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## REGULARS

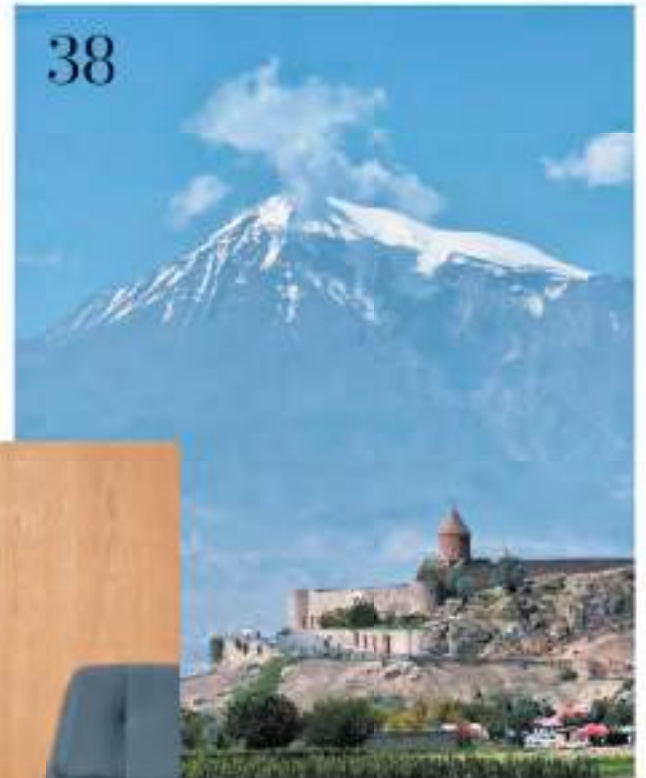
- 5 EDITOR'S LETTER  
Cui Nelson on working with your hands
- 11 MY LIFE  
Artist and tattoo studio owner Mr Koo
- 12 ARTIST'S STUDIO  
Nicole Wong talks clarity through crystals
- 34 INTERIORS  
A Hung Hoi couple bring home a taste of Mumbai
- 38 TRAVEL  
A round-up of the best places to visit in 2025
- 40 FOOD  
Hong Kong's love affair with ice cream heats up
- 42 THEN & NOW  
Local Portuguese get long overdue recognition

## THE AGENDA

- 6 ON OUR RADAR  
The "Notre-Dame de Paris, The Augmented Exhibition" brings the iconic cathedral to life
- 8 NEW OPENINGS  
The buzziest places for your hit list
- 10 YOUR PERFECT WEEK  
The best things to do in Hong Kong



Cover image: Jesse Hao Lap-hang (left) and Charis Mok Shu-wai from Zou-Mat design studio, photographed by Jocelyn Tam



## FEATURES

- 14 HONG KONG WOODWORKERS  
How a handmade revival is elevating a local craft
- 20 A CHAT WITH JO KOO  
The veteran actor on her latest role in Philip Yung's true-crime film *Papa*
- 24 SYDNEY'S WHITE RABBIT GALLERY  
Billionaire owner Judith Neilson is taking art to the masses – for free
- 30 EASTER ISLAND ECLIPSE  
Watching a "ring of fire" on Rapa Nui



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DIGITAL PRODUCTION EDITOR

**Leanne Mirandilla**

CONTENT MANAGER,

SOCIAL MEDIA

**Stephanie Miu**

PROJECT MANAGER

**Thomas Chang**

For editorial inquiries, contact: [postmag@scmp.com](mailto:postmag@scmp.com)  
For advertising inquiries, contact: Belinda Tse at 2565 2438  
or [belinda.tse@scmp.com](mailto:belinda.tse@scmp.com)  
Address: 21/F, Tower One, Times Square, 1 Matheson Street,  
Causeway Bay, Hong Kong

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## EDITOR'S LETTER

**T**he romance of “working with your hands” is real. Sure, we all work with our hands in a sense – even us monkeys trying to coax Shakespeare out of keyboards. But there’s an inarguable difference between the furious finger-twitching that comprises the bulk of my day and the kind of physicality of work that transforms rough, raw materials into beautiful objects.

In our cover feature, Christopher DeWolf visits five of the studios behind a new wave of woodworking in Hong Kong (p14). While the stories of how each of them came to the craft varies, a common thread is the pull to make things with their hands. The result? A range of pieces that runs the gamut from arresting to playful, such as Filip Winiewicz’s gorgeous, towering sculpture of stacked wood blocks or Ken Chow Kin-lung’s upmarket but still whimsical take on plastic stools. It’s a craft that most certainly blurs the line with art.

Firmly in the world of art is Australia’s White Rabbit Gallery. Billionaire Judith Neilson opened the Sydney space 15 years ago and since then has amassed more than 4,000 pieces of contemporary art from around 800 artists across mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, writes Aarti Betigeri (p24). Neilson is a fierce advocate for artistic talent in this part of the world – so much so that she’s made the sprawling gallery, displaying her private collection, free to the public. One for the Sydney bucket list.

Easter Island is also one to put on the list – and not just the island, but the island during an annular solar eclipse. Jamie Carter, who chases the “ring of fire” all the way to the Chilean territory (p30), describes the almost addictive pull of an eclipse. When is the next one, he and his fellow eclipse-chasers immediately ask. I remember the same feeling as I watched my first eclipse at Hungary’s Lake Balaton in 1999. It’s a strange sensation when the world suddenly falls into darkness.

Patrick Suen speaks with Jo Koo Cho-lam who’s hot off her latest film (p20). Directed by Philip Yung Tsz-kwong, *Papa* is a true-crime story based on a 2010 case in Tsuen Wan. Koo, who plays a mother murdered by her son, describes her hesitancy at accepting the role. “I was petrified by the thought of doing a scene in which I was killed by my son.” The film offers something different than your usual true-crime tale though, with its focus on the murder’s aftermath – the father’s survivor guilt, darkness as encompassing as an eclipse, and how one can move on.

Winter has arrived in Hong Kong now but you wouldn’t know it by the recent spate of new ice-cream and gelato shops. Gavin Yeung does the hard work of exploring the sweet scene, discovering flavours of all sorts (p40). For me? If pistachio’s on the menu, I’m having it. How about you?



*Cat*  
**Cat Nelson**



ON OUR RADAR

# Notre-Dame de AR

The augmented-reality exhibition celebrates the history and reopening of Paris' iconic cathedral after the devastating fire of 2019

The years roll back from the present day to April 15, 2019, as drone footage of the historic fire that engulfed the Notre-Dame de Paris' wooden spire flashes across the screen of the tablet in my hands. A few moments later, I look up and I'm standing in front of the altar of the cavernous cathedral, within a 3D version of Napoleon Bonaparte crowning his virtual wife, Joséphine, recreating the monumental 1807 painting *The Coronation of Napoleon*.

Then the projections change and I'm hovering above the River Seine, gazing down on the Île de la Cité in the 17th century, with the Notre-Dame towering over Paris.

These vignettes are part of a narrative spanning centuries, brought to life as part of "Notre-Dame de Paris, The Augmented Exhibition" at the West Kowloon Cultural District's Art Park. The showcase of technology and history opened to the Hong Kong public on December 8, the same day the Paris cathedral hosted its first mass after a five-year, €700 million (HK\$5.72 billion) restoration. Put together by French cultural and educational organisation Visionairs, the exhibition will run until March 7, 2025, to engage audiences with the history of the neo-Gothic monument through augmented reality (AR) technology and carefully curated artefacts.

At the heart of the exhibition is the HistoPad, a touch-screen tablet developed by French AR studio Histovery that serves as a gateway for visitors to explore 20 "time portals" – plinths scattered around the exhibition space and printed with a QR code that can be scanned using the HistoPad to delve into key moments at Notre-Dame, from its 12th century origins to its current state, post-restoration.

"Converting history into a VR experience inspires so many people to experience the past," says Visionairs co-founder Lydie Blandeau. "It's 360 degrees, transporting visitors to another space and time."

Blandeau estimates that visitors can spend anywhere from one to four hours immersed in the contents of this richly detailed virtual world.

The exhibition emphasises the craftsmanship and creativity of the professionals dedicated to restoring Notre-Dame to its former glory, with panoramic photos of the construction both inside and outside the cathedral tracking the progress.

Technology is used in other ways to bring a sense of physicality to the exhibition, such as a full-size replica of one of the cathedral's famed chimera statues, alongside a depiction of Notre-Dame's iconic West Rose

stained-glass window printed directly onto the carpet of the welcome hall. Notre-Dame in its various incarnations throughout history can be found rendered in 3D-printed models across the exhibition, while a soundtrack of organs and tolling bells completes the experience.

"Notre-Dame de Paris, The Augmented Exhibition" has toured across 19 locations around the world, from Paris and Dubai to Montreal and Shanghai, welcoming more than 750,000 visitors so far. Visionairs plans to bring other historical stories to life, too, such as those of Tutankhamun and Cleopatra.

"The key to the success of this experience is to give each visitor the power to enjoy their visit in their own way, at their own pace," says André de Sá Moreira, director of exhibitions at Histovery. "Everyone can have their very own personalised journey."

Blandeau agrees, saying she believes "we can revolutionise history museums worldwide". ■ Gavin Yeung

"Notre-Dame de Paris, The Augmented Exhibition" is at Visionairs, Units GF-01-03, Art Park, 22 Museum Drive, West Kowloon Cultural District, Kowloon, until March 7. Tickets for HK\$298. For details, visit [westk.blk](http://westk.blk)

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# New openings

The buzziest places for your hit list



## Bolo Bolo

New to Lan Kwai Fong, this hole-in-the-wall has made pineapple-bun burgers its main jam. Bolo Bolo's signature creations feature freshly baked, crunchy-on-the-outside, soft-on-the-inside buns, sandwiching everything from scrambled egg and hash browns to balsamic chicken thigh and satay steak. These come paired with local street snacks such as siu mai. Why not wash it down with a thematically appropriate iced pineapple tea?

8 Wo On Lane, Central



Saemaeul Sikdang

## Saemaeul Sikdang

Hot on the heels of Netflix's hit reality show *Culinary Class Wars*, the Korean barbecue restaurant opened by competition judge Baek Jong-won has launched in Hong Kong, adding to more than 120 branches worldwide. Signature dishes include chilbun dwaeji kimchi, a potent combination of kimchi grilled with pork, and cheese-gyeran jjim, which marries steamed eggs with savoury cheese. Korean barbecue classics abound, too, with quality pork cuts to sate the most ardent grill enthusiast. Shop 101, 1/F, Multifield Plaza, 3-7 Prat Avenue, Tsim Sha Tsui

## Marmo Bistro

Taking over what used to be The Dining Room by BluHouse in the Rosewood Hong Kong, Marmo Bistro is the hotel's first foray into French cuisine, offering an intimate dining setting reminiscent of Parisian brasseries. Under chef Giovanni Galeota, the menu features classic dishes such as foie gras torchon and côte de boeuf à la Bordelaise, emphasising fresh, high-quality ingredients. The bistro also boasts a predictably French-focused wine list and signature cocktails inspired by Gallic drinking culture.

G/F, Rosewood Hong Kong, 18 Salisbury Road, Tsim Sha Tsui



Marmo Bistro

PHOTOS: COURTESY VENUES

## Snowsand

This popular winter-exclusive dessert brand from Hokkaido, Japan, is making its Hong Kong debut with a pop-up at K11 Art Mall that runs until January 5. Founded in 2021 by Shintaro Naganuma, Snowsand specialises in chocolate desserts made from rich winter milk sourced from pasture-raised cows. Signature offerings include the Snowsand chocolate sandwich and snowball chocolate truffle, packaged in nostalgic designs reminiscent of Hokkaido's snowy landscapes, by woodblock artist Kazuyoshi Otani.

