

# THE MASTER OF MISE EN SCENE

The bespoke spaces created by Robert Cheng of Brewin Design Office offer sensual and timeless living with their rich details, layered narratives and well-composed sceneries.

By LUO JINGMEI

The heart of this Ardmore penthouse is an open living room, with a loose layout of furniture pieces that offers a variety of seating arrangements, in full view of art bathed in natural light.

**W**hen one thinks of Fat Cow in Singapore's Camden Medical Centre, it is not just the exquisite cuisine that comes to mind. The finely crafted interior, with a cloud of interlocking timber cubes that floats above the central space and cascades down the walls, also leaves a deep impression.

This is the work of Brewin Design Office, helmed by architect and interior designer Robert Cheng. His approach is characterised by an artisanal nature, rooted in

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experimental fabrication techniques and refined detailing. An underlying conceptual rigour also provides an originality and gravitas to the multi-textured palette, put together with a well-curated eye. This methodology stems from his education in the art-focused Rhode Island School of Design, as well as the mentorship of his architecture-trained father, and architects Calvin Tsao of Tsao & McKown and Jean Nouvel, with whom Cheng had worked under.

For Cheng, there is no boundary between architecture, interior design and product design. Like a renaissance artist, all three disciplines inform one other and much effort is put into the design of big and small elements to conceive a seamless whole. This is most

Cleverly placed seating nooks provide ample opportunities for guests to appreciate the owner's art collection and the expansive view.

**Inset:** an antique screen from the Edo period hangs above the bed.

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evident in several residential interiors he has completed in Singapore.

For instance, in an apartment in Hana Residence, Cheng drew from the building's contemporised Japanese influences of screening and symmetry. There is a bespoke coffee table of stacked solid Iranian red travertine slabs that brings to mind traditional Japanese structures, as well as a custom-designed shelf with delicate proportions and lines subtly referencing Kyoto Imperial Palace.

In another example, the home of an art collector in Ardmore Residence, Cheng created a tableau inspired by American artist Donald Judd. In the living space, a Mies van der Rohe Barcelona Daybed is juxtaposed with vibrant paintings by Florian Maier-Aichen and Oscar Murillo against the backdrop of soft silk carpet underfoot and a ceiling of smoky grey metal sheets.

From above: Cheng in his studio; a detail of the matrix of timber cubes in varying sizes at Fat Cow.

In these bespoke environments, Cheng weaves together narratives about history, material, form and space. "To me, an environment that is bespoke is eclectic, in the pairing of old with new, or affordable and expensive ... it is moulding the space in the manner of a set designer, by combining various pieces to create a setting that is unique to the space, and in certain cases, resembles a style that the designer exudes naturally," Cheng describes.



For sure, the worlds he creates are luxurious. But it is a luxury that goes beyond the visual and the tactile, such as expensive gold or exotic marbles. Cheng's definition of luxury holds deeper meaning. "It is when a mindset has been customised to one's own philosophy. This idea of luxury is very romantic and is characterised by a quiet subtlety," he reflects.