

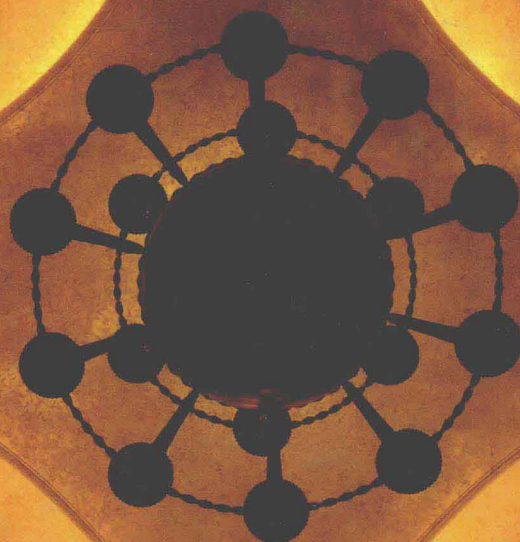
WORLD'S BEST DESIGNERS SERIES 世界顶级设计师系列

30 LIGHT YEARS

Lighting through the eyes of

Tino Kwan

三十光年 | 关永权灯光设计



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深圳市创福美图文化发展有限公司 编著
大连理工大学出版社

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Tino Kwan's 30 Light Years

Tino Kwan / Biography

1973

Graduated from Hong Kong Polytechnic University majoring in Interior & Industrial Design

1974-1975

Lighting Designer in Hong Kong Branch Office of US Spatial Light Environments Design Company

1975-1976

Lighting Designer in Athens Branch Office of US Spatial Light Environments Design Company

1976-1978

Lighting Design Director in London Branch Office of Dale Keller & Associates

1979

Founded Tino Kwan Lighting Consultants in London

1981

The Headquarter of