Atrium, K11 Art Mall, 18 Fianoi Road, Tsim Sha Tsui



A Snowsand chocolate sandwich



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# Your perfect week

Our cheat sheet for the best things to do in Hong Kong



The lo hei yu sheng from Whey

## DO THIS

### The Big Bounce World Tour

The world's largest touring inflatable event is set to take over Hong Kong from December 21 to January 5 on the Great Lawn of the West Kowloon Cultural District. This action-packed event features custom-built inflatable attractions suitable for all ages, including a massive obstacle course, and you know none of this would work without a bouncy castle. With day and night sessions, families can bounce their hearts out in an inflatable playground measuring more than 500 feet in length and featuring aliens, spaceships, giant planets and moon-crater ball pits. For details, visit [thebigbounceasia.com](http://thebigbounceasia.com)



## DRINK THIS

### Sublime cocktails at Qura

Just in time for the changing seasons, Qura Bar in the Regent Hong Kong has unveiled its Sublime cocktail collection. Designed by bar manager Gennaro Pucci, the menu leans into surprising flavour combinations such as edamame with pineapple, and mezcal with peanut butter, using advanced mixology techniques like fat-washing and isomalt garnishes. Complementing these are Riviera-inspired dishes created by chef Ciro Petrone, as well as a bar bites menu spanning global flavours. G/F, Regent Hong Kong, 18 Salisbury Road, Tsim Sha Tsui

## TRY THIS

### Whey's winter menu

Be spirited away to the straits of Singapore with the new seasonal menu at Southeast Asian fine-dining restaurant Whey. Designed by chef Barry Quek, the 10-course degustation includes highlights such as the lo hei yu sheng, a festive salad with bluefin tuna and seasonal produce, dressed in lime and coconut sugar. Then there's a tender beef short rib served with celeriac pavé and a rich gulai sauce, and the big one, nasi alam with charcoal-grilled lobster, house-made scallop XO sauce and coconut rice. DG/F, The Wellington, 198 Wellington Street, Central

## WATCH THIS

### The Snowman & The Bear

On December 21, the City Chamber Orchestra of Hong Kong will present *The Snowman & The Bear* at Sha Tin Town Hall, featuring live music alongside animated films. Conducted by Philippe Forget, with storytelling by Debra Jones and Christopher Price, the concert is based on the 1982 British television film *The Snowman*, which was in turn based on Raymond Briggs' 1978 children's picture book of the same name. Featuring solo performances from young Hong Kong talents and an enchanting score by Howard Blake, it's certain to get concertgoers into the Christmas spirit. Sha Tin Town Hall, 1 Yuen Wo Road, Sha Tin







# Mr Koo

The tattoo artist, who moved from Toronto to Hong Kong this year, talks family, fame and finding solace in art. By *Kate Whitehead*

**PLAYBOY'S SON** My dad came from a good family and his father was pretty wealthy, but dad was a big spender, so it didn't pass down to my brother and me. My parents emigrated (from Hong Kong) to Canada in the 1980s, and I was born in Toronto in 1990. My parents split up when I was two, but they continued to live together and, when I was four, we moved back to Hong Kong. For a while the family lived together with my grandfather and aunt. My dad was a playboy, so I never saw much of him growing up. My aunt, who is a psychology professor, kicked my mum out of the house, then it was just my aunt and me, and she raised me.

**BOUNCING AROUND** It was probably hard to raise me because I had every learning disability in the book. I have crazy ADHD, I'm always bouncing around talking and trying to do stuff. I was kicked out of every school I went to. They didn't understand how to deal with my learning disability, so they just found an excuse to kick me out.

**THE BULLY** The first time I was arrested for stealing I was 12. I guess I was rebelling against the people who kept trying to get me to conform to society, and probably also my family situation. My aunt only talked about school stuff – there was no family love. I found family in friends, but they didn't treat me the best. I was getting bullied, and I was bullying people.

**FALLING IN LOVE** I got my first tattoo when I was 14. I went to Ricky Tattoo in Wan Chai because Ricky was a legend. I was drinking and partying hard. When I was 16, I went to Delia International School. That was life-changing for me because I found a good group of people who steered me away from the bad crowd. In 2008, I asked a tattoo-artist friend for a tattoo. He said, "You know how to draw, why don't you tattoo yourself?" So, my second tattoo I did on myself on my 18th birthday. That was when I fell in love with the art of tattoo.

**A BETTER MAN** I spent two years at Raffles Design Institute in Hong Kong. I found the design work easy, so I just hung out all day. After a lot of drugs and alcohol, my health got really bad. In 2009, I moved to Canada. I wanted to change my environment. I've always known that if I change my environment, I can make myself a better person. I decided never to touch alcohol again and have been sober since 2009.

**INK AND WATER** I went to Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto. My aunt paid my school fees and I got odd jobs to pay for my living expenses, from cooking to teaching rock climbing. I opened my first tattoo shop in 2015, Ink & Water. As a foreign kid in my early 20s trying to start a business, no one would rent to me. It is easier when you have a white face in the industry to help push it, so I brought in a good friend.

**FAME AND MISFORTUNE** I realised the tattoo industry has always catered to big butch guys, hard-core people who like metal, but the bigger market is females, looking at it as a fashion or beauty accessory. So, I started doing micro tattoos – small, detailed feminine tattoos. My clientele was 99 per cent women. My clientele was the super-rich, a lot of celebrities. I was working 12 to 15 hours a day, but after a couple of years my health started getting bad. It was only when I was working that I didn't feel sick.

**OH BROTHER** Every year we opened another shop. By the time the pandemic hit in 2020, we had five shops, including one in New York. Everything slowed down during the pandemic. I've never been sicker. I was on a liquid diet. I couldn't drive, I lost my mind. I didn't know where I was any more and was having panic attacks daily, which led to suicidal thoughts. My brother came back to help me.

**RELEASE FROM THE PAIN** On a daily basis I was on a 9/10, from nerve pain, back pain, neck pain. I was thinking of ending everything and getting medically assisted suicide. In Canada, you can get put out legally if you are in a lot of pain and no one can help you. Then I met a doctor in Los Angeles. He realised I have a hiatal hernia, and my acid levels were off the roof. It was a four-hour surgery and cost US\$500,000.

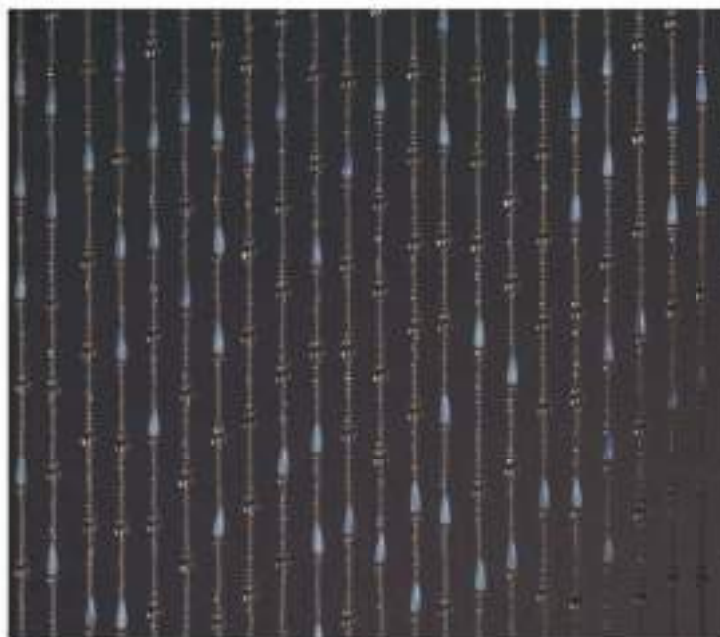
**AIRBRUSHING ART** After a short trip to Hong Kong in late 2023, I decided to give away or sell everything I owned, and moved to Hong Kong with just a backpack. I arrived this past February. I picked up an airbrush from Taobao for HK\$40 and decided to paint. After I'd done a few pieces, Young Soy Gallery said they wanted to show my work. Within a month I'd made 20 pieces and then New Art (Est-Ouest Auctions) in H Queen's also said they wanted to show me. And that's how I launched my art career in Hong Kong.

**GIVING BACK** My studio has been in Chai Wan for the last eight months. Everyone knows me here as the tattoo guy with the crazy-looking dog. Chico is a Xoloitzcuintle, a hairless Mexican dog. Xoloitzcuintle are show dogs but also emotional support dogs, which is great for me when I need it. I never thought mental health was an actual thing until I started getting panic attacks. Now my art is based on mental health and I give back everything I can to mental health-based stuff, I support Mind HK.

**TOXIC AND CRAZY** I will paint and work very hard for a month or two and then I'll network and just be around people I enjoy for a few months. I love Hong Kong. It is very toxic and crazy. I choose to live a simple and slow lifestyle. You can if you block out all the craziness and the luxury stuff. When you realise life and family are the most important things, then all that other stuff fades away. ■

*If you have suicidal thoughts or know someone who is experiencing them, help is available. In Hong Kong, you can dial 1811 for the government-run Mental Health Support Hotline. You can also call 2896 0000 for The Samaritans or 2382 0000 for Suicide Prevention Services*





Nicole Wong with her sculpture  
*The Definition of Rain* (2024)  
at Rossi & Rossi

# Nicole Wong

The Hong Kong artist chats to *Aaina Bhargava* about crystals, the limitations of space and embracing nothingness



Nicole Wong is curious about our curiosity. “Crystals, jewels, reflective surfaces – why are we so attracted to shiny objects,” she asks. I meet the Hong Kong artist as she’s gearing up for her solo exhibition “Once it Sets”, at the Rossi & Rossi gallery in Wong Chuk Hang, where she explores the process of crystallisation and notions of ambiguity and fixedness, to understand how things become established, or “set”.

Through her work, Wong poses philosophical questions associated with time, perception and transformation, and often uses materials as metaphor to address them.

Artificial crystals comprise the bulk of her sculptural works for the show, alluding to the idea that things are never quite what they seem. For

*The Definition of Rain* (2024) – a sculpture resembling a beaded curtain – the artist uses opalite, a crystal made from glass resin that resembles the naturally occurring opal. The pattern of the raindrop-like beads follows the binary-code definition of rain, drawing a parallel with how meanings are constructed, perceived and established.

With a deep interest in spiritual practices such as tarot-card reading and astrology, Wong also runs a crystal shop. While she doesn’t incorporate these New Age themes directly into her work, motifs relating to the topics occasionally find their way in.

Two glass globes filled with water, resembling crystal balls, are part of *Two Bodies*, another installation on show at Rossi & Rossi. Light shines through the spheres as they rotate atop a camera tripod, projecting unexpected visuals and reflecting the transformative effects of light.

Wong’s interest in both New Age spirituality and art stem from a desire to find answers to open-ended questions. Though she had wanted to be a scientist – “something to do with physics or chemistry” – she quickly realised that “there is always a textbook answer” in science.

“I want the freedom to explore beyond the textbook,” she says. “Art allows for that.”

## DESCRIBE YOUR WORK IN THREE WORDS.

Translation, problems, colourless.

