

VOGUE





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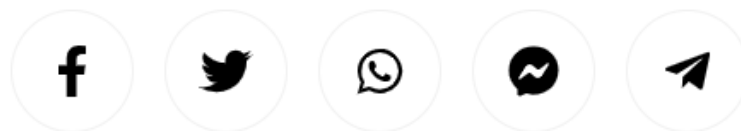
LIFESTYLE

Trailblazers: How This Humid House, Kausmo and Lanzavecchia + Wai are solving problems of today

BY AMELIA CHIA AND CHANDREYEE RAY

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There is a new guard emerging in Singapore. These rising forces of creativity are unified not in profession or craft, but in purpose: each one of them has a sharp gaze levelled at solving problems like food wastage, environmental degradation and inaccessible design. Meet the homegrown brands that are breaking new ground and leading by example via their socially conscious philosophies—one chair, dish and bouquet at a time.



This Humid House





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From left: head of design, Francoise Ozawa; senior designer, Carina Smawfield; creative director, John Lim; senior designer, Carol Melbye.

Recontextualising local flora and fauna is the modus operandi for botanical studio [This Humid House](#). With work that is eccentric, experimental and delightfully unpredictable, the brand is revolutionising industry standards for what good [floristry](#) looks like.

Led by ex-architect and founder John Lim, the team of 10 work primarily out of their sprawling studio-cum-greenhouse and are proudest of one big accomplishment over the past year—their garden. Started as a passion project last May, the fertile ground they plant on has grown steadily into a promising source of ingredients for their projects.

They stay away from [chemical pesticides](#) and floral foam, a toxic and non-biodegradable product commonly used in floristry. “Our baseline target is that at

least 20 percent of the products we use should be local and ideally grown in our own garden. But our progress has been immense—several current projects have been created exclusively from flora and fauna we grew ourselves,” shares Lim.



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This Humid House’s studio-cum-greenhouse is full of unconventional plants and produce

The team’s unflinching use of flowers most Singaporeans dismiss—

bougainvillea, chrysanthemum or marigold to name a few—results in arrangements, installations and landscapes that are as beautiful as they are unconventional. “We are changing the perception that tropical floral arrangements look heavy and weighed down. You take the leaves off a stem of bougainvillea, for example, and it looks like a whole new flower. You no longer recognise it as something you see on your way to Changi Airport,” says head of design Francoise Ozawa.

“When you look at traditional wedding flowers and arrangements in Singapore, they don’t remind you of anything we have grown up with locally. The hydrangeas and everything—they feel like a foreign import. I have always wanted to create work that feels like us because Singaporeans love plants and our culture is deeply tied to horticulture and floristry,” adds Lim.

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Can floristry be sustainable? This Humid House’s founder certainly thinks so

BY CHANDREYEE RAY



Aside from injecting a sorely missed sense of place into their botanical arrangements, using local products plays an important role in making their floral practice more sustainable. “The amount of trash that eventually comes out of a big wedding is appalling. You have massive amounts of flowers just being thrown away. Not to mention that every wedding has flowers coming from Holland and Africa, therefore carrying a massive carbon footprint,” shares Ozawa. To counteract these harmful industry standard practices, This Humid House elevates its rebellious installations

with trees, plants or hedges that are reusable by nature.

Of the four senior designers, three don't have formal training in botany. Yet it is easy to see why in recent years, clients high- and low- profile alike have flocked to them for weddings and events. Their work operates at the intersection of floristry and art and breaks down the traditional boundaries of their industry, all with an end goal of making floristry more creative, environmentally friendly and culturally relatable. Ozawa concludes: "Our clients have trusted us to do things they could not imagine would work. We surprise them every time. Now, we are seeing other floral companies in Singapore follow a similar pattern. It's encouraging and points towards a more ethical, innovative future for our industry."

Kausmo





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On Tang: Passo cotton shirt and pleated wrap skirt from Lusso; Piaget earrings and rings. On Kuah: printed silk dress by Souvenir from Lusso; Piaget earrings and bracelet

One-and-a-half-year-old fine-dining concept Kausmo is helmed by a passionate young duo: 26-year-old chef Lisa Tang and 28-year-old Kuah Chew Shian, who manages front of house. Their intimate 16-seat restaurant (with COVID-19, full capacity is closer to 12) is tucked away in the middle of Shaw Centre, with wall-length windows and an airy open kitchen allowing patrons to witness Tang's delicately plated dishes come to life.

