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APARTMENT THAT  
TEMPERS THE SOUL**

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ACGMEDIA



# THE SOULFUL OPTIMIST

A SPEARHEADER OF DESIGN IN HER OWN RIGHT, MILLIMETRE DESIGN'S DRIVEN AND DEDICATED DESIGN DIRECTOR VIENNA CHEW CONTINUES TO INSTIL INSPIRATION INTO ONE MILLIMETRE AFTER ANOTHER THROUGH AN EVERLASTING SUPPLY OF IMAGINATION, INTENTION AND INTEGRITY.

TEXT MONISHA SIVANESAN  
IMAGES COURTESY OF MILLIMETRE DESIGN SDN BHD

American actor and director Ossie Davis once stated that, "Any form of art is a form of power; it has impact, it can affect change—it can not only move us, it makes us move," and it looks like Vienna Chew, Design Director of Millimetre Design Sdn Bhd, is one to agree with that profound sentiment. As a fine art aficionado herself, she fuelled her passion for the craft at a tender age when she participated in the Commonwealth Games' drawing competition held nationally in 1998, back when she was still attending primary school. It was this deep love for art, the seeds of which were subconsciously planted by father dearest, that eventually steered her to expand her horizons in the interior design industry once she grew older.

In doing so, Vienna's once small world became exposed to prominent names like Zaha Hadid and Philippe Starck, who she admires for their courageously norm-defying body of work that not only challenges expectations on a consistent basis but has also altered the way she views design by imparting the message that one need not always be restricted by material constraints. Tadao Ando is also another big-league player she looks up to, praising the distinct qualities of the architect's creations that draw upon his Japanese background, i.e. the minimalist aesthetics, innovative use of concrete and open spaces integrated with nature. While the trio have been influential to her in some shape or form, Vienna believes that her own design approach has gradually evolved over time. At present, she prefers evoking a tailored sense of timeless appreciation, or what she defines as a "taste of soul."

Reflecting on the days when limitations and restrictions prevented an uninhibited exploration of her own out-of-the-box ideas as well as adhering to her long-held belief that ideas should always come first in the design process, Vienna was highly motivated to establish a design firm that could actually, and safely, bring those ideas to life. Finding a trusted partner in Alan Fong who shared the same ideals, the duo took the leap and founded Millimetre Design Sdn Bhd in 2011, where they conquered the commercial development scene from offices and experience centres, right up to public spaces and retail outlets. "My vision is to draw inspiration from the environment around us and to design freely, helping others create a fulfilling lifestyle through design," she voices ardently with regards to her work at the multiple award-winning design consultancy and build firm.

Over the past 16 years in the industry, Vienna has had the privilege of being involved in numerous projects that have brought her lasting moments of great pride, regardless of whether they were designed by her individually or as the leader of a design team. One of her favourites is the Sentral Suites Facilities and Common Area inspired by traditional local games, whereby countless sleepless nights, a fast-paced concept generation, an in-depth study of the area's heritage value and 3D renderings on limited computers marked both its obstacles and rewards. Another one is the twentyfive7 Sales Gallery and Show Units, undertaking a complex "Deconstructivism" style that tested the capabilities of local skilled workers. Inaccessibility to the technology or ready-made materials required for the 'Decon' style surfaces and no prior knowledge of curved LED panels were additional issues encountered. Nevertheless, they persevered and got the job done right.

design speaks who's who



Having said that, Vienna considers her biggest professional achievement to be the ability to propose the most suitable and meaningful designs for her clients, helping them meet their business needs through innovation and imagination. Additionally, working with a variety of clients from start to finish has allowed her to understand diverse perspectives. On a personal level though, she values the invaluable communication skills gained within the workplace, especially when interacting with those across both blue-collar and white-collar roles, each with different cultural and language expectations. "Words are powerful, and different communication approaches are necessary depending on the social context. However, the one common thread in all interactions is the respect shared by both sides," she thoughtfully adds.

The latest manifestation of the firm's creativity took place at Dignity Real Estate, completed back in November 2024. More than just your average agency office setup, it was designed to motivate employees, encourage mental positivity, foster communication and boost sales productivity within the work environment. Aside from the obvious passion that keeps her creating with enthusiasm and purpose, this project is arguably the perfect demonstration of Vienna's two other foundational, career-guiding values at play: responsibility and soulfulness. Rooted in integrity, the former holds her accountable to not just her clients but to the environment and society too, while the latter ensures that the spaces she designs resonate and connect with the people who ultimately inhabit them.



On that note, she'd like to drop a few wise words of her own to up-and-coming designers out there: "It's important to be able to envision your final goal and understand what it means to you as a designer on your career path, and remember that there are no insurmountable challenges; it simply depends on how you approach finding solutions from a different perspective." Even in the most unfortunate circumstances, she believes that perhaps the final outcome is the best possible result after putting in all the necessary effort. Last but not least, the designer hopes that the evergreen ones will follow suit in adopting an inquisitive mind and humble spirit in order to embrace an unwavering desire for learning, to which she believes is crucial for steady accomplishment.

Looking towards the future, Vienna hopes to witness the Malaysian design landscape become more accepting of diverse ideas and newfangled approaches in order to transform itself into a precious sanctum for the bold, the unconventional and the unapologetic. When the industry takes on a friendlier nature to the unknown, it "will not only enhance the profession's ability to adaptively respond to the clients' ever-changing wants and needs but also empower designers to push boundaries and explore new possibilities. Ultimately, this more liberated environment will lead to richer, more dynamic spaces that better reflect the unique requirements and identities of those who inhabit them." m

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**"ENVISION YOUR GOAL, EMBRACE CHALLENGES, UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS TO YOU AS A DESIGNER ON YOUR CAREER PATH; IT SIMPLY DEPENDS ON HOW YOU APPROACH FINDING SOLUTIONS FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE."**

**VIENNA CHEW,**  
Design Director,  
Millimetre Design Sdn Bhd