## WHAT INSPIRED YOUR WORKS FOR “ONCE IT SETS”?

I’ve always been drawn to minimalist laboratory aesthetics. I was doing research about how experiments are conducted and came across the process of microscopic crystallisation in our body, which can lead to illness and pain, such as kidney stones. It’s like having tiny jewellery in our body – it can be quite beautiful to look at. Coincidentally, my cat fell sick around that time, and we discovered that she had crystals inside her bladder. I was fascinated by the idea of how something so small could cause so much pain, and the fact that it crystallised.







#### WHAT ARE THE KEY THEMES YOU'RE EXPLORING IN THE SHOW?

I'm working with curator Chris Wan, who pointed out that in addition to the scientific process, the term "crystallisation" has a philosophical meaning as well, about how when something is crystallised, it's essentially "set". I'm interested in this idea of how concepts and traditions become established. Things can change, but once they become crystallised, how can you go back?

#### WALK US THROUGH YOUR CREATIVE PROCESS.

It differs from show to show, but for this exhibition, I spent most of my time researching and trying to understand the crystallisation process in illnesses and the biology behind it. The production process was also significant. For instance, I worked with a glassmaker to make the glass globes you see in the exhibition. We spent months trying to figure out how to encase water in them. Chemically it doesn't work, the water heats up and creates steam and pressure, which can lead to the glass exploding.

#### HOW DID YOU GET STARTED WITH CRYSTALS?

The first crystal I collected was a pyrite, which forms into cubes naturally. I appreciated how it's a natural process but it looks so perfect and man-made. From there, I started studying more about crystals and minerals. I like how you can differentiate the type of crystal by looking at the pattern and shape. Clear quartz has six sides, and it's a rule that won't change. There's no room for variation or ambiguity.

**Left:**  
a work from "Once it Sets", at Rossi & Rossi

**Below:**  
Wong's previous exhibition, "Cotton in the ears, turban in the throat", at Rossi & Rossi last year



#### ARE THERE ANY SPECIFIC CRYSTALS YOU'RE GRAVITATING TOWARDS RIGHT NOW?

I like feldspar. It's an umbrella term for moon and sun stones which have reflective characteristics. Some even have sparkles trapped inside. There's a flashiness to them I really like.

#### TELL US ABOUT YOUR STUDIO IN FO TAN.

My first studio was also here in Fo Tan, and I've moved several times within the building. I like the high ceiling – it doesn't limit the potential scale of the work. The smaller the space, the more limited your creativity.

#### NAME THE ARTISTS YOU ADMIRE OR ARE INSPIRED BY.

Martin Creed, Sophie Calle and Joseph Beuys.

#### HOW DO YOU SHAKE A CREATIVE BLOCK?

If I have a block, I've realised I shouldn't be trying to escape my boredom. I should embrace the nothingness instead of doing something else to fill the gap. If I use a distraction to cover up the block, then it will last much longer.

#### WHAT'S YOUR MOST CREATIVE TIME OF DAY?

When I'm in transit. When I'm walking home or on a bus – that's when I feel I can be in my own bubble. It's a very narrow window of time.

#### WHAT'S YOUR FIRST THOUGHT WHEN YOU WAKE UP?

When it's a good day, my mind is clear to plan the day. But when it's a bad day, then it's a lot of negative thoughts and self-doubt.

#### WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO AN ARTIST WHO'S JUST STARTING OUT?

Keep making work, and find a space that allows you some stability. Being an artist is not a nine-to-five job. We really need to be self-disciplined. I'm still working on that.

#### WHAT DO YOU HOPE AUDIENCES WALK AWAY WITH AFTER EXPERIENCING YOUR WORK?

I hope it reminds them of the fluidity of being and how there's always potential. There's always room for transformation and improvement – physically and spiritually. I also hope they start appreciating the little things around them in daily life. If you can appreciate the little things, even if they're bad, it can act as a healing process. ■

"Once it Sets" is at Rossi & Rossi, 11/F, M Place, 54 Wong Chuk Hang Road, Wong Chuk Hang, until January 25. For details, visit [rossirossi.com](http://rossirossi.com)



# TOUCH WOOD

Hong Kong joiners are riding a handmade revival, using everything from local trimmings to imported timber to elevate their craft. By *Christopher DeWolf*







**I**n 1960s Hong Kong, timber was big business. The city was full of carpenters building everything from boats to fine furniture to simple tables, chairs and stools. But the shift of the industry to mainland China after the 1980s left many talented woodworkers without an outlet for their skills.

Today, there is something of a revival taking place, with a small but dedicated number of woodworkers making custom furniture and wood objects in local studios, mostly tucked away in Hong Kong's industrial areas.

"Almost all of us know each other," says Filip Winiewicz, whose company, Hardwood HK, makes bespoke hardwood furniture. "It's competition but in a friendly way. Everyone has their own area of expertise."

Some of those woodworkers are making high-concept furniture designed with digital tools, while others are focusing on traditional joinery and historically inspired pieces. Some use salvaged materials and local Hong Kong wood while others seek out the best quality timber from overseas.

To learn more, we reached out to five local woodworkers, each with a distinctive approach to design, fabrication and woodcraft, to understand why wood is making a comeback in Hong Kong.

### COUTOU WOODWORKING STUDIO

In 2017, Arthur Li Kin-shing and Yung Wing-yan wanted to build a bridge between Hong Kong's history of industrial woodworking and the growing number of people interested in taking up crafts. That led them to start Coutou, a collaborative studio in To Kwa Wan that brings together *sifu* – masters – with anyone interested in learning about woodcraft.

Another motivation: reducing waste. "Our workshop is really close to a park and also a rubbish depot," says Li. "We always see a lot of [discarded] old furniture, and they always trim the trees." The team at Coutou salvages old furniture and discarded wood, along with tree trimmings from the park, to upcycle them into new wooden objects. They also source local wood from Roy Ng Ting-ho, a woodworker himself who runs Studio 818, as well as a small sawmill. "Hong Kong wood has really nice patterns and colours that other trees [from Europe and North America] don't have," says Li. "Usually for furniture we use walnut, oak and ash [from the United States], but in Hong Kong we also have lychee and other trees."

Since the studio was founded, well over a thousand students have taken Coutou's classes, which teach



**Left:**  
Yung Wing-yan and Arthur Li of  
Coutou Woodworking Studio

**Above:**  
Li at work

**Below:**  
Coutou Woodworking Studio

everything from basic woodworking skills to the advanced joinery techniques needed to make Ming-style furniture. For commercial projects, Coutou has also paired designers with its roster of four masters, each with his own unique skill set.

"The masters we work with always have an open mind about new materials and techniques," says Li. One of them was pleased to discover that locally salvaged acacia was just as appealing in Ming-style furniture as the more traditional rosewood. In another project, a shelving system for an art gallery, they created a more contemporary look by pairing brass elements with traditional burr-puzzle joinery, a traditional Chinese method that assembles furniture through interlocking pieces of wood rather than screws or nails.

It's this combination of innovation and hard-won knowledge that Li hopes will help local woodworking thrive in Hong Kong. "The masters have got a different point of view to what you see in books or on the internet," he says. "They do what they do really well, but they need help to spread their knowledge."





Right:  
a mahjong table by  
Hardwood HK

Below:  
Filip Winiewicz of  
Hardwood HK, with a  
sculpture commissioned  
by Studio TK



## HARDWOOD HK

Filip Winiewicz studied to become an architect in Poland, but when he ended up settling in Hong Kong in 2014, after stints in Dublin, Beijing and Kuala Lumpur, he realised, "Hong Kong is not a good place for architects." He spent most of his time as an architectural designer working on shopping malls and concepts that would never see the light of day. "I'd always had the feeling that I wanted to do something more with my hands," he says. So he decided to start working with wood.

He initially approached a local carpenter to see if he could work as an apprentice. "He said no, I will cut off my fingers," says Winiewicz. "He didn't want the trouble." Instead, he began dabbling in projects in his Lamma Island backyard. On a return trip to Poland, to visit family, Winiewicz found himself in awe of the variety of hardwood timber available. "In Hong Kong it's hard

to get nice material," he says. So he ended up importing an entire container of ash, walnut and oak and renting a warehouse in Kwai Chung to store it.

The initial plan was to sell the timber and work on personal projects. But it turned out there were more people looking for custom furniture than Winiewicz had expected. He soon had enough work that he was able to leave his day job and focus on woodworking full time. After two years on his own, he hired a few trained carpenters to help him. "For me it was just try, fail and learn," he says. "But when I got more orders, I heard some advice that you should hire people better than you. So the carpenters I work with have better skills."

Winiewicz's own taste in furniture tends to lean towards the contemporary, and he also works with plywood, but his business is client-driven. He'll develop a design and work with his carpenters to execute it. "That's where being [trained as] an architect helps," he says. Sometimes the requests are totally unexpected, such as when a doctor asked him to create a rolling hotpot table with a wood frame and two induction burners under an artificial stone top. He also finds satisfaction in more conventional projects, such as a "floating" mahjong table with an ink-stained ash top and walnut legs, which, he says, turned out to be one of his favourite pieces.

He says woodworkers in Hong Kong must deal with strong competition from mainland China, where custom-made furniture can be had for much less than what it costs locally. But his clients like the collaborative, hands-on experience of using a local workshop. "[It] is noisy and full of dust, but clients like coming anyway to sketch out the details, see the progress," he says. "And if something's not right with the final product, we'll fix it and refinish it."

Winiewicz's goal is to scale up that experience, not by making individual pieces of furniture, but by working on entire houses and apartments, including supplying kitchens. For a home in Clear Water Bay designed by Emma Maclean & Co, he crafted everything from the cabinetry to the bookcase-cum-doors.

"Our biggest project was a two-storey villa in Sheung Shui where we designed everything in the house," he says. "That's probably the project I'm most proud of."







**Left:**  
Jesse Hao of Zou-Mat

**Below:**  
Moon table by Zou-Mat



## ZOU-MAT

In 2019, Charis Mok Shu-wai and Jesse Hao Lap-hang opened their design studio Zou-Mat with the goal of combining woodcraft with contemporary design. “We wanted to explore different ways of making and approaching design,” says Hao. “We both come from an architecture and design background, so that really informs a particular approach to what we can do with design and making. We often try and integrate a multidisciplinary approach to making. We usually emphasise a lot of contextual elements as well as integrating digital design and fabrication methods, and more traditional hands-on skills.”

Mok and Hao collaborate on the designs, which are then executed by Hao in the Fo Tan workshop they share with Roy Ng, who cures and cuts local timber, particularly Taiwanese acacia trees that are being felled for slope maintenance. “It’s a very dense, very tough wood,” says Hao. “We’re working a lot with that at the moment. We also do walnut, white oak – the typical hardwood species.”

That spirit of experimentation extends beyond the material itself to the techniques they use to build with it. Hao uses parametric design tools to create forms that would be hard to replicate by hand. (Parametric design uses an algorithmic process to create complex 3D models.) “If it requires a lot of precision or intricacy then I will try to control it with digital fabrication like laser cutting, laser engraving or CNC milling,” says Hao, referring to computer-guided milling machines. “But

if it’s joinery that is easily done with a typical saw or chisel – hand-cut joinery – then I’ll do that. I try to find a balance.”

Hao says the design duo has a “particular obsession” with pairing live-edge wood with more geometric forms. This is reflected in several of their projects, such as Moon, a table that combines a live-edge slab of walnut with spindle-like legs on one side and desk drawers on the other. “We first sourced the tabletop, the walnut slab, and thought about how we can showcase it,” says Hao. “We tried to integrate the offcuts of the slab, so in this case the faces of the drawers are actually from the same slab. We cut it down into thinner pieces.”

