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CHERIN TAN

Creative director at Laank

"A nice surprise", is how Cherin Tan would describe her design firm Laank's performance this year. It's a bit of an understatement given its performance at the recent Interior Design Confederation Singapore's Design Excellence Awards 2017.

First, it bagged two gold awards for its design of restaurant National Kitchen by Violet Oon - the AkzoNobel Colour Award, and another for Best F&B Design in Asia Pacific for spaces less than 2,000 sq ft.

The boutique-sized firm was also named Emerging ID Firm of the Year. Not bad, considering it's the first time the five-year-old firm has ever taken part in a competition.

As its creative director, Ms Tan says that she has always acknowledged her firm's good work, and "the awards are a boost of encouragement to the team."

Besides restaurants, Ms Tan also designs retail spaces, such as the largest Melissa shoe store in the world at Raffles City, and private homes. She doesn't have a signature look, but tackles each project with a view to telling the story of the brand. "A design that provides solutions is essential," she says.

An example is optical store O+, for which she created a bespoke look taken from the material that the home-grown company uses to make their eyewear frames, such as resin. The store's panelling gets a turtle-shell finish, with flexible display shelves that allow them to display more or fewer items as needed. The attention to detail continues to the mirrors placed at strategic spots, so that the staff can see a distant corner of the store without having to be physically there.

"Our style is not tied to trends, so it is not important to have a signature look," says Ms Tan. "But clients appreciate the meticulous design that goes into it."

Ms Tan, who has a degree in interior architecture from Curtin University, never intended to start her own firm. She had previously worked with WOW Architects and Asylum, and was planning to take a sabbatical. However, the freelance work started coming in and when that grew, she ended up starting her own firm, "so that I could do things my way."

In the works include the completion of an office for a design agency, that Ms Tan says will have quirky elements that are "grown up and yet fun."

She is also excited about an aesthetic clinic which she describes as "loud and vibrant, and nothing you'd expect of such a space."

And there is more. Ms Tan hopes to go into furniture design on a more massive scale, designing chairs, vessels, lighting and rugs. She already does bespoke pieces for clients, but wants to expand on the collection.

2018 looks set to be another busy year, leaving her no time for her sabbatical. "I have to shelve that idea, and take two weeks off at the end of every year instead."

- Tay Suan Chiang

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Weekend