

DESIGN FILE

Candice Chan

Design is all in the mind for the founder of J. Candice Interior Architects.

BY PETA TOMLINSON

Tell us how you started. “As a little girl I dreamed of being a shoe designer, a fashion designer, basically anything related to design. By 13, I knew interior design was the career I wanted. Every once in a while, my father [Michael Chan Yue-kwong, chairman of Cafe de Coral Holdings] would take me to a dusty construction site and ask me to imagine what I would do with the space. Staring at those plain concrete walls gave me the idea, and a sense of excitement, to create spatial concepts through visualisation. I made a promise to myself when I was 13 that I must establish my own firm by the age of 30.”

What brought you back to Hong Kong?

“After college in New York, I had an amazing two years there, working for a mid-sized company in SoHo specialising in restoration and preservation. I was given a lot of opportunities to design and make decisions [on projects including the revitalisation of a Broadway theatre and interiors for cultural and community centre 92Y]. My partner, now husband, Leonard Chao, and I were both brought up in Hong Kong and attended college in the United States. Moving back had always been on our agenda.”



From left: Nur, in Central; Japanese restaurant Kishoku, in Causeway Bay.

What projects have you been involved in since setting up J. Candice Interior Architects?

“In Hong Kong, there have been restaurants [such as] Nur, Michelin-starred fine dining; Kishoku, Japanese fine dining; Primal Cut, a luxury sports bar and steakhouse; and TCafe 1954, a nostalgic café for Tai Cheong Bakery. We’ve also done

TriBeluga, a six-level tech incubator in Seoul, Korea.”

How would you describe your design approach? “Getting the feel of how natural sunlight warms the interior, how different sounds travel from outside and the overall setting of the neighbourhood are all



important factors. Once I have a good sense of the space, I move onto a drafting table and start developing floor plans. Colours, light and shadows pop into my mind and everything becomes three dimensional. I can walk through the completed space in my head, and then it all comes down to getting the details on paper.”

What is the biggest challenge when designing for commercial clients in Hong Kong?

“Working to a tight timeline. We are often pushed to our limits when designing commercial projects: with high market rents, 30 days to design and 30 days to renovate is a typical schedule.”