Zou-Mat’s latest project involves recycling wood found inside a historic building currently under renovation. (The restoration project is still officially under wraps, with an announcement expected next year.) “There was some old furniture from the 1940s and it’s of quite good-quality teakwood,” says Mok. The designers will break down the furniture and other materials to use them in various ways. “If there’s particular joinery – like if it’s tongue-and-groove flooring – we’ll try to use that structure and put it back into the design,” says Hao. “Right now we’re still working on several ideas.”





Left and far left:  
Screw Up Studio

Below:  
Obie Chan of  
Screw Up Studio

## SCREW UP STUDIO

Most woodworkers are fascinated by the material qualities of wood, but Screw Up Studio founder Obie Chan Shung-lek sees it more as a means to an end. "We quite like the quality of pinewood because it's easier to design and build with," he says. "And we often use birch plywood, a high quality type of plywood that you can find at Hong Kong wood retailers. We think of how to use one single sheet of plywood when we're working on many different projects. You have to imagine how to cut this sheet into parts to be cost-efficient."

Chan says he was inspired by his construction worker father. "That was a big influence for me to start working with wood," he says. "When I was a kid I started to play with drills and screws." Chan went on to study

interior design at Polytechnic University, and for his final year project, he rented a *tong lau* flat with several other students, brought in all the tools and materials they needed and kitted it out from top to bottom. He liked the experience enough that he vowed not to seek employment after graduation but to start his own studio instead. "I just wanted to do my own stuff, design and build my own objects, furniture, small-scale interior projects," he says.

That was nearly 10 years ago. Since then, Screw Up Studio has worked on a wide range of projects, often in collaboration with local architects and designers. Two years ago, Chan and his team used birch plywood and woodworking chate slides – a metal track normally used to hang tools in a wood shop – to create a flexible shelving

system for Whatever Coffee, a cafe in Sham Shui Po. They also worked on a design – by Napp Studio and Architects with Chinese University – to create an ash-framed hawker cart with an oak countertop and canvas awning. "It aims to preserve the cultural heritage of Shui Hui Tsuen, in South Lantau, by allowing visitors to experience food making by local villagers," says Chan.

Most recently, Chan's studio combined birch plywood with green-tinted acrylic to create a portable vinyl DJ booth for HAHHA, a restaurant in Kam Tin. Screw Up is currently working on tables for a local restaurant that mix wood with upcycled materials such as old billiard balls that will serve as bag hooks.

None of these projects are made entirely of wood, and, for Chan, that's the point. "We don't look for simplicity in a woodworking project, we look for complexity," he says. "We like to mix things and add more and more details, maybe not with wood but with other materials. When you use more than just one material, the accuracy of putting different parts and materials together really comes on the table. When you see the finished product you easily know if it's done by a good craftsman or not."

*"We don't look for simplicity in a woodworking project, we look for complexity"*





## YAT MUK

A little under 10 years ago, Ken Chow Kin-lung was looking for a job that would allow him to make things with his hands. "There's a lot of crafts you can try in Hong Kong," he says. He tried leatherwork and sewing, and enjoyed both, but didn't see himself doing it for a living. Then he tried woodworking. "It felt like fate."

In 2016, he travelled to Taiwan to study woodworking full time. He returned to Hong Kong and interned at two local wood shops, taking time off to travel around Taiwan and mainland China to learn from woodworkers in those places. Now he runs his own studio, Yat Muk, where he makes chairs, explores traditional joinery and runs public workshops.

Chow often works with local designers, especially Keith Chan Shing-hin of Hintegro. "It's not like a client relationship," says Chow. "He's more like a mentor." Together they have worked on cabinets, tables and chairs for many of the residential and commercial projects designed by Chan and his team, who lean towards a minimalist, Japanese-inspired aesthetic.

As for his own style, Chow says he is still exploring what he likes. He is particularly proud of a Ming-style chair he made in Taiwan, but less for its appearance and more for the technical skills he had to learn to build it. That focus on the making process has led him to work on a large variety of projects. Made in collaboration with woodcarving workshop Hop Keung Cheong Kee, *Arise in Gallops* is a mahjong table featuring intricate scenes of Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour on two sides and the Thames in London on the other two.

At the other end of the aesthetic spectrum are decidedly contemporary objects such as a wooden version of the stackable plastic stools found in countless Hong Kong restaurants, or an angular A-shaped chair whose shape evokes the Chinese character for wood or tree (木).

Chow says he is focused on refining his skills. "I still feel like a student." But that attitude is also what inspires him to share his knowledge. He runs woodworking classes for children and adults, teaching them basic skills but also more advanced techniques for people who, like him, are serious about their interest in wood.

"There are a lot of introductory courses in Hong Kong," he says. "That's not a bad thing – there are lots of people who just want to try it out as a hobby. But a few hours is not a real woodworking experience. My main area of focus is one-on-one instruction. They can come here as a blank slate and I'll teach them everything." ■



**Above:**  
*Arise in Gallops*, a mahjong table by Yat Muk

**Left:**  
Yat Muk's wood versions of a step stool and stackable plastic stool

**Below:**  
Ken Chow of Yat Muk



# STEPPING OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Fresh from her turn in Philip Yung's new true-crime drama *Papa*, veteran actor Jo Koo tells *Patrick Suen* why she was hesitant to take the role and why she has never had a manager









Sean Lau and Jo Koo in *Papa*

**K**nown for his past adaptations of gruesome true-crime stories, Hong Kong critic-turned-filmmaker Philip Yung Tsz-kwong's latest work as a writer and director, *Papa*, is inspired by the shocking case of a 15-year-old who murdered his mother and sister in their Tsuen Wan home in 2010.

Whereas Yung's 2022 outing, *Where the Wind Blows*, takes a more over-the-top approach to criminal behaviour, *Papa* focuses on one man's attempt to reconcile his son's crime.

While the multi-award-winning Sean Lau Ching-wan shines as desperate father Yuen coming to terms with his own child killing the rest of his family, the supporting cast of wife Yin, played by Jo Koo Cho-lam, and son Ming, played by Dylan So Man-to, hold their own, delivering fine performances in a non-linear plotline as murdered mother and murderer son. Daughter Grace is ably portrayed by Lainey Hung Lok-ye.

We caught up with Koo, 47, to discuss how she approached her character, her on-set chemistry with Lau and how she thinks this harrowing film can contribute to society at large.

**YOU HAVE SCENE-STEALING PERFORMANCES AS A CARING MOTHER AND AN UNDERSTANDING WIFE IN *PAPA*, WHILE WE THE AUDIENCE KNOW YOUR FATE. HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT?**

I have known Philip Yung for a long time, and he wrote this script right after winning multiple awards with his film *Port of Call* (2015). He sent it to me at the time for comments while waiting for potential investors, and after six to seven years he finally secured funding. When I was reading the script, I already thought it was very cinematic, while providing plenty of room for thought and audience contemplation.

I was hesitant about taking this role because I was petrified by the thought of doing a scene in which I was killed by my son. After talking to close relatives and friends, I decided I shouldn't avoid the role but overcome my fear and anxiety. Philip knows me well. He knows

*"I decided I shouldn't avoid the role but overcome my fear and anxiety"*

that I may look cool and tough, but I am vulnerable inside. Similarly, the mother I play in the film appears to be calm and rational, but she is actually tender-hearted and passionate.

**WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING WITH SEAN LAU? YOU TWO MADE A CONVINCING COUPLE WHO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER WELL ON SCREEN.**

We did not spend much time discussing the characters or the storyline. There is a sex scene between us, but it's funny, we didn't even talk about it beforehand, we just did what we believed the characters would do. I'm not sure if Philip intentionally let us play it out with our gut feelings. Many scenes are simply portrayals of daily life, conversations within an ordinary family, we were just doing what families usually do. For instance, when we had our unexpected last dinner scene at the cha chaan teng before the tragedy, we just followed the mood and improvised the lines. We look and talk like what you would hear from a normal family in a cha chaan teng.

**THE SON IN THE FILM KILLS HIS MOTHER AND SISTER AFTER HE HEARS VOICES IN HIS HEAD. HAS YOUR PERCEPTION OF PSYCHOSIS CHANGED AFTER SHOOTING THE FILM?**

I already knew quite a lot about the illness, since I am a committee member of the Early Psychosis Foundation.

We did a lot of research and realised many family members of patients suffering from psychosis keep blaming themselves, thinking it is their fault. But mental illness is just like any other kind of illness. You wouldn't blame yourself if your parents got diabetes, would you? The symptoms of psychosis are hardly noticeable, but there are clues. *Papa* is now showing, and we hope to work with doctors and related organisations to deliver a proper understanding of psychosis and how society should deal with it.

**YOU BEGAN YOUR CAREER WITH DIRECTOR FRUIT CHAN GOR'S *THE LONGEST SUMMER* IN 1998, AND HAVE APPEARED IN NEARLY 50 FILMS SO FAR, RANGING FROM COMEDIES AND ACTION FLICKS TO THRILLERS AND HORROR MOVIES. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR CAREER?**

I think I am a special case in this industry. I have been acting in movies, but I have also worked as a radio host and performed in theatre. I used to run my own dessert joint, and then I got married and became a mother. I have done lots of stuff and I am happy that I can still appear in films, like once or twice a year. I am happy and grateful about my trajectory, especially as I am not a very sociable or outgoing person. I don't even have my own manager.

**ARE YOU SERIOUS? IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE HOW AN ACTOR CAN SURVIVE WITHOUT A MANAGER FOR SO MANY YEARS.**

Yes. People just contact me and I always handle my own schedule and work. There are limitations, of course, and that's why you do not see me showing up everywhere. The main reason is because I don't belong to any management company. Throughout my career, filmmakers have just approached me directly if they thought I fitted a role. Some people think that I don't have a distinctive image and I never leave a strong impression on the audience. I used to ponder whether that's a blessing or a curse. But I think it means I can play any character without being typecast. Whenever a film company announces a new project, they will, of course, cast the actors they manage. It has nothing to do with my acting skills.





**HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT RECRUITING A MANAGER TO GET MORE OPPORTUNITIES?**

I always hoped to find someone who understands me and appreciates me for who I am. I don't need a veteran or a big-shot manager. There have been people who approached me, but they have mostly worked with the big companies and adopted the conventional approach and planning. There is nothing wrong with that, of course, but I know too well what kind of actress I am; I am not the sweet, pretty type. Having said that, I have a feeling that the right candidate may appear soon. ■

*Papa is in cinemas now*

**Above and below:**

Lau, Koo, Dylan So and Lainey Hung in *Papa*



## Who is Dylan So?

Meet the 18-year-old Hong Kong actor who has won over audiences with his breakthrough performance as a young murderer in his debut film, *Papa*



Dylan So looks like a typical student, which placed him well for his role as Ming in *Papa*: an otherwise quiet high-schooler, but one who hears voices telling him climate change and environmental hazards are caused by overpopulation, and people have to die to make the world better, leading him to murder his mother and sister.

Despite having zero acting experience before *Papa*, So's subtle yet fearless performance is already being tipped for a Hong Kong Film Awards nomination.

