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TONY LUK KNOWS THAT STYLE IS MORE THAN
JUST BUYING THE LATEST AND THE LOUDEST

Dressed in solid black, Tony Luk emerges from the back of the Andante furniture showroom and takes a seat on a low white sofa. Instantly, the shop's director and his environment seem to match perfectly, with the solid, neutral tones of the furniture and his wardrobe harmonising into an aura of confident restraint.

Then one notices the purple shirt and white blazer combo neatly laid across a patterned Minotti sofa beside him. It's an indicator of what's to come – teal pocket squares, white piping and orange accents on the inside of his glasses. It's a sharp diversion from the generally monochrome appearance that Luk typically tends to champion. And if the sofa is anything to go by, so too is the new collection Andante is about to reveal.

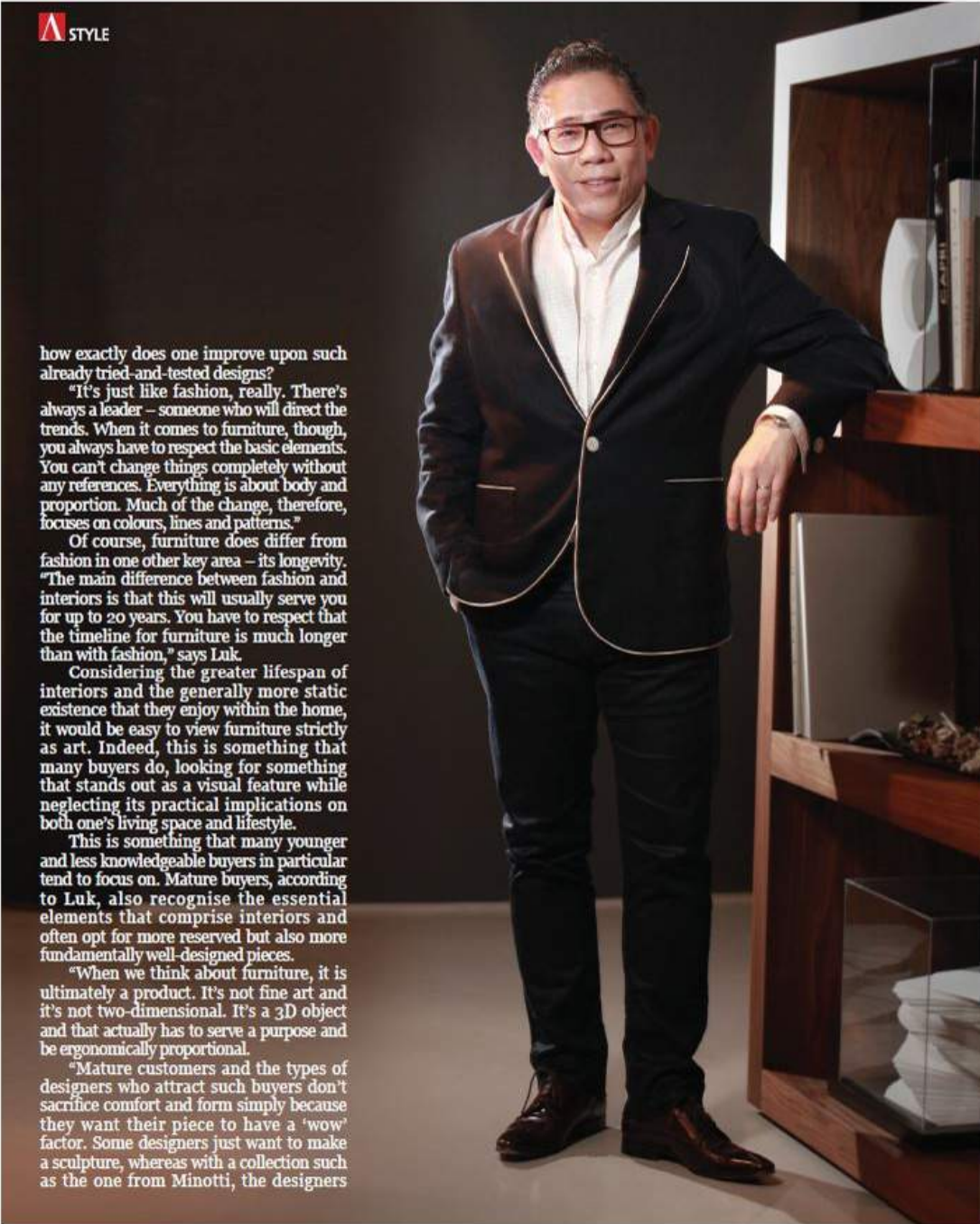
"We're just waiting for the latest collection from Minotti," says Luk. "Usually all the new collections come straight from the Milan fair in April. After the delivery and construction, we're usually ready to showcase them in the middle of summer. We're lucky to have had a few of those pieces in the showroom for a while already."

