

**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW** SEBASTIAN CONRAN **VACHERON CONSTANTIN**  
REVEALS THE NEW TRADITIONNELLE **CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN** RELEASES  
NEW MAKE-UP COLLECTION **L'ATELIER DE JOËL ROBUCHON** TO OPEN IN  
THE MEATPACKING DISTRICT **QUINTESSENTIALLY ONE** IS SOON TO SET SAIL  
**LAND ROVER** INTRODUCES A NEW ADDITION TO THE RANGE ROVER  
COLLECTION **FOUR SEASONS HOTEL** TEN TRINITY SQUARE OPENS NEW SPA  
**EUROSTAR** UNVEILS NEW BUSINESS LOUNGE

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195



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# Master of Space

RACHEL DYER SITS DOWN WITH **ED NG**, CO-FOUNDER AND PRINCIPAL OF AB CONCEPT, THE DETAIL-ORIENTED DESIGN STUDIO RESPONSIBLE FOR SOME OF THE WORLD'S FINEST HOSPITALITY INTERIORS

When Ed Ng graduated from design school he sent out less than five job application letters. Such was the gusto and confidence with which he embarked on his career in hospitality interior design, and he hasn't looked back since. Twenty years on, alongside his partner Terence

Ngan, he is at the helm of the world-renowned award-winning design studio, AB Concept. The firm was launched in Hong Kong in 1999, and now has offices in Bangkok (for its creativity) and Taipei (for its diversity).

Ed realised his love for design from a very young age. He wore the interior-design trousers in his

family as soon as he could speak, and encouraged by his parents, he would choose fabrics, colours, textures and styles in his home. As a child, Terence's teachers didn't believe that his sketches were his own. 'I think it's an inborn thing,' he explains.

Why his parents 'had the guts' to let him make these

decisions is beyond him, but putting their trust in their bossy six-year-old son turned out to be gamble that paid off. Today he has the interior design job of dreams, decking the halls of the world's most famous hotels and restaurants, as well as the private residences of the very well-heeled.

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Thanks to high-profile projects and the generous budgets that come with them, Ed and his team have the best materials in the business to play with, which he sees as both a blessing and a curse. Too many interior designers fall into the trap of ‘stuffing the visible wealth into a space’ – something he has had to learn to curtail. ‘You can quantify the value of a material, but you can never quantify the value of the artistic quality and the space’. For him, narrating the story of the space always comes first.

It is the pair’s deep roots in architecture that has allowed them to master this art. Unlike many interior designers, whose understanding of a room ends at the cosmetic surface level, both Ed and Terence are knowledgeable and passionate in equal measure about architectural space; Terence earned his stripes training as an architect at the University of Toronto, and Ed graduated from Hong Kong Polytechnic University School of Design before 1997, when education was still closely modelled on the British system. His course was, therefore, ‘literally interior



*Previous page, from left:*  
An AB Concept project in La Corniche, France; Terence Ngan and Ed Ng of AB Concept

*This page, above and below:*  
Ed Ng, Co-Founder and Principal of AB Concept; immaculate detail at La Corniche, France

*Next page, above and below:*  
La Corniche, France; an AB Concept design in Hong Kong, My Tai Tai

architecture’. If AB Concept has a ‘signature’ aesthetic it is with thanks to this expertise: ‘the form tends to be very bold and clean’.

The first step to drawing the magic out of a space is getting the floor plan right; ‘if the floor plan doesn’t work, the space doesn’t work’. But this is no feat for mortals; Ed immerses himself into his planning using what he describes as ‘pretty much a sixth sense’ – something that all good designers must possess. ‘By the time you draw the line you can already imagine the reality of it. When you draw a counter you already feel like you’re standing in front of it. How do you reach the object on top, and if there’s a mirror, what shape should it be?’

This brings us to Ed’s devilish eye for detail. AB Concept’s designs are drawn with the bold spatial understanding of an architect’s pencil, but they’re finished with the precision of an extra-

fine paintbrush. Both Ed and Terence obsess over the ‘nitty gritty’, drilling into the details layer by layer until they are happy with the angle of every light bulb, the finish of every surface and the piping on every cushion. Never is this more pertinent than when designing a bathroom or walk-in closet – perhaps surprisingly, Ed’s favourite type of room to design. ‘It’s so private; you get to know a person through their closet and it brings you to another level of understanding with your client.’

Ed and Terence’s synthesis as a team is a special one. Terence is an architect obsessed by detail and Ed is an interior designer obsessed by architectural space, meaning that they are forever in a state of healthy debate. Challenging each other in this way allows them to continually better themselves. The Japanese word *kaizen* comes to mind, and unsurprisingly Ed thinks Japan has ‘one of the most inspiring cultures’. There is no sniff of complacency – ‘I’m a very, very lucky designer’.

In fact, he, despite having hotels such as the Four Seasons, Rosewood, Waldorf Astoria, Park Hyatt and W under his belt, is still humbled by the sheer scale and responsibility of some of the projects he works on. The Mandarin Oriental in Bangkok is one of them;





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Ed delights in this challenge, but sometimes he likes to change into what he calls his 'party boy outfit'. New projects, such as the new W Hotel in Algarve, afford him this indulgence. 'I can live my design dreams through the W Hotel; it's like a fantasy. Let's go party, let's go wild!' He feels fortunate to have the opportunity to work on projects at both ends of the spectrum, and it is testament to AB Concept's taste, calibre and vision that it excels at both. ●

[abconcept.net](http://abconcept.net)



'We feel honoured to breathe new life into this grande dame, but it's a big mission!' Expectations are extremely high among the loyal guests of a hotel that is as prestigious now as when it first opened its doors in 1876.

It's a similar story at the Four Seasons Hotel London at Ten Trinity Square, where he and Terence are currently challenged with creating a contemporary Asian restaurant, due to open this May, in the iconic Grade-II-listed building. Working within strict guidelines (no down-lighting allowed) and around Corinthian columns is no mean feat and requires creativity, research, patience and sensitivity. 'In the older ones you really have to humble yourself, listen and follow what the history has to offer.'



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