"The daughter of my mother's friend had been working with director Philip Yung for a while," says So, 18. "One evening when we were having dinner together, she asked if I would be interested in auditioning for *Papa*. I took the chance and got the role. I was a Form Five student back then. I did not intentionally imitate how a mentally ill patient or murderer might look or act, I just played the role of a son. I was going through puberty, like the character, and I applied my attitude towards my parents in real life to the role, as I believe the character was hearing voices in his head, which were not meant to be expressed explicitly."

So's interactions with Lau in the film are so convincing they feel like exchanges between a real father and son. When asked if his attitude towards his own father changed after the film, So replies that while he thinks it is important to talk and communicate, when "my father saw the film, I did not ask him whether he liked it. We just looked at each other without saying anything".

Currently majoring in English at the Education University of Hong Kong, So hopes to find a job that allows him to "learn and broaden my horizons through meeting different people".

"I may work as a teacher or social worker after graduation. I will consider acting, too," he says. "Acting is interesting since I can experience other people's lives through the characters. I just want to explore, and I won't set a limit to what kind of characters I play."



Whether it's the lifelike salaryman hunched over his phone, a forest of cartoonish creatures made from fun clay or a collapsed life-size military tank of the finest Italian leather, they're all here, inside an art gallery in Sydney, Australia.

Since 2009, the White Rabbit Gallery has carved its own niche in the Australian art scene, housing one of the world's largest and most comprehensive collections of contemporary art from mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, an anomaly in a country where Asian art is mostly limited to state-owned collections.

"I have around 800 artists and there were 4,000 pieces the last time I counted," says gallery owner Judith Neilson, 78, sipping an iced tea in the ground-floor cafe. "It's probably more than that now."

A couple of metres away, visitors stream in through a wide glass door, a mix of students, aficionados and visitors from Asia.

The former wife of South African-born billionaire Kerr Neilson – think Australia's Warren Buffett – Judith Neilson has been collecting since the 1990s, when, in a Sydney gallery, she came across something that stopped her in her tracks. "I'd never seen anything like it," she says. "I didn't realise it was Chinese, I just thought, 'That is something new, that's something I've not seen in 40 years.'"

Neilson tracked down the artist, Wang Zhiyuan, who would become a long-term collaborator, helping to guide her subsequent purchases, introducing her to other artists, and guiding her around China on numerous trips over her 25 years of collecting, in which time she has amassed one of the largest collections of contemporary Chinese art in the world.

White Rabbit's building, in the inner-city suburb of Chippendale – a formerly gritty fringe now the beating heart of Sydney's creative scene – went through a complete refit by Sydney architect William Smart, to feature light-drenched interiors, a double-height ground floor and three more levels of art.



Above:  
Judith Neilson, owner of Sydney's  
White Rabbit Gallery

Right:  
Oka (2023), by Feng Chen, from the  
"Laozi's Furnace" exhibition at the gallery





# THE RABBIT HOLE DOORWAY UNDER

This billionaire Sydney gallery owner has one of the world's largest - and idiosyncratic - collections of Chinese contemporary art. By Aarti Belliger







The White Rabbit Gallery

"The idea behind White Rabbit was to have a place where the incredible talent and vision of Chinese artists could be on show," says Neilson. "For an audience who wouldn't normally see it."

What marks White Rabbit out among other privately owned galleries in Sydney is that the art is not for sale, but on free display to the public, chosen from Neilson's vast private collection – a rare treat in a pricey city. Neilson says every visitor to the gallery represents A\$100 (HK\$500) to the operating costs, one she is willing to bear.

"The White Rabbit Gallery has, in its time in Sydney, extended and encouraged acceptance and understanding of this kind of art by the Australian art scene and general public," says Hong Kong-Australian artist and academic John Young Zerunge, who has long promoted cross-cultural dialogue between Australia and Asia in the arts. "Similar to the Sigg Collection at M+ in Hong Kong, which provides a snapshot of Chinese contemporary artists from an earlier era, Judith Neilson's collection gives a view of the later generation."

White Rabbit hit its stride in 2021, when the exhibition "Lumen" went viral on TikTok and Instagram, with young Sydneysiders looking for ways to get out of the house amid the Covid-19 pandemic. There were lines stretching down the street to experience the free exhibition of light-

based art, and the gallery was dubbed the "coolest place in Sydney" on social media, much to the amusement of staff.

Zerunge believes Neilson's collection has helped forge greater understanding between the Australian public and contemporary Chinese culture. "The works [at White Rabbit Gallery] express a more effective challenge to Australia's general understanding of contemporary art, which is more in the Western, Eurocentric and American lane," he says. "The public hasn't really understood before now that China has a really vibrant artistic culture."

He describes Neilson's approach to collecting as idiosyncratic – something he says makes it more successful than Australian government collections in conveying the qualities of the artworks themselves in terms of originality, creativity, conceptual advances and cultural expression. "Neilson has operated with a different set of priorities to state museums, which in my view are still weighed down with settler identity politics and national diplomatic policies that inform their collecting and presentation decisions." In this context, he says, Neilson's collection is a breath of fresh air. It's a collection that is not informed by any overarching issue – whether it be trade in lobsters, diplomatic one-upmanship or value signalling – but rather, a collection based on the merits of each piece.

The gallery holds two exhibitions each year, running five months at a time, with a month off in between. The day of my visit, "Laozi's Furnace" is the main draw, the exhibition inspired by Tang dynasty alchemists who attempted to concoct an elixir for eternal life, brewing up a mixture of cinnabar, gold, mercury and lead. "It's ironic," says a gallery staffer, explaining that what they ultimately created was gunpowder, or "fire medicine". "They went looking for immortality, but found destruction."

Works include Liu Jianhua's *Fallen Leaves* (2012), a collection of more than 5,000 individually created porcelain leaves, painstakingly arranged on a curved platform positioned by one of the front windows at ground level, visible to passers-by, placed as though they've been blown by the wind, invoking a sense of fragility and impermanence.

Up a double flight of stairs, on the first floor, stand a number of show-stopping sculptures such as He Xiangyu's *Tank Project* (2011-13), a favourite with visitors. The artist had discovered a disused military



*Tank Project* (2011-2013) by He Xiangyu



Exhibits in "Laozi's Furnace"

PHOTOS: COURTESY WHITE RABBIT GALLERY (JUDITH NEILSON, GALLERY EXTERIOR); JESSICA MAUIER (OKO, TANK PROJECT, LAOZI'S FURNACE, FALLEN LEAVES)





Fallen Leaves (2012) by Liu Jianhua



*“I could never have a collection like this from any other country”*

vehicle near the North Korean border that had collapsed in on itself. After taking exact measurements, he had it recreated, life-size, in premium Italian leather, at a factory that usually deals in hand-sewn fake designer handbags.

Nearby is *Big Dog – Death Star* (2015-2016), by Liu Wei, one of China’s most successful artists. The work is an evocation of the Star Wars space station made from oxhide, often used to make dog chews.

“People ask me, ‘Why do you collect Chinese art?’” muses Neilson. “I say the reason is there are more artists in China than anywhere else in the world. So you see the good, the bad, the medium. I could never have a collection like this from any other country.”

And only a small part of Neilson’s collection is on display in any given exhibition. All her post-2000 purchases, spanning video, sculpture, painting, animation, works on paper, ceramics and installation, are mostly housed in Dangrove, a custom-built facility a few kilometres away.

Dangrove is enormous, the size of two football fields, and has a staff of specialists to catalogue and preserve the collection. Focusing predominantly on mainland artists, the collection includes pieces such as Mao Tongqiang’s *Order* (2015), an installation of 15 stainless-steel panels pockmarked by bullets. There are a number of works by Hong Kong artists, including Firenze Lai Ching-yin’s *Noise* (2014) and Chow Chun-fai’s *Legend of the Fist: China is Not Ruled by Chinese Anyway* (2012), the latter a painting of a scene from a 2010 Hong Kong martial arts movie. Kwan Sheung-chi’s video art *One Million (RMB)* (2013) is also in there.

Born and raised in Zimbabwe, Neilson has been collecting things since childhood. She describes how, before moving to Australia in 1983, she would find small, inconsequential things and hold on to them. The very first thing she collected was a small bell that had fallen from a cart, something she has kept ever since.

“My mum was born in the Kalahari, it was simpler times, no running water,” she says. “When I grew up, you were lucky if you got one bottle or can of Coca-Cola in a year. Now, I collect them. I’ve got around 1,500.”

Neilson doesn’t present herself as the billionaire responsible for this mammoth undertaking: it is likely that those people entering the gallery just a few metres from where we are sitting wouldn’t look twice our way. Dressed in a summery fern-green cotton dress, she is carrying a handbag with “Hong Kong” printed on its side, in the style of an amah bag. It’s the kind of thing an up-and-coming designer would produce and sell in a gallery, or in a highly curated gift shop, perhaps. (Later, Neilson shows me the label inside: it’s Balenciaga, from the Bazar line by Demna Gvasalia.)

Despite her low-key appearance, Neilson is steadily making inroads into the cultural fabric of Australia, and is getting noticed for it. She



**Above:**  
*Big Dog – Death Star*  
(2015-2016), by Liu Wei

**Below:**  
*Order* (2015),  
by Mao Tongqiang



PHOTOS: JESSICA MAURER (BIG DOG, FORESIGHT); COURTESY WHITE RABBIT GALLERY (ORDER)





also helps the Judith Neilson Foundation, which invests heavily in development programmes in Africa and Australia, and the Judith Neilson Institute, which funds independent journalism projects.

It is this latter venture that has gained her considerable attention. First established in late 2018 as an independent and non-partisan body to support quality journalism via grants and education, it had a budget of A\$100 million, a vast amount for Australia's usually cash-strapped media landscape, and started funding a range of projects. In 2022, however, Neilson sensationally disbanded its board, unhappy with the direction the institute was taking. It has since restarted, albeit cautiously, with a focus on local and independent projects.

There is also a smaller project, close to her heart, around the corner from White Rabbit Gallery. Phoenix Central Park houses a private gallery, a central garden and a performance space, and is aimed at doing for music and musicians what the gallery does for artists. Tickets are free, and will soon be available to the public by ballot. The Phoenix features award-winning architecture, designed to create the best acoustics. During the pandemic, the Phoenix paid musicians to perform in the space and recorded them for online content, providing them with some kind of income at a time when the performing arts were in crisis.

The private gallery is, as we walk through, being set up with an exhibition of African art. On display are tacky souvenirs, the kind you buy from the side of the road, and upstairs large-scale pieces of painting and sculpture, many by women artists groups.

Whether it's her ever-growing Chinese art collection, or this new venture harking back to her southern African roots, Neilson's methods have always been intuitive.

"I go directly to the artists and they show me things, their own work, the work of others, and I decide," she says. "It's instant gratification. I don't care who the artist is or what it's about. I go entirely on the visual." ■

Jiang Pengyi's  
Foresight series (2017)





# HEADS UP

Eclipse-chasing gives meaning to this frequent traveller, with Rapa Nui providing two mystical experiences in one. Words and photographs by *Jamie Carter*

I didn't expect to see its famous moai statues face down in the dirt. Nor did I think I would have to drive through a huge herd of cows to reach them. But the most surprising thing about my visit to Easter Island, known locally as Rapa Nui, was watching the moon do something extraordinary above this iconic location.

Remote, barren and almost treeless, Rapa Nui is on many a bucket list. On mine, there's been a ring marked around it for years, not only for a particular date but even a specific time of day: 14:04 on October 2, 2024. That was when an annular solar eclipse – a “ring of fire” – would form above this island and almost nowhere else. For six minutes and 13 seconds, the moon would sit plum against the sun's centre.

