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DESIGN IN FOCUS

# hinge

*Shopping Bliss... A Retail Concept Raises The Bar*

*Sleeping Beauty... Cream Creates in Lan Kwai Fong*

*Talking Heads... Karim Rashid, Yung Ho Chang, Ho Kwoncjan*

**Awards  
Season...**

*APIDA Takes  
The Stage*

# Show Shoppers

Andy Tong Creations





Shopping in Causeway Bay is a fact of life for most Hong Kong residents. The district is a round-the-clock shoppers' haven with an energy quite unlike any other part of the city. World Trade Centre, located in the heart of the district, has been a magnet for those seeking retail therapy ever since it opened its doors in the mid-1980s. In recent years, however, property developer and landlord Sun Hung Kai has decided to rethink what the complex could offer its tenants to attract late-night customers in search of fresh retail excitement. Along with a complete overhaul of the exterior, the interiors will be renovated in a phased project that will take two years. The end-results will include an open-air rooftop cafe and Japanese-inspired trends in the ensuing commercial mix. Having formerly worked with the developer on a number of its shopping mall displays, Andy Tong Creations was retained to come up with a concept for a retail showroom – dubbed WTC More – to both attract new tenants and show existing ones some exciting possibilities for their space.

Tong studied design at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and is better known in the industry as a stage and set designer. His previous accomplishments include the award-winning stage design for Canto-pop queen Sammi Cheng's X-Live Concert in 1996, sets for various TVB serials and festive decorations at Harbour City's main entrance near the Star Ferry's Tsim Sha Tsui pier. He has worked on the elaborate Christmas displays at Harbour City for nine consecutive years now, and in 2005 won a Hong Kong Designers Association Excellence Award for Exhibition & Event Design for his distinctive interpretation of Chinese New Year. He founded Andy Tong Creations in 2000 and has been steering his projects from temporary, graphic-oriented displays to more permanent interiors in recent years. "Sets are temporary," explains Tong. "Their purpose is to focus the attention on the performance, and to enhance or exaggerate the experience between the actors and the audience. Interiors allow for a practical interface between people and their environment. It is a more direct interaction with society. I see interior design the same way I see music – the more variety and impact, the better. But interiors also have to have a cultural basis that users can relate to."

For WTC More, Tong was given virtual carte blanche – Sun Hung Kai wanted to bring in some of Tokyo's busy night culture to Hong Kong, but the rest was up to him. "The problem is that there aren't too many places to go to in Causeway Bay after midnight," Tong says. "Sun Hung Kai wanted to extend the mall's business hours for drinking and relaxing, with more clubs, bars and lifestyle venues such as spas. My job was to show the client how to construct crossover spaces." Tong worked with approximately half a typical office floorplate to construct a 5,500sq ft fantasy land of retail possibilities. WTC More – located on the 13th floor of the World Trade Centre – took no less than 18 months, including half a year for construction, to be completed, and was officially handed over to Sun Hung Kai in October 2006. From the beginning, Tong encountered a number of constraints. The most difficult was the less-than-desired 8ft height; sprinkler heads and the ventilation system reduced it even further in some areas. He decided to paint the entire ceiling black, and focussed on lighting the floors and walls so as to create a theatrical atmosphere.

WTC More is divided into five crossover zones that blend retail with lifestyle activities. As the mall is targeted at teens and young adults, the key is to keep them from getting bored. Tong balances active and passive spaces by slotting in quiet zones as buffers, with a progression of activities that increase in level of intensity from front to back. "I wanted to encourage excitement," says Tong. At the front is a Beauty and Jewellery Zone, featuring spa and salon services as well as fashion accessories. A conveyor belt for cosmetics and eyewear snakes around customers inside the salon, so they can shop while getting their hair done. The AV and Noodle Express Zone includes a Japanese-style vending machine for ready-to-eat spaghetti, while the Audio-Visual Products and Shoes Zone boasts CD-clad walls, ceilings and floors with LED backlighting. In the Trendy Jeans and Art Zone, shoppers can custom-finish their own jeans, with Swarovski crystals highlighting the studio/shop's DIY features. Lastly, the Bar and Video Entertainment Zone blends bar services and video entertainment. "This is actually my first interiors project of this size," admits Tong. "I was very careful not to do anything wrong, but it was also a lot of fun."

