

Couture 18-karat gold oval citrine and diamond ring; Couture Quatrefoil 18 karat gold golden South Sea pearl diamond earrings; Couture 18-karat golden South Sea pearl and citrine jewel bead necklace, all from David Yurman

Designer Genes

While fashion labels would love to dress a girl with the elegance, looks and figure of ingenue **CANDICE CHAN**, she has her own designs, writes Christina Ko

■ PHOTOGRAPHY SEAN LEE-DAVIES

At the Edipresse photography studio, order and tranquility have given way to chaos. The oxygen-to-styling product ratio in the air has shifted heavily towards hairspray, and between the lights, the gaggle of crew members, and the five different curling irons and hair dryers going at once, the temperature is at least a couple of degrees higher than outside.

Sitting in the middle of the fray, Candice Chan sits calmly as the fuss around her ebbs and flows. She is all smiles despite an early-morning call time (and a flat tyre en route to the studio), good natured throughout the hair-pulling and make-up procedure, amiable when the shoot runs almost five hours overtime and utterly charming when asked to stay to complete the interview after everyone has packed up and gone.

A clash in schedules has required the studio to be split in half, and at some point in the middle of the day, as a mother watches her teenage son receive instructions on posing and facial expressions, she notes, nodding at Chan, "The models always look so much more natural, don't they?"

It may be all in a day's job for a typical model, but as it turns out, this is Chan's first time in front of the lens. The quick study

is certainly no stranger to hard work, but her typical day requires less modelling, and more designing. The 25-year-old graduate of Syracuse University in New York is the founder and

"To convert a historical building and give it new meaning would be my dream job"

creative director of J Candice Interior Architects, a firm she launched in March of this year handling spatial planning and design. The establishment of her practice fulfills the dream she has harboured since she was half her age while growing up in Hong Kong.

"I was 12 years old when I decided to pursue interior design. I liked to draw things when

I was a little girl, and I thought about being a fashion designer or a shoe designer or an architect. But then my father, who is in the restaurant business, took me to the construction site and asked me how I would decorate the space. From then on, it really appealed to me, to visualise something and then create your own space," she shares.

There was no question when she arrived at Syracuse University that she would study interior design. After graduation with a bachelor of fine arts, she moved from upstate New York down to Manhattan, taking up a position at a mid-sized architectural firm, where she honed her skills on projects such as the CNN and HBO studios, cultural and community centre 92Y and her personal favourite, the Broadway theatre on 39th Street. Since the bulk of her colleagues were involved with the architectural aspects, she and a superior were charged with handling the interiors on their own, granting her early access to hands-on experience and a chance to really prove her mettle by being involved in the decision-making processes.

After a couple of years in New York, she decided the time was ripe for a homecoming. "I always knew I wanted to live in Hong Kong. I told myself, two or three years in New York, and then I'll move back. It was always in the back of my mind," she says. She set foot at Hong Kong International Airport towards the end of 2008, and within half a year, had her own shop up and running.

The projects she handles are mostly of a commercial nature, including a whole host of large-scale interior concepts and designs required for restaurants under the family business, Café de Coral, including Oliver's Super Sandwiches, Spaghetti House and the Chinese food quick-serve chain, Manchu Wok. While these close-to-home assignments take a good chunk of her workload, she has also found the time to give a facelift to popular Japanese snack shop Okashi Land in Hong Kong, and the fruits of her labours should be there for the public to see as soon as next month.

While this type of work is a far cry from the iconic Broadway theatre she worked on not so long ago, she is still contributing to the fabric of Hong Kong life and history – the restaurants and shops whose interiors she is shaping are certainly very much a part of the average Hongkonger's day-to-day routine.

But when it comes to a dream project, Chan is looking for something more akin to the revamp of Western Market in Sheung Wan, which retained the structure and essence of its historical roots while evincing a new aesthetic and purpose. "I really appreciate the conservation of historical buildings," she says. "And to convert something and give it new meaning, that would be my dream job. In 10 years maybe, I might go to Shanghai and see if I

Qin Qin full pave earrings, Small double Qin Qin Ring in 18-karat white gold with full pave diamonds and black diamonds; Qin Qin pendant in 18-karat white gold set with diamonds and black diamonds; Qin Qin pendant in 18-karat yellow gold set with diamonds, ruby, and orange sapphires, all from Qeelin



This Page

White gold
white round
diamond Gypsy
hoops earrings;
platinum white
round diamond
ring set with
white taper
baguette
diamond
shoulders;
platinum white
round diamond
three row
necklace, all
from Graff

Opposite Page

Lotus earring in
platinum with
diamonds;
Platinum Lotus
pendants with
diamonds, all
from Qeelin



**This Page**

Green
tourmaline
earrings; S-link
diamond
bracelet; rose
cut diamond
bracelet,
all from
Tiffany & Co.

Opposite Page

Parentesi
cocktail white
gold long
earrings with
amethyst, blue
topaz and pave
diamonds;
Parentesi
cocktail white
gold one-row
necklace with
amethysts, blue
topazes, green
quartz and
pave diamonds;
Parentesi
cocktail white
gold cocktail
ring with
amethyst and
pave diamonds,
all from
BVLGARI

HAIR KEN HUI ■ MAKEUP CANDY LAW



could work on one of the districts with really old buildings and give them new purpose.” Of recent similar resurrections such as The Pawn and 1881 Heritage, she is positive, but laments, “It’s not enough. Without history, you’re nobody, you have no roots to back up who we are today. We’d be lost without some kind of identity from our past.”

With so much on her plate, it’s no wonder the girl needs to get away now and then. But even when she’s on holiday, work is at the forefront of her mind, and any piece of art, landscape or even fashion trend can spark a new idea. “During my travels, I take a lot of pictures, and often I’ll just sit down and start sketching immediately. Then when I have a project, I’ll pull out the file and all the memories are right there,” she says. When it comes to more concrete muses, the work of Takashi Sugimoto of Japanese firm Super Potato Design and Andrée Putman top her list. Both are known for their stunning modern designs, which transform simple spaces into breathtaking destinations, something she hopes to do with her self-described “modern classic” aesthetic.

When it comes to clothing, however, she’s admittedly “more conservative,” though her lithe frame is the perfect canvas for designs, an unsurprising fact discovered over the course of this day as she goes from glam goddess to rock chick to girl-next-door and more. But perhaps, despite her lovely looks, it’s her design work she wants us to be looking at. And look we will. ■