It would be Rapa Nui's first annular solar eclipse since 1788, and its last until 2345.

I'm an eclipse chaser, having seen a dozen solar eclipses in far-flung places, from the Southern Ocean off South Georgia and the remote Faroe Islands to Queensland, in Australia, and the Texas Hill Country, in the United States. I do it for the spine-tingling feeling of awe and to meet the many eclipse chasers I've become acquainted with over the years. Mainly, though, I do it for the travel. Travelling for its own sake can get tiring; travelling with a purpose never does.

All of which made a solar eclipse on Easter Island impossible to resist.

Some 1,900km from its “neighbouring” island, Pitcairn, and 3,500km west of Chile, this speck of just 163 sq km may seem an unlikely place for the moon's shadow to fall. Here was the rarest of chances to experience two “otherworldly” experiences in one: the mysterious moai and an awe-inspiring eclipse.

It may be remote geographically, but Rapa Nui is easy to get to if you have patience. There is generally one flight daily to the island from Chile's capital, Santiago, and LATAM Airlines can land a Boeing 787 at Rapa Nui's Mataverí International Airport thanks to its runway being extended in 1987 by Nasa, which required somewhere in the Pacific Ocean to land its Space Shuttle in case of emergency. It has never been used for that purpose; instead, it allows more than 4,000 visitors each week to see some of the island's 900 moai.

Visiting Rapa Nui is a small-town experience. Low-rise Hanga Roa, the only town, is home to about 7,000 people. There are small coves and beaches, and a few restaurants serving tuna steaks and ceviche. There's a football pitch in the town centre and a smattering of small tourist resorts, none above three-star. This is a low-key kind of place, starkly contrasting with its main attraction.

Rapa Nui's few dirt roads are plied by small Mercedes minibuses that ferry tourists to the moai sites. In each of its three vertices, there's an extinct volcano, one of which, Rano Kau, is a water-filled caldera. Along its craggy black lava coast are the remains of small villages where boat-shaped houses once stood in front of a platform (*ahu*) on which several moai stood, watching over the villagers.

According to the crews of two Spanish ships that stopped by in 1770, the Rapa Nui people worshipped the

## I do it for the spine-tingling feeling of awe



Left: the partial phase of the eclipse begins, with sunspots visible across the sun's surface, on October 2

Right: Rano Raraku, where every moai was carved from a basalt dome









moai and the rising sun. With one exception, the moai faced inland. With no exceptions, they were pushed over, and many of them broken, during a civil war in the 18th century.

At Ahu Akahanga, the first stop on my guided tour (the only legal way of visiting the increasingly protected 12 sites in Rapa Nui National Park), moai lie on the ground where they fell centuries ago. At others – such as the more dramatic and photogenic Ahu Tongariki, Anakena and Ahu Akivi – moai have been cemented in place back on their *ahu*.

Most iconic is Rano Raraku, where every moai was carved from a basalt dome, and dozens still stand on the hillside where they were abandoned, buried up to their heads. Walking through this ghost town of stone giants feels like being on the set of a sci-fi movie.

The popular misconception is that an “ecocide” took place on Rapa Nui, which resulted in civil war. That’s been discredited as presentism in recent years by archaeologists. Polynesian people most likely settled on what was a tropical, forested island between 700 and 1100. Legend has it that the king, Hotu Matua, called it Te Pito Te Henua, “the navel of the world”.

The Rapa Nui constructed the moai between 1150 and 1290. Land clearing for agriculture and rats caused deforestation, while drought complicated life for the islanders. European sailors caused epidemics of smallpox. There were slave raids. By the 1880s, the population had dwindled to just 111 people, and the island became a sheep ranch. Outsiders, not the islanders, likely triggered the rapid decimation of the Rapa Nui culture.

The entire sun-watching Rapa Nui culture rose and fell without ever experiencing a total solar eclipse. I know that because I checked the last 1,500 years of eclipse paths; there were none here between 591 and 2010.

Today’s ring of fire is slightly different. They happen when a new moon – orbiting Earth in a slight ellipse – passes across the sun while it’s as far from Earth as possible. That happened here five times between 1095 and 1788, so the Rapa Nui would have seen some. My guide suggests islanders may even have watched while protecting their eyes with the shiny, translucent, black obsidian found on the island. That was used, with white coral, to make eyes for the moai.

Politics prevents me from watching the eclipse beside a moai; a recent election complicated the rules on where

eclipse chasers would be allowed to observe from. So I watch from a small farm, Parcela Mahinatur, in the island’s centre. The farm is below Cerro Tres Cruces Cristianas, a hill topped by three Christian crosses placed there by those Spanish sailors in 1770, so should give a perfect view of the sun and moon as they converge above Rapa Nui.

As with many solar eclipses, it is a nail-biter. Cumulus clouds race across the island. One moment, I and the 30-or-so eclipse chasers around me are watching the sun become a crescent through our eclipse glasses. The next, we are nervously looking at dark clouds. It is windy and then suddenly entirely calm. The light levels drop around us and the cloud cover disappears. A rapid cessation of sunlight can do strange things, not least to humans.

At 2.03pm, the ring of fire gradually forms to become a perfect circle high above the Tres Cruces Cristianas. Some photograph it; others use slotted spaghetti spoons as pinhole projectors, to project weird-looking ringlets onto uniform surfaces. If witnessing the brief moments of a new moon in silhouette is sublime, so is watching the ring crumble to a crescent.





The "ring of fire" above Rapa Nui on October 2



Writer Jamie Carter watches the solar eclipse on Rapa Nui



A slotted spaghetti spoon used as a pinhole projector projects "ringlet sun" shadows during the few minutes when the moon sat plum against the sun

Almost as soon as it is over, a black cloud forms across the now partial eclipse, and the wind whips up. It begins to rain. Everyone has the same question: when is the next one?

Identical solar eclipses – the result of predictable movements of the moon and Earth – repeat themselves every 18 years, 11 months and eight hours. The last time this one struck Earth, in 2006, it created a ring of fire seen only from Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana. The next time it occurs, in 2042, it will be a major travel event, with southern Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand along its path.

Before that, there will be a bevy of total solar eclipses, where the moon blocks all of the sun, it goes dark and the sun's wispy corona becomes visible. The next one will happen on August 12, 2026, and will be best seen from eastern Greenland, western Iceland or northern Spain. One lunar year later, on August 2, 2027, totality will strike southern Spain and also be seen across North Africa and Saudi Arabia. Lasting six minutes, 23 seconds, it will be the longest total solar eclipse for another 87 years.

The following ring of fire worth visiting will be on February 6, 2027, and be best seen from Ghana, where a tropical ring will blaze moments before setting into the Gulf of Guinea.

For intrepid eclipse chasers, the quest for perfection never ends. For the patient moai of Rapa Nui, there's now a 321-year wait. ■









**LIVING AND DINING AREA**  
Black-stained Burmese teak table, designed by reD Architects (redarchitects.in) and made by contractor Patrick Mak, of KongDu Group (kongdugroup.com). Bespoke origami pendant lamp, by Aditi Anuj (Instagram: @aditianuj). Small table, circle light and floor lamp, sourced through Taobao (taobao.com). Lattice screen in solid oak, designed by reD Architects and made by KongDu Group. Artwork by Hussein Salim, from Forster Gallery, Zanzibar (forster-gallery.com)

**LIVING ROOM (FAR LEFT)**  
Round occasional tables, sofa and lounge chairs, all from a factory in Guangdong. Terracotta wall lamps, from Length Breadth Height (lxbxh.in). Artwork by Valerie Amani, from Forster Gallery. Surface-mounted ceiling lights and custom-cut stone flooring, supplied by KongDu Group

# Finding their way home

A couple enlist a Mumbai-based studio to refurbish their Hung Hom apartment after striking out locally. By *Peta Tomlinson*

**I**t's a Covid story with a difference – how the pandemic altered Harsh and Priyanka Maheshwari's plans for the renovation of their newly purchased Hung Hom apartment.

The couple were on a trip to India in 2022 when snap travel restrictions delayed their return to Hong Kong by five months. Priyanka had already interviewed multiple Hong Kong designers, none of whom gelled, so she used the downtime to look in the city of her birth, Mumbai. Thus ensued a collaboration with reD Architects, with whom the couple "clicked" right away, says Priyanka.

The 2,200 sq ft Hung Hom apartment had originally been two units, which a previous owner had merged into one. Working to the existing layout – since most internal walls could not be removed – reD Architects was tasked with stripping back the interior to a bare shell and starting afresh.

The couple took a long-term view of the renovation. "We wanted a kids' room for when we decide to grow our family," says Priyanka. "And also to be able to accommodate guests."

With four existing bedrooms plus a multipurpose room to choose from, these requests were easily met.

Both Harsh, who runs a second-generation family business in Hong Kong, and Priyanka, a marketing manager freelancing for a non-profit organisation, spend considerable time working from home. The multipurpose room was refitted as their study, with one bedroom allocated for future children, another for guests (a Murphy bed is concealed within the joinery), and the fourth converted into a dressing room adjoining the main bedroom.

Much of the design groundwork was done via Zoom calls and photos but when travel restrictions allowed the design team on site for the first time, they found factors



they hadn't counted on. One was a harbour view more expansive than photos had suggested. This prompted Rajiv Parekh, a founding partner of reD Architects, to revisit the team's original ideas for the living/dining room.

He proposed placing a 14-foot Burmese teak dining table designed by reD Architects front and centre of the living area, just off the entrance, with a bespoke origami pendant by Indian designer Aditi Anuj hanging low and wide above it. While such a large shade might be regarded as obstructive, Parekh says it does the opposite. "We want the view to be revealed moving through," he says. "You don't have to see everything at once."

The table is supported by a "forest" of turned wood columns arranged in a seemingly random manner, but actually positioned to avoid contact with the legs of each person seated.

The second unexpected factor was the living room ceiling being uneven in places. Its height didn't allow for the addition of a false ceiling, so Parekh opted to work with its imperfections, cladding the ceiling with 3D Memento Moooi textural wallpaper for depth. Surface-mounted lights illuminate the space without any visual clutter.

Parekh also discovered that the apartment wasn't particularly soundproof. The culprit was mainly the entry door, which couldn't be changed, so he lined the entire vestibule, all walls, doorways and the ceiling, with lattice-patterned screens in solid oak. The material helps limit sound, while the grid pattern plays with light and shadows. The entrance was also wide enough to incorporate a shoe cupboard and a puja niche within the latticework, along with concealed entrances to the kitchen, utility area and den.

The project, completed in May this year, was the first residential assignment in Hong Kong for reD Architects, who overcame logistical challenges of distance and a pandemic, to create a refined blend of contemporary living and the warmth of Indian craftsmanship.

"There are so many things we love about it," says Harsh. "Now when we travel, we miss home." ■

**VESTIBULE**  
Lattice-patterned oak,  
designed by reD Architects  
and made by KongDu Group







#### DINING ROOM

Memento Moooi textural 3D wallpaper on ceiling, from Moooi ([moooi.com](http://moooi.com)). Timber feature wall, designed by r&D Architects with marble-lined bar insert, and made by KongDu Group. Dining chairs, from a factory in Guangdong



#### MAIN EN SUITE

Limestone floor, sourced by KongDu Group, who made the bathroom cabinetry and mirror. Hanging lights, from a factory in Guangdong

#### BEDROOM

Bed and bedhead, previously owned by clients. Bedside tables, made by KongDu Group. Timber flooring, supplied by KongDu Group. Rug, from Jaipur Rugs Foundation ([jaipur rugs.org](http://jaipur rugs.org)). Suspended marble tube light, by Rooshad Shroff ([rooshadshroff.com](http://rooshadshroff.com)). Artworks, bought in Bali



This release of lanterns during the Loy Krathong festival in Chiang Mai

TRIP INSPIRATION

# The best of the best

Our annual round-up of red-hot holiday destinations for 2025. By *Tim Pile*

It's that time again. Travel companies and magazines, websites and tour operators are unveiling their lists of places to visit in the coming year. Some are old favourites with something new to offer, others are appearing for the first time. A few appear in more than one list, which means you'll need to get there before everyone else does.