"The new collection for this year is particularly exciting. It's got a lot of 1950s and 1960s references with some lovely colours and incredible patterns. Minotti usually tends to go for something a bit more subtle and tame, but this year you can see a new trend of minimalism and an incorporation of styles from past decades. This will add a bit more excitement and the tones and textures will be more bold than the previous styles."

Luk sees this as being the main trend for the coming year. As with any product or collection, ideas and styles are constantly changing and evolving and new forms are always emerging onto the market.

That said, the essential elements that comprise a piece of furniture have mostly remained relatively unchanged. A table, whether it is from 2013 or 1713, is still immediately recognisable as a table. A sofa is a sofa, no matter the styling and a chair is a chair. In such an established and unchanging field as furniture,





how exactly does one improve upon such already tried-and-tested designs?

"It's just like fashion, really. There's always a leader – someone who will direct the trends. When it comes to furniture, though, you always have to respect the basic elements. You can't change things completely without any references. Everything is about body and proportion. Much of the change, therefore, focuses on colours, lines and patterns."

Of course, furniture does differ from fashion in one other key area – its longevity. "The main difference between fashion and interiors is that this will usually serve you for up to 20 years. You have to respect that the timeline for furniture is much longer than with fashion," says Luk.

Considering the greater lifespan of interiors and the generally more static existence that they enjoy within the home, it would be easy to view furniture strictly as art. Indeed, this is something that many buyers do, looking for something that stands out as a visual feature while neglecting its practical implications on both one's living space and lifestyle.

This is something that many younger and less knowledgeable buyers in particular tend to focus on. Mature buyers, according to Luk, also recognise the essential elements that comprise interiors and often opt for more reserved but also more fundamentally well-designed pieces.

"When we think about furniture, it is ultimately a product. It's not fine art and it's not two-dimensional. It's a 3D object and that actually has to serve a purpose and be ergonomically proportional.

"Mature customers and the types of designers who attract such buyers don't sacrifice comfort and form simply because they want their piece to have a 'wow' factor. Some designers just want to make a sculpture, whereas with a collection such as the one from Minotti, the designers

know that this is something that you will have to look at and use for a long time. The basic ingredients all have to be correct.

"Because of that, they tend to appeal to customers generally above the age of 30. Plus, having travelled a lot and having a lot of life experience, they can see certain repeating elements – things that can be trusted and colours that they like to see in a clean environment.

"It is interesting, though. One would think that having travelled so much, people would have an immense library of elements in their mind and would feel compelled to mix all of them together.



our customers otherwise it might not end up being a very nice cocktail.

"Mixing and matching has to be done very wisely and very sensitively. If it's just a jumble of different forms, colours and patterns then it won't be at all balanced.

"You need to know what the main feature is and what the complementary ones are. It's just like how one dresses – if you have a dark coloured suit, you have to complement that with, say, a bright shirt or accents on a pair of glasses. But if you start to do something along the lines of Andy Warhol – consistently colourful and consistently wild in form – and mix that with other wild elements,

“The difference between fashion and interiors is that interiors will serve you for 20 years. You have to respect that timeline”

But when you're past the stage of being inquisitive and you've seen enough to know what looks good together, you go back to your roots.

"It's a sort of visual learning curve of lifestyle experience. Some things you simply don't change, because they are already so well-defined and well-tested. They're there and you know that they are right."

One constant that Luk feels is particularly good to fall back on is the use of lacquer. The sleek, shiny surfaces and the range of colours that the material allows for give pieces a lasting look of modernity. "The contrast and the complementary nature of having a harsh, cold surface with a warm, plush one also make it a good element to have as an accessory."

It is this sort of assemblage of disparate elements that is becoming increasingly popular among buyers. Less common is the practice of bringing together matching furniture from a single collection. Instead, Luk says, people prefer to take different pieces from varying backgrounds and link them together based on their essential features.

