

From phone to fun booth

Innovative interior designer – and former *Perspective 40 Under 40* Award-winner – Candice Chan Chao transforms Hong Kong’s under-used phone booths

What drove you to create your own design studio in Hong Kong?

Hong Kong has always been my home; I was born and raised here. Establishing my own design studio (J. Candice Interior Architects) has been on my agenda ever since I decided to become an interior designer when I was 15. I think there is a certain creative aspect of creating a company, almost like making a clay sculpture. The feeling of creating something from scratch is extremely fulfilling.



Phone, photos and facts: Candice Chan Chao has adapted under-utilised phone booths to become multi-function information stations

What is your design approach?

I enjoy having a site walk of the space alone. When I step into a construction site with bare concrete walls and flooring, I can sculpt the space and visualise the design in my head. Textures of wall panelling, large decorative lights, colours of the drapes and fabric pop into my mind as I walk through the venue.

I then return to the drafting board to sketch out all the details. I love to hand-sketch. With the advancement of technology, I still find sketching the quickest and the most effective way to communicate with our clients.

What qualities do you see in the designers of Hong Kong?

I think we are pretty adaptive. Just take a look at how we design small spaces, combining functions and maximising uses of space.



Chao has designed for a variety of clients and projects, ranging from corporate work to the interiors to the Mighty Oaks International Nursery and Kindergarten

You participated in Hong Kong Trade Development Council’s (HKTDC) DesignInspire exhibition last year, how was the experience?

It was a wonderful experience. We spend hours in the studio creating and developing ideas – I don’t get to meet a lot of young like-minded individuals on a daily basis. We have our own struggles as business owners and designers. It was a great opportunity to see what everyone is doing and to feel connected with the local design community.

How was the phone booth idea of your artwork conceived?

The idea of creating a photo-phone booth came up when we realised more than half of the phone booths in Hong Kong are under-utilised with the popularisation of cellphones. We decided to turn them into a fun booth, not only to make phone calls but to take photos and to learn about the history of the district.

How did your collaboration with HKTDC begin? Are you looking to explore more collaborative opportunities and design projects with HKTDC?

I think our collaboration began when I was invited to give a talk at one of the design forums. We have collaborated ever since.

I enjoyed working with HKTDC because every year they bring designers from all sectors together through design forums and exhibitions. It is a great platform to bring design awareness to the public and it provides designers with the opportunity to rethink and find ways to improve our community. ■

PROFILE

After attending university in the United States and working in New York for a few years, Candice Chan Chao returned to Hong Kong in 2010 and founded J. Candice Interior Architects, a full-service interior design and branding agency, and she has designed commercial interiors for brands such as Radisson Hotel, SJM and the Hong Kong Jockey Club. She has been recognised with awards both at home and abroad, including the Canadian Maple Leaf Silver Award, the Hong Kong City Lady Award by the Hong Kong City Lady Junior



Chamber, the Asia Pacific Interior Design Award by the Hong Kong Interior Design Association, Design for Asia Award by Hong Kong Design Centre, and a Ten Outstanding Designers Award by the Hong Kong Art & Design Festival.



The light and airy space that Chao created for the Lady M patisserie in Causeway Bay