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# The Discreet Charm *of* André Fu

The Hong Kong designer has quietly become the hotel tastemaker of the moment.

by ERIC WILSON *Portrait by* LIT MA

Perhaps the most common response the architect André Fu gets from friends who have experienced his East-meets-West interior design for the ultra-luxe St. Regis Hong Kong, which opened in the Wan Chai neighborhood last year, is that the hotel looks “very André.”

They say the same thing of the restaurant Louise, one of the city’s hottest new tables, where Fu created a two-story, colonial-style salon lined with tropical prints and Art Deco fixtures, a place he imagined a French woman who migrated to Hong Kong in the 1950s might make as her home—a look that is also “very André.” And nothing says “very André” quite so much as the cool, calming (and much copied) interiors of the Upper House hotel in nearby Admiralty, which put Fu on the design map only a decade ago with its innovative progression of scale, from intimate to dramatic—to even surreally dynamic in, say, the restroom mirrors, which are angled in such a way that guests appear to be floating in the sky.

“The Upper House in some ways elevated my career tremendously,” Fu says. Since then, Fu has been able to not just simply replicate the success of that project but also take on very different ones.

No other homegrown designer, in fact, has made such a substantial mark on the cityscape in recent times as Fu, whose signature can be found on four major hotels, multiple retail spaces, and occasional art installations. His growing portfolio, which includes projects around the world and a lifestyle brand of home products, has made him one of the most acclaimed talents of his generation. “I seem not to have met anyone in Hong Kong who doesn’t like his work,” says Adrian Cheng, the billionaire chief executive officer of New World Development Company, who redeveloped the city’s Victoria Dockside. It includes a hybrid hotel-and-serviced-residences concept called K11 Artus, which Fu designed with the idea of incorporating contemporary art alongside traditional Chinese handicrafts. “He completely gets my vision of creating the world’s first artisanal home,” Cheng says. Other recent hotel commissions include the Waldorf Astoria Bangkok, the Andaz Singapore, and the Pavilion Suites at the Berkeley London. In New York, Fu recently created a showcase apartment in Jean Nouvel’s 53 West 53 tower.

The level of projects would be remarkable for any designer, let alone one of his relatively young age—Fu is now 44. Besides hospitality and residential works, he is also in demand for product collaborations, such as an elegantly twisted couch for Louis Vuitton’s *Objets Nomades* collection, rugs with Tai Ping that reference the brushstrokes of Chinese calligraphy, and a Julian Bedel–formulated home fragrance that combines notes of Sichuan pepper, South American ginger, and citrus. His latest commission, outdoor furniture for Janus et Cie, consists of teak lounge chairs and tables painted pale shades of gray he calls “smoke” and “driftwood.” The pieces are so meditatively clean and minimal they practically whisper the collection’s name: *Rock Garden*. “Outdoor furniture is typically designed in such a way that it feels more robust, which is why I created something more like an indoor collection,” Fu says. “A lot of the design is in the details, such as interlocking joints where the seat and legs come together.” The furniture gives the illusion of taking up less physical space, a theme that is central to his work in hotels, where space is always at a premium. “It’s more like a human scale that’s suited to an urban environment,” he says. “Not smaller, but softer.”

For Fu, a dashing figure who comes from a prominent family, and yet is disarmingly discreet, the perception that his work is becoming recognizable seems somewhat at odds with his stated mission to blend in to the background. “For every project I take on, I’m still there to tell the client’s story, using my aesthetics,” Fu says. “I don’t think the endgame is to put me in the foreground, but instead it’s just me as a curator, to absorb, interpret, and express.” Nonetheless, Fu is taking stock of his accomplishments in a new book, *André Fu: Crossing Cultures with Design*, out in May from Thames & Hudson. Working with the Hong Kong–based writer Catherine Shaw, Fu explains how

André Fu at Louise,  
a restaurant he  
designed in Hong  
Kong that opened  
last year.