Greenland has a shiny new international airport linking the capital, Nuuk, with North America. Previously, direct flights were available only to Copenhagen, Denmark, and Reykjavik, Iceland. The world's largest and least densely populated island is promoted as a year-round destination. In winter, visitors come to witness the ethereal beauty of the northern lights, while summer sightseers enjoy never-ending days – the sun doesn't set from May 25 to July 25.

Travel publisher Condé Nast urges adventurous tourists to experience Greenland's jaw-dropping fjords, formidable glaciers and pristine wilderness. Meanwhile, National Geographic Best of the World 2025 highlights the Danish dependent territory's new flights (Iqaluit, Canada, and Newark, the United States) and encourages visitors to learn about indigenous Inuit culture.

International media brand Travel + Leisure recommends wildlife-watching tours – excursions through Greenland's iceberg-laden waters provide an opportunity to observe polar bears, whales and walrus at close quarters.

In its Best in Travel 2025 list, publisher Lonely Planet named Chiang Mai as one of its Top Cities, highlighting the importance of food in Thai culture. Each January, the city hosts a gourmet festival, but there are plenty of other activities to keep visitors busy at this time of year. In the first week of February, the city celebrates its annual flower festival, which culminates in a huge floral parade. Then, when you've had your fill of temples, trekking and tasty Lanna (northern Thai) cuisine, book an overnight sleeper to Bangkok ("Train-hopping" is top of Lonely Planet's Travel Trends 2025 category).

National Geographic Magazine includes the Thai capital in its 25 best places in the world to travel to in 2025, describing it as "an intoxicating blend of old and new". When you've finished shopping for silks, boating along the canals and marking Bangkok's rooftop bars out of 10, fly back to Hong Kong from the Thai capital rather than returning via Chiang Mai.

Both The Sydney Morning Herald (The 18 countries to put on your must-visit list for 2025) and high-end tour



Cappadocia,  
Turkey

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES (CHIANG MAI); SHUTTERSTOCK (CAPPADOCIA); PRAVDA (ILIMANAO); TIM PILE (TBILISI); PENNY WATSON (RAJA AMPAT); AFP (ILIMANAO)



operator Insight Vacations give Turkey the nod for next year. Straddling Europe and Asia, Istanbul is brimming with history and mystery. While sightseers could easily spend their entire stay in the scenic Sultanahmet district, marvelling at its magnificent mosques and rich collection of Ottoman and Byzantine architectural landmarks, be sure to stroll across the illustrious Galata Bridge to the medieval Galata Tower, where panoramic vistas of Istanbul await.

Then, journey south to explore the Roman ruins of Ephesus and Troy, as well as the beaches along the Turquoise Coast. Another remarkable attraction is the desert region of Cappadocia, famed for its otherworldly rock formations. The surreal landscapes and breathtaking aerial views are best appreciated from a hot-air balloon.

According to Skyscanner's 2025 Trending Destinations, Reggio Calabria has seen a 541 per cent increase in searches over the past 12 months. The historic city, birthplace of designer Gianni Versace, is located on the 'toe of Italy' and is renowned for Lungomare Falcomata, a picturesque waterfront promenade. The "most beautiful kilometre in Italy" offers enticing vistas of Sicily across the shimmering Strait of Messina.

Talking of which, luxury travel adviser Ovation Network includes Sicily in its 25 Top Places to Travel in 2025 list. A 20-minute ferry ride from Calabria, the Pearl of the Mediterranean's eastern coast is a treasure trove of wonders, from the baroque elegance of Catania and the ancient ruins in Syracuse to the Greek Theatre in Taormina, which boasts panoramic views of the temperamental Mount Etna volcano.

In addition to receiving multiple endorsements for 2025, some places are featured in recommendation lists because they're hosting anniversary celebrations or festivals. Forbes magazine's 5 Nostalgic Trends Dominating Travel in 2025 suggests getting your kicks on the US' Route 66 - the Mother Road is in the run-up to its 100th anniversary, in 2026. To fully capture the spirit of the journey, book overnight stays at that icon of mid-century Americana, the roadside motel.

Condé Nast reckons Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City is the place to be, especially in April, when the city formerly known as Saigon commemorates 50 years since the end of the Vietnam war and the country's reunification. The global media company also thinks we would be mad to miss the Kumbh Mela, which takes place in Prayagraj, India. Regarded as one of the world's most important religious pilgrimages, the Hindu festival is the largest human gathering in the world, attracting more than 100 million worshippers. The Mela is held every 12 years and the next one begins on January 13.

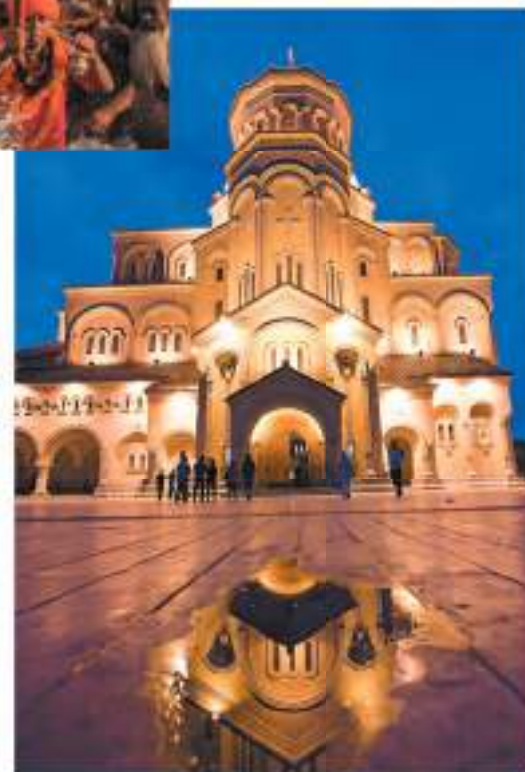
Another trend for 2025 involves visiting places we might struggle to find on a world map. Ovation Network believes the Faroe Islands are on the cusp of discovery - new flights from Reykjavik with Icelandair make for a tempting two-centre holiday.

Or how about a three-centre adventure? Travel + Leisure says 2025 is the year to embark on a trip to the



The Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, India

The Holy Trinity Cathedral of Tbilisi, in Georgia



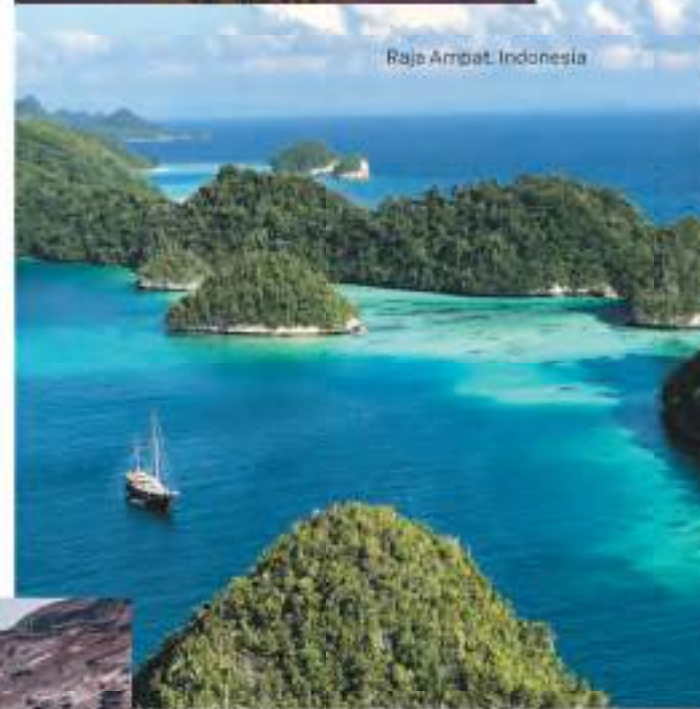
Caucasus trio of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, while The Sydney Morning Herald champions Kyrgyzstan. With its "sky-piercing 7,000-metre peaks, snaking glaciers and plunging pine valleys", the Switzerland of Central Asia is expected to feature on many a wish list next year.

Teeming with more than 1,000 species of reef fish and 500 types of coral, Raja Ampat, Indonesia, is touted by National Geographic as a scuba-diving nirvana waiting to be discovered.

Back to mainstream getaways, American Express Travel claims now is the time to visit - or revisit - Koh Samui. The Thai island offers a "dreamy combo of lush jungle, white-sand beaches, and turquoise waters" and is popular for its "upscale tropical-paradise vibe".

Along with its annual Go List, travel and tourism brand Fodor's recently released its No List for 2025. The latter advises us to steer clear of overcrowded holiday spots such as Venice, Barcelona, Bali and ... Koh Samui. Increased traffic, waste-management issues and unregulated construction are ongoing challenges, and with a new season of the HBO series *The White Lotus* - filmed at the Four Seasons Koh Samui resort - set to air in 2025, many locals are concerned about the island's future. Dr Wijarn Simachaya, president of the non-profit Thailand Environment Institute, emphasises the need for a long-term, sustainable plan but admits that at present no initiatives are in place to make Samui a sustainably green destination. ■

Raja Ampat, Indonesia



Ilimanaq, Greenland





SWEET TREATS

# Inside scoop

It may be winter but Hong Kong's love for ice cream is strong. By *Gavin Yeung*



**Above:**  
JC Lombard, founder of Snack Baby

**Left:**  
Liz & Tori

**J**ust as Hong Kong temperatures drop, the dessert wars are heating up, thanks to an ongoing love affair with ice cream and gelato. What began in earnest in 2022, with the opening of cult Australian brand Messina, has continued apace this summer with the unveiling of Milan-inspired gelateria Snack Baby, and the momentum has only increased since then.

Within the past two months, the city has seen a wave of new openings, with notables being Italian-Japanese gelato-centric cafe Tozzo; Singaporean transplant The Ice Cream & Cookie Co; Liz & Tori, an ice-cream shop that chef Vicky Cheng of Michelin-starred restaurant VEA dedicated to his two daughters; and Okinawan import Yonna Yonna Gelato.

Yet this is no flash in the pan; Hong Kong's penchant for ice cream can be traced back to more than a century ago, with the opening of On Lok Yuen, a Western-style cafe chain that established the city's first ice-cream factory in 1921. Then came Dairy Farm, which entered the ice-cream business in 1928, and in the decades since, home-grown ice-cream brands such as Appolo, Yan Chim Kee, Mister Softee and XTC Gelato have become Hong Kong icons. But as internet culture has taken hold, consumers with increasingly sophisticated palates are dialling ever deeper into regional varieties that come with a sense of terroir.

The result is a panoply of frozen flavours that span the world. Take the maritozzo, a Roman pastry traditionally filled with cream but which, at Tozzo, becomes an ice-cream bao of sorts with the addition of a gelato filling.