When you receive a plate of food at Kausmo, you will likely not realise that some components in your dish were made from unevenly coloured, oddly shaped or overripe produce. These items, typically sieved out through a process known as aesthetic filtering, would not have made it to supermarkets or other restaurants. Tang and Kuah make it a point to purchase and utilise these doomed ingredients, proving beyond a doubt that they are not only edible, but delicious. In other words, the duo turn 'ugly' food that doesn't meet arbitrary retail standards into gold—all in a bid to raise awareness of the food wastage that results from aesthetic filtering.

“So much of the food that we import and grow ends up in bins and land fields instead of our dinner plates”

“So much of the food that we import and grow ends up in bins and land fields instead of our dinner plates. Retailers look for produce of uniform shape and size, but nature doesn’t work that way,” shares Kuah. While their raw ingredients may look unconventional, Kausmo’s dishes don’t pack any less of a punch—especially when prepared by talented young chef Tang, who has cut her teeth at establishments like Pollen, Jaan and Les Amis. At Kausmo, she shows her flair with local produce and sustainably sourced materials, like our native amaranth spinach, ethically farmed softshell crabs and often-overlooked secondary cuts of meat.





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Kausmo's shelves hold a variety of preserved herbs, fruits and vegetables

Given the volatile nature of Kausmo's food sources, Tang often finds herself working with a whole new set of ingredients each week. Hence, the restaurant's menu is *carte blanche* by design. Instead of picking a dish, patrons trust Tang to serve them something delicious—and she always delivers. “My dishes highlight the ingredients used. I match the produce available each week with existing preserves, spices and herbs that I have on hand, bringing new and interesting tones to each plate.”

With only each other to rely on, the pair run a tight ship. Tang takes occasional breaks from her culinary duties to manage Kausmo's social media, while Kuah brews the restaurant's signature kombucha on the side. Through long days, what keeps them going is their shared mission of bringing awareness to food wastage in Singapore and a hope of eventually changing the way the industry operates. “Our goal is that retailers will notice that since diners can see the beauty in our food, they do not need to aesthetically filter their produce and waste so much of it,” Tang says. Kuah adds: “We also aspire for diners, retailers and restaurants alike to be more thoughtful with their food selection, while supporting local farms as much as they can.”

Lanzavecchia + Wai



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On Wai: Hermès cotton shirt, striped cotton jacket and cotton trousers

In 2012, Francesca Lanzavecchia and Hunn Wai embarked on a project

titled 'No Country for Old Men' for SaloneSatellite, the young designers' platform at Salone del Mobile. It was sparked by the realisation that well-resolved and well-designed products for the elderly at home were scarce.

“Nobody looks forward to ageing, yet we are underprepared for that state of living—where our bodies don't work the same way anymore,” says Wai, one-half of design consultancy [Lanzavecchia + Wai](#). “My work partner Francesca's grandfather had just passed on at the time and her grandmother was very old. Since she's a designer, she decided to design cool things for her grandma.”

“When we are caught up in everyday work, we tend to forget that we have the power, means and accessible platforms to make an impact”


This stream of consciousness is echoed in Lanzavecchia + Wai's personal philosophy, which is to specialise in narrative and concept-driven furniture and home objects that can change perspectives and rituals. Lanzavecchia and Wai, who are based in the Italian town of Pavia and Singapore respectively, aimed to extrapolate objects that were aspirational, desirable and inspired a sense of ownership towards elderly aid objects.

The industrial designers went to work on dreaming up three brilliant objects, starting with the Together Cane, a walking cane with a mini table. The pair also designed the MonoLamp, a sleek table lamp with a

magnifying screen and LED components to help those with deteriorating eyesight read better. Finally, Assunta—a chair that helps seniors stand up with ease.

Although ‘No Country for Old Men’ was a mere concept, it opened doors for Lanzavecchia + Wai in the healthcare sector. “It challenged us on an emphatic level. We needed to visit homes and talk to people to get a better understanding of their lives.”





A top-down view of Lanzavecchia + Wai's office space in Singapore

Their other commercial projects—such as designing a chair for renowned Italian furniture company Zanotta and creating immersive window installations for Hermès—were simultaneously propelling Lanzavecchia + Wai to greater heights and universal recognition. But Wai believes it is the less glamorous work that has true power to change the world.

Their latest venture—Hack Care, in partnership with Lien Foundation and Lekker Architects—hopes to do just that for persons with dementia. Styled like an Ikea catalogue, Hack Care is a visual compendium of tips and tricks that aims to show how one can care better for persons with dementia with simple and creative improvisations.

“Perhaps designers can agree to a creative corporate social responsibility, to dedicate five to 10 percent of their time to investigate issues at hand. When we are caught up in everyday work, we tend to forget that we have the power, means and accessible platforms to make an impact in a way that might not need to be commercially produced yet,” Wai concludes.

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