



Clockwise from left: Steve Leung Designers' Shan Shui bathroom set embedded with Swarovski crystals; Zaha Hadid's City of Towers, a cultural installation that experiments with skyscraper form; Alan Chan's Travelling With Tea trunk for Louis Vuitton.



## SHRUNKEN TREASURES

This weekend's International Design Furniture Fair Hong Kong is sending a message that quality of space is more important than quantity, writes **Christopher DeWolf**

**H**ong Kong already has some of the world's tiniest living spaces – and they're becoming smaller. Developers are unveiling so-called nano flat developments such as Novi, a tower in the city's densely populated Mong Kok district comprising 138 flats ranging in size from 157 sq ft to 312 sq ft. And some 200,000 people in Hong Kong already live in de facto nano flats – otherwise known as subdivided apartments – many of which are illegal and uncomfortable. The nano flats have been touted by Secretary for Transport and Housing Frank Chan Fan as a possible solution to the city's lack of affordable housing. But many of those built by developers have been criticised for their cramped, impractical layouts. But architect



William Lim's Das Haus Asia conceptual flat shows how layering areas can achieve comfort and style while maximising space. This 194 sq ft nano flat layout boasts two bedrooms, a kitchen and living room.

William Lim, managing director of Hong Kong design firm CL3, reckons there's a way to make nano flats work. "We should think of them as three-dimensional spaces," he says. "We have traditionally looked at spaces as floor plans, but if we start looking at them in three dimensions, we could have different levels within the space." Lim explores this notion in Das Haus Asia, an exhibition at the second International Design Furniture Fair Hong Kong, which runs from August 25 to 27 at the Convention and Exhibition Centre in Wan Chai. He's designed a conceptual flat that contains two bedrooms, a kitchen and a living room – all within 18 square metres (194 sq ft). He achieves that by layering the bedrooms on top of the bathroom and kitchen. Lim claims it is the world's smallest fully equipped living space.

As a concept, it's not unprecedented. "The nano apartment is not unique to Hong Kong," says Lim, pointing out that Tokyo has long had them. In Japan, flats often have small floor areas with extra-high ceilings that allow for a cockloft. Hong Kong's building codes require a minimum ceiling height of 2.5 metres, but many flats are already closer to three metres in height – and Lim says they could go even higher. Think of it as high-rises within high-rises. Lim says he wants to prove that "tiny spaces don't have to be void of character – they don't have to be totally utilitarian". His installation at the fair will be stocked with high-end furniture and even a Baccarat chandelier in the high-ceilinged

living room. The installation includes a balcony with a weatherproof sofa because balconies are a cheap way to extend the living space. When it comes to living in style, Lim says, quality of space, rather than quantity, is key. Architect Winnie Yue, the brains behind the design fair, says the exhibition by Lim – known for his bamboo sculptures as well as buildings, including H Queen's Road Central – fits with her ambitions for the event. "He has filled it with a mixture of products from Baccarat to BoConcept," says Yue. "We want to show people that luxury doesn't have to be expensive. It is a state of mind. Sitting in a comfortable environment, reading a book – that's luxury."

Lim's Das Haus Asia is one of several exhibitions which, along with some 20 talks, are intended "to empower visitors to appreciate the process of design", says Yue. Among the speakers is designer Tino Kwan, who will introduce fair-goers to the underrated discipline of lighting design. "Many people still don't understand it," says Kwan, who has worked on interior and architectural lighting since 1979. He says good lighting enhances the design of a space. "I use minimal lighting to achieve a maximum effect. You should not say, 'Wow, the lighting is so great.' It should be, 'Wow, this is a nice space.' The lighting shouldn't overpower the architecture of interior design." Trevor Vivian, global director of Hong Kong-based architecture firm Benoy, will talk on the way



A lounge suite from Steve Leung Designers' Luxury for Serenity for Theodore Alexander.

**Tiny spaces don't have to be void of character – they don't have to be totally utilitarian**

WILLIAM LIM, MANAGING DIRECTOR, CL3

Hong Kong firm LAAB, plans to show the impact of design in our everyday lives.

Among the exhibitions is Zaha Hadid's City of Towers, a sculptural installation that experiments with skyscraper form, pulling and twisting the towers in unexpected ways. In Mr Chan's Tea Room, pioneering Hong Kong designer Alan Chan reveals a fascination for tea, and explores how it has served as a springboard for his product, furniture and graphic design. "It's quite exciting. There's so many different types of people coming together," says Vivian. "It's a chance for people to talk about something relevant and less about their own business."

Yue says: "A lot of people take design for granted, but we want them to understand just how important it is." [ifegscmp.com](http://ifegscmp.com)

International Design Furniture Fair Hong Kong, Fri to Sun, Convention and Exhibition Centre, Wan Chai



Architect and IDFFHK founder Winnie Yue. Photo: David Wong

### Why Hong Kong might be the only place in Asia where a stylish design fair can blossom

Times are tough for design fairs in Asia. The Paris-based Maison & Objet pulled the plug on its Singapore show last November after three years, citing a poor response from European brands and the sluggishness of the global economy.

When architect Winnie Yue launched the International Design Furniture Fair Hong Kong (IDFFHK) in 2015 to give ordinary Hongkongers a chance to appreciate some of the world's best design, she says it was tough to persuade overseas

exhibitors to give the event a chance, but she is confident it will avoid the fate of the Singapore event.

"From the beginning I've thought that only in Hong Kong can a stylish design fair blossom," she says. "Hong Kong is very international and we have a huge market interest in China."

Yue wants the fair to be about more than business. "It's still a small fair – I would call it a boutique event – but this year it's more culture based," she says. "Design is a way of thinking. It's not just about looking good."

There will still be plenty of furniture on show for business visitors to the fair to appreciate, though.

David Hoggard, a partner at POP London Architects, is to speak on the globalisation of design, but he is also looking forward to seeing the booths set up by international design brands.

"You can see some really nicely put together displays, which is interesting to us because we do interior design as well as architecture," he says.

Highlights this year include Germany's ALNO, which will be showcasing its latest kitchen designs, and Everything Under the Sun, a Hong Kong outdoor-living specialist that will be displaying patio-friendly furniture from Tribu, Tuuci, Fermob and many other brands.

Hong Kong designer Steve Leung will exhibit his latest collections, with pieces such as the teacup-like Inkstone bathtub and Shan Shui, a series of bathroom fixtures embedded with Swarovski crystals.

Yue says the brand showcase aims to facilitate networking, although not at the cost of a friendly, relaxed atmosphere.

"What brands really want is to have a platform to reach out to day-to-day consumers, but also to do projects with architects and designers," she says.

But the atmosphere is casual. People really have the time to learn about the heritage or culture of a brand." **Christopher DeWolf**