压力从竞争对手的款待、工作及零售环境中突围而出，以图吸引最优秀人才以及客户。反过来，大家对所委托的设计师创新的需求日益增加，以求获得竞争优势。」

文化因素

那该怎样做才可以令相对实验性风格在香港大放异彩？Lee 指出成败系于能否与当地文化产生共鸣。「香港对国际化设计一直有强烈偏好，而这习性将会继续。有趣的是，试举例说，油麻地或天后的酒店体验，虽然地方不大，但强调创新及与当地社区参与，缔造度身定制的体验，与一般传统酒店截然不同。这亦并非设计师由零创造，而是在社区内演变出来。

「就文化体验而言，全部都与本地创新有关。关乎采纳地区元素、社区参与，以创造别开生面的体验，目的是创造互动同时回馈社会。我们并不打算大幅度重新诠释或重新定义。」

她续说：「大地标时代已经过去，令旅客重复到访香港旅遊的唯一方法，就是重新发掘景点。也许香港须重塑其品牌形象，令旅客认识除了那几处必去必做的目的地，本地还有其他引人入胜之处。

翻译：Jasper Lau

集思广益

各出席者莫不同意容纳不同声音之重要。Brazier 留意到香港的设计专业人员共同面对的难题，是由上到下的管理架构，及似乎除非得到同意，否则避免表达个人意见。

「我认为客户与顾问建立关系，过程完成后就是基于忠诚与信任。双方若达到合作无间，必会如鱼得水，既有莫大得益之余，生产力亦大大提高，但前提是须先通过这艰难的过程。」

当大型事务所忙于与各大学互动频繁，提供实习机会及其他举措以抢先拣选行业明日之星，一众讲者均同意未来将会掀起大变化。Herron 以自己的事务所 HASSELL 为例，尝试在设计工作环境上让毕业生顺利过渡成就业阶段。

Lee 解释说：「招聘的最大挑战是没有人真正想要一份全职工作。他们都想当顾问或自由职业者。年轻人现在渴望的是不断变化，他们想要完整的体验。」

工作空间演化

设计作为不断演变的行业，还面对另一层潜在困难：工作本身的性质正不断变更。

「在澳洲你把三千人放进一幢没有分配固定工作间的大楼，但每个人也觉得舒适自在，他们可随意选择工作地方，只要有空位便可。但在香港，每人都希望拥有私人空间，即使很小也没关系，最重要是有自己小小的一片天。」据 Keefe 观察所得。

「但香港的工作及私人生活界线比世界各地都模糊。这并不是『这是我工作的地方、那是我的家。』的这般意思。而是所有日常东西都已混在一起，因为大家无时无刻也在工作。而上班族在办公室内里面，也可以和朋友在脸书、看网上视频或玩音乐。」

空间的概念连结到另一个对设计师更为紧迫的担忧，就是可持续性。虽然香港和中国内地似乎落后于北美或欧洲，但这方面的机遇在亚洲，特别是香港乃非常庞大。

「你看看我们对混合式项目所作的规划，港铁站上方建有零售群楼，再上是住宅大厦，其密度从城市发展角度显得非常具效益，同时多得香港的稠密环境，亦会获得一些西方国家并无提供的认证。」Brazier 先生解说。

展望将来

设计行业时刻受冲击，亚洲区发展方兴未艾，愿景不断演变，只有变幻才是永恒。出席的嘉宾对未来路向无一不感到兴奋。他们认为纳米技术、3D 列印技术和人工智慧技术将透过降低成本及大幅增加设计选项，革新设计行业。

「这将赋予我们极大灵活度及更大发挥，昔日的家俱制造商总是坚持：『不！你们必须恪守尺寸大小。』以上的科技将彻底打破框框，如何做设计及给予更大弹性。你试想想十年后，科技将以几何级数提升。」

而可能意味着继续的破坏，但同时为新加入者、新构想及持续活化提供丰富土壤。「设计顾问市场正不断发展，在过去一年左右，我们已经看到最优质、最前瞻的发展商开始聘请更小型、更敏锐的设计师事务所，他们为市场带来新冲击，这将为发展商及设计顾问创造更多机遇。」Turnbull 分析说。



为个人家庭及社交而伸延之设计，House of Madison 大大超越了传统展厅的限制。在这个富艺术感和吸引力的空间中，可激发创新思维，品牌的创作可以与来宾一起体验，感受与别不同的生活概念。

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