At Yonna Yonna, the sister brand of Okinawa's Yanbaru Gelato, patrons indulge in flavours native to the southern Japanese archipelago, such as the indigenous Katsuyama shikuwasa lime and sweet red potato from Iejima.

"I was introduced to Yanbaru Gelato a few years ago, before Covid-19," says Yonna Yonna's director, Henrietta Tseng. "I just couldn't forget the taste of it for all these years. My first bite was mini-tomato and yomogi – it twisted my perception of gelato."

"I travelled back after the borders opened as I wanted to reconfirm if that was what I had been seeking to bring back to Hong Kong."

To Tseng, eating gelato offers respite from the day. "My brand name means 'take your time' in the Okinawan dialect. These days we call it 'me time'. It's important to reward ourselves here and there to generate positive





Left:  
a Mister Softee ice-cream  
van in Sham Shui Po in 1995

Below:  
Dairy Farm has been selling  
ice creams since 1928



*"Hong Kong's penchant for ice cream can be traced back to more than a century ago"*



energy. [and eating gelato is] probably one of the easiest ways to fulfil that."

For Fabio Bardi, the Italian co-founder of Tozzo, churning gelato is a way to connect with his native Sardinia, which he left to pursue a career in pastry that has taken him to New York, Paris, Singapore, Osaka, London and finally, Hong Kong. His pistachio gelato quickly became a hit here during his stint as executive pastry chef at one-Michelin-starred Estro in Central.

In opening Tozzo, "I wanted to create a cosy space where people could indulge without breaking the bank," says Bardi. The cafe's unique selling point lies in its commitment to quality; the gelato is made from pure ingredients, ensuring a healthier alternative to traditional ice cream while maintaining rich flavours.

There's also a movement towards dairy-free options. Snack Baby has made this its niche, with most of its rotating menu of 14 flavours being free of dairy and animal products. Meanwhile, The Ice Cream & Cookie

Co, which began as a market stall in Singapore in 2012, has also spun its Asian-inspired flavours into vegan and dairy-free offerings such as mango mochi and tropical coconut. The brand's recipes use 40 per cent less sugar than conventional ice cream, thanks to the inclusion of unrefined coconut nectar, a natural sweetener.

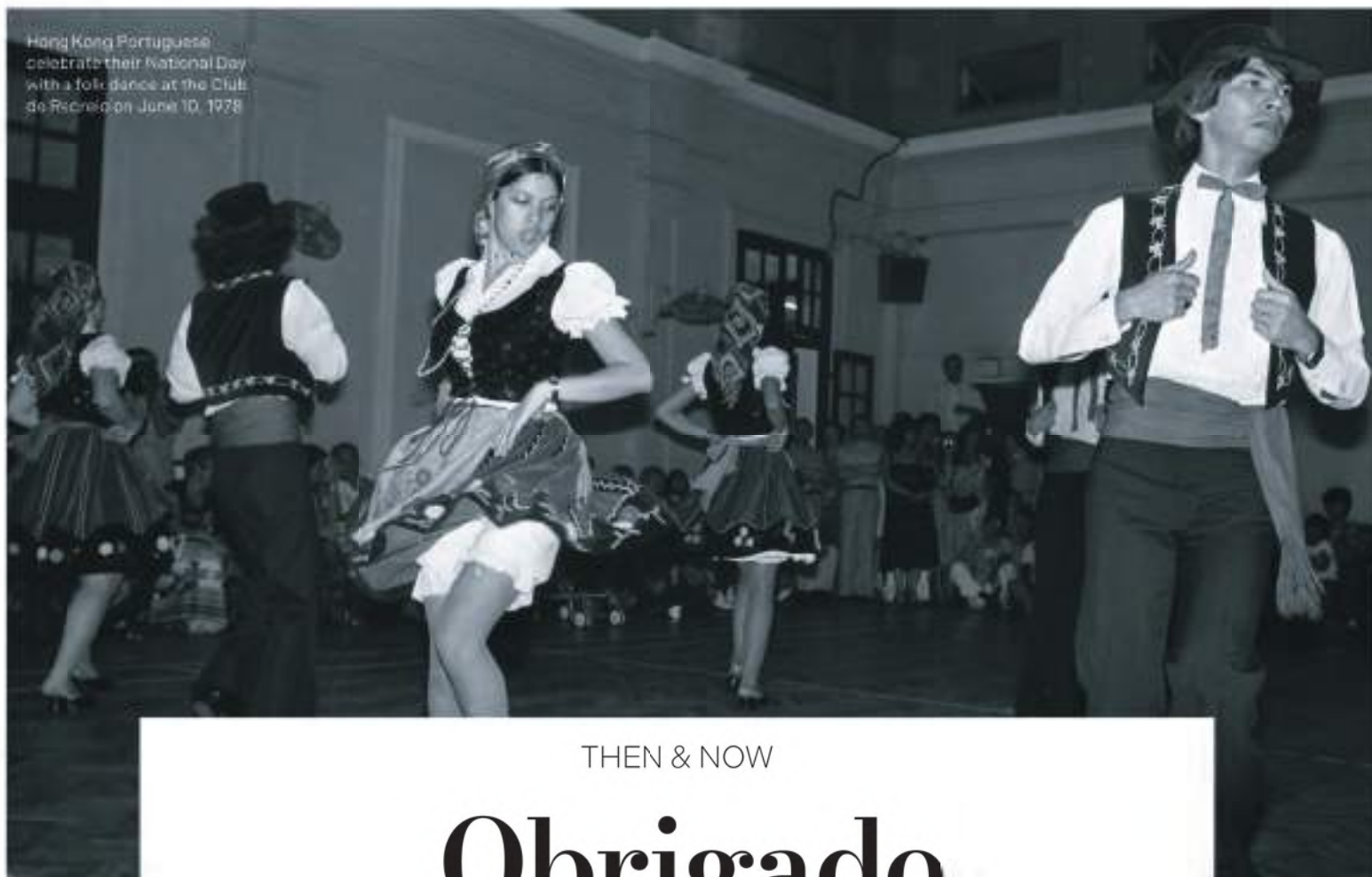
"One of our core principles is that we would not sell anything we wouldn't feed our families," says The Ice Cream & Cookie's Singapore-based founder Natasha Chiam. She also made the decision to include probiotics in the brand's products to support gut health, spurred by a "significant shift" in the ice-cream industry, with consumers increasingly prioritising health and wellness.

In recent years, Chiam has noticed that ice-cream shops have become places for people to gather and enjoy desserts together.

"Post-pandemic, people are craving connection and seeking comfort," she says, or, in the words of Tozzo co-founder Bardi, "Gelato is like a warm hug in a cone." ■



Hong Kong Portuguese  
celebrate their National Day  
with a folk dance at the Club  
de Recreio on June 10, 1978



THEN & NOW

# Obrigado

A new exhibition at the Museum of History gives overdue recognition to the local Portuguese community. By Jason Wordie

Over the years, regular readers of this column will have noticed periodic references to Hong Kong's local Portuguese community, and its many-faceted contributions to local society. Under-recognised and underappreciated, this ethnic group were among the first incomers to make their homes and lives here after British rule was established.

The earliest permanent settlers came across from Macau with Captain Charles Elliot, and were present when the British flag was raised on Hong Kong Island on January 26, 1841. From those urban beginnings to the present day, their direct descendants have displayed an outstanding legacy of personal commitment and dedicated public service to their new adopted homeland vastly disproportionate to the community's overall size.

In mainstream historiography, Hong Kong has typically been portrayed as a primarily Anglo-Chinese – or Sino-British – joint creation. This convenient, wildly inaccurate binary view of the local past conceals the extraordinary levels of textural richness that lie within "Asia's World City". Various ethnic groups made their homes and lives in Hong Kong, and did not merely come and go as temporary sojourners. Instead, permanent family roots were set down and – for the past six generations – have left their bones in the soil of this place.

Consequently, broader public recognition of the contributions made by these "other" Hong Kong belongers has remained patchy. At last, this imbalance has been redressed with the newly opened Hong Kong

Museum of History exhibition, "Estórias Lusas – Stories of the Hong Kong Portuguese", in preparation since 2016.

To relate a few examples, Hong Kong's printing industry was largely operated by two local Portuguese families: Noronha and Xavier. Early Portuguese trading houses, with commercial links spanning India, Singapore, Australia, the Philippines and China, played a role vastly larger than the community's actual size, and helped connect Hong Kong to the world. Few today realise, when they open a cold bottle of San Miguel beer, that a member of the local Barretto family first established the brewery in the Philippines in 1890, and built Malacañang Palace – now the presidential residence in Manila – as his private home.

Hong Kong's legal sector has always been a community stronghold. Direct descendants of the first two local Portuguese solicitors, brothers Francisco Xavier and Leonardo D'Almada e Castro, became highly regarded solicitors and barristers, and left a resounding legacy of dedicated public life. War service in the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps to the Executive and Legislative councils, and a commitment to heritage and environmental conservation work that continues to benefit all of Hong Kong's people, are other key legacies. Leonardo's daughter, New Territories-raised Gloria D'Almada Barretto, a largely self-taught botanist, pioneering champion of local conservation, internationally recognised authority on Hong Kong's

native orchids – and a highly regarded war heroine – is given due prominence in the exhibition.

Firm commitment to the general betterment of the next generation through access to quality education was another community priority. Various well regarded local schools – the starting point for generations of local leaders from all ethnicities (mostly Chinese) – would not exist but for the civic-mindedness and open-handed generosity of various local Portuguese that led to their establishment and subsequent endowment for future generations. Sacred Heart Canossian College on Hong Kong Island and La Salle College in Kowloon are two well-known examples.

Sporting prowess was always a key community marker; contemporary Hong Kong largely owes its extensive public sporting facilities – especially the widespread availability of swimming pools – to long-serving local Portuguese Urban Council chairman A. de O. Sales. Due to his determination, generations of local athletes continue to compete in the Olympic Games under the separate local banner – Hong Kong, China.

These personalities and general themes offer merely a few threads teased from the rich tapestry of the local Portuguese community's involvement in Hong Kong life. Ancestral links to elsewhere in maritime Asia – mainly Macau – are also thoroughly explored and documented in the superbly curated, long-overdue exhibition. ■

For details, visit [hk.history.museum](http://hk.history.museum)



# ANYTHING BUT NORMAL

Colourful Cantonese slang. Fragrant street foods. An ever-evolving identity. Hong Kong's vibrant culture is unlike any other. Join us in uncovering its most unique and extraordinary aspects through home-grown "never normal" stories.



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常港 **Never Normal**™



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Morning Post





# NOTHING ESCAPES US

**This is our Chronergy escapement, introduced in 2015. This mechanism transmits energy with unrelenting precision to regulate the heartbeat of the watch. Its wheel and anchor have been redesigned to optimize the system's efficiency. The overarching principle is simple: an anchor with two pallets frees the rotation of a dented wheel, in a minutely timed dance. "Tick", the first pallet stops the wheel. "Tock", it releases it and**

**leaves the second pallet to halt its rotation. And so on. This happens eight times per second without ever skipping a single beat. That makes 28,800 rounds per hour, amounting to 14,400 "ticks" and as many "tocks". A metronomic and perpetual cadence that sets every cog and wheel in motion. Which, in turn, brings the watch to life. Yet further proof that, when it comes to mastering time, nothing escapes us.**

*#Perpetual*

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WWW.CHOWTAIFOOK.COM  
TEL: 18521 2526 8649

  
**ROLEX**