

# 'TRAVELING IN THE MIND'

*Jiun Ho's Malaysian, French and British aesthetic informs his sophisticated SoMa showroom*

By Julius Lumsden

Tucked away in the heart of SoMa is a doorway that leads one on a voyage across centuries and through many cultures. A steel sign above the main entrance, illuminated at night, reads "Jiun Ho de Jia," meaning "welcome to the house of Jiun Ho."

Intrinsic to Jiun Ho's vision is the idea of traveling in the mind, which is reflected in the works on display and the careful placement of each object and work of art in the San Francisco product and interior designer's showroom.

"This is a space that reflects my life, my background and my culture," says Ho.

If you do not have time to travel, then you can travel within these walls. The showroom opened in January 2011, but the 39-year-old has been working in San Francisco since 1999.

The San Francisco audience is sophisticated, traveled and international, which is what drew Ho to the city. His clientele includes celebrities and corporate executives, and his work has been featured in *Elle Decor*, *Architectural Digest* and *California Home & Design*, among others. He has



participated in the Metropolitan Home Showhouse in San Francisco.

Ho, who is of Chinese descent, was born in Malaysia. There is a strong colonial sensibility to his design aesthetic, notably French, yet it's also infused with Asian and British elements. The 1930s emerges through this eclectic mix of themes, with a touch of the surreal that lends a whimsical humor to his otherwise serious work.

To synthesize art with life, he has a fully equipped kitchen in the gallery and often invites local chefs to create gastro-nomic events and wine tastings alongside the art and furniture on show. Art is to be lived, not looked at.

The rawness of the space reflects its history. The walls are rough with layers of paint remaining from past incarnations. This visual narrative is key to his work. Modern architectural details were built in the space, but the shell remains untouched. History and a sense of place are important to understand his work. There is a continuous juxtaposition of the past and present, the masculine and the feminine, and the traditional and modern.



In contrast to a Western two-point perspective, every object is in balance with the entirety of the room, rather than hierarchical.

"It is a fusion of my Malaysian background and the time spent in the United States," Ho says. "It is a fusion of the two environments enhanced by my world travels. Through my work both with interiors and products, I am trying to connect with people on an emotional level."

Ho does not want to be seen as an Asian designer. He wanted to break that assumption when creating the French-inspired furniture collection. This collection is an attempt to synthesize Eastern and Western design ideals.

If you consider parallel perspective in Asian art and the placement of objects in the two dimensions of the paper in which they float, you will be aware that none take precedence. Every object is in bal-

ance with the others and of equal importance philosophically. There is no hierarchy, as there is no foreground and obvious subject, as in Western two-point perspective.

Once this is understood, one can appreciate the Eastern influence in Ho's work and philosophy of life that he hopes to share in the gallery, interiors he designs for clients and the furniture he makes.

"Both are rooted in modern principles and distilled through my own life experiences. I do not follow fashion trends; rather, I create my own and let it speak for itself."

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