

“VIOLET AND I AGREED THAT THE DESIGN OF HER RESTAURANTS NEEDED TO BE AS ICONIC AS RAFFLES HOTEL.”

CHERIN TAN



ONE TO WATCH

LAANK'S CHERIN TAN LIKES TO WALK IN YOUR SHOES.

In 2012, Cherin Tan intended to take a sabbatical from work but her freelance jobs kept piling up. So, she said “no” to the time off and “yes” to starting her interior architecture firm, Laank.

Five years on, the baby-faced designer still gets asked by corporations and older clients if they could “speak to her boss” – never mind that she’s helmed notable F&B projects that include three restaurants by culinary personality Violet Oon, and Resorts World Sentosa’s Curate, the first restaurant in Asia dedicated to showcasing Michelin-star chefs.

The fact is, Tan has worked in the industry for more than a decade, having started at the age of 21 honing her design skills at local design firm Asylum. At 33, her experience shows. Any credibility issues her clients have over her youth are usually dispelled after a meeting.

Today, Laank’s projects include hospitality, health care, retail, exhibitions, and offices. But the self-confessed foodie has a soft spot for F&B clients. “I love designing restaurants because of the human-centric approach we take in our work. It’s easy to apply that to restaurants. We try to imagine how a person might experience the space before defining the experience.”

Take her projects with Violet Oon. When designing Oon’s restaurants, Tan wanted to bring out Oon’s vivacious personality. “How would Violet feel if she was walking through the restaurant, sharing stories of the space with her guests? That’s one of the key considerations,” reflects Tan.

“Violet and I also agreed that the design of her restaurants needed to represent her and be as iconic as Raffles Hotel or the Singapore Sling.” With historic elements including old-school coffee shop chairs, and photo walls of Oon’s past, Oon’s restaurants have hosted luminaries like Thai princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn.

Unexpected elements also come into play. Says Tan: “When someone walks into a restaurant, he or she already has expectations of what the restaurant should look like.



We like to surprise the guest, and create something with a different vibe.”

For Curate, she was tasked to reflect the culinary prowess of its chefs. Her team turned to the idea of an enchanted garden. “We want the diner to experience a sense of dreaminess underscored by calm,” says Tan.

She, on the other hand, is no dreamy creative. “One of my strengths is my ability to manage budgets,” says Tan with a laugh. She adds that practicality and creating projects that withstand wear and tear is “essential” and sometimes “more important than aesthetics”.

This clear rationality, coupled with her ambitions to grow overseas – Laank is currently working on restaurants in Phuket and the US – puts the firm in a good position to succeed in a highly competitive industry.

03 GARDEN OF STARS
The interior decor of Curate, which showcases Michelin-star chefs, channels an enchanted garden.

04 SHOW OF PERSONALITY
The Violet Oon story is encapsulated in the design of her restaurants.