"I've found that customers have a mix-and-match mentality. This term is widely used, but buyers really do have their own character and lifestyles. People are more exposed to art, form and fashion and they like to mix it up. Of course, it's in this area that we try to help

it will just get a bit confusing. You have to focus and embrace that with other complementary elements.

"It's important to always have a reference point. Even if it's, say, a black headrest, it has to reference something else in the grouping. When you link things together subtly, that level of detail is long-lasting and timeless. People find excitement in seeing that a set-up looks good, but then looking into the second and third layers and noticing that there are a lot of rudiments and rules. You just have to look beneath the surface to find them.

"Nowadays with interior fashion houses, designers allow space for the mature and well-advised clients to play with some of the elements. It makes it a lot more fun."

Combining together different elements to suit your personal needs also serves another function, one that is particularly appropriate for a city such as Hong Kong. Space – or a distinct lack thereof – creates constraints that have to be worked within. In this way, Luk feels that Hong Kong has developed its own particular brand of awareness and understanding when it comes to interiors.

"Any major city has its own style and DNA. It comes from a long-term evolution of society and it forms a distinct design context.

Opening spread: This year's trends incorporate styles from the past, according to Luk; Opposite page: Luk feels younger buyers neglect the practical implications of furniture; This page: Luk believes that mixing and matching has to be done wisely



“ Respect your space. What you see in a magazine or in a film won't necessarily give you the same result in your own home ”

Text: Craig Bright | Photos: Nic Gaunt

This page: Luk believes that interior design in Hong Kong references both European and Asian styles

“From a design point of view, generally people in different cities like different things because it relates to their individual culture. Hong Kong, as an international and East-meets-West kind of city, doesn't tend to go for a totally European or totally Asian style. It has references to both.

“When it comes to space, what's significant is the scale. Hong Kong being Hong Kong, we have to miniaturise a lot of items, but the basic ergonomic proportions cannot be changed. You can miniaturise the scale, but then it wouldn't fit the people.

“Therefore in Hong Kong, because of the limitations of most peoples' apartments, buyers have to make harder decisions. They have to be wiser, and from our point of view, we have to work harder. You have to present the scale and the form, but you always have to be aware of the four walls.”

It's a significant departure from the attitude of those whose furniture Luk is currently showcasing – the Italians. There, space and history combine to give a much freer hand when it comes to creating unique interior spaces. It also helps, says Luk, that Italians tend to possess a natural flair for design and creative expression.

“In terms of style, when you look at Italy they are much wilder and more open-minded. Design is in their blood and they don't really need a tape measure to ensure the proportions are all correct.

“Showrooms in Italy can often be a lot more avant-garde – they don't have to visually link their pieces in order to make it look consistent. They have a fun element that we try to incorporate and emulate, but we still have a gap between the Italian design mind-set and the Hong Kong mind-set. They have the skill and the space to be more playful.

“In Europe, you'll find that people play with historical lines. You have old buildings that look as though they're about to fall down, but have incredibly luxurious interiors.

“In Hong Kong, we don't have that. We have a short history – architecture and interiors are all very new and there aren't that many buildings much older than 30 years old. People are more interested in having the latest and the newest, whereas the West tends to be more concerned with preserving its history and adding to it.”

Having said that, Luk's main piece of interior decor advice for people in Hong Kong doesn't involve preserving history or developing more eclectic tastes. In fact, he's reluctant to offer anything that could be described as a single, over-arching nugget of wisdom on the topic of furniture.

“I think it would be too arrogant to give a single piece of advice to clients. After all, they're people with experience. However, you do need to respect your space. What you see in a magazine or in a glamorous film won't necessarily give you the same result in your own home.

“Space is three-dimensional, and one thing many people forget is height. Height plays a major part in the perception of space and proportion. So, know your space in the same way that you know your own lifestyle. If you have cats and dogs, young children or you throw wild parties with people coming and going, consider that. All of those elements will influence your choice of furnishings. After all, the purpose is to give you comfort. Once you've found that, then you look at the style.

“Another thing I would highlight is adding lights to your room. Whether it's artificial or natural, light will have a big effect on the eventual result. Also look at basic things such as the architecture and alignment of your building, what sort of views you have, and the relationship between what you see outside and what you want to recreate, echo or contrast inside.

“There are always lots of questions, so I suppose the best piece of advice I can give would be to simply ask, ask, ask. Know yourself, know your space, and then add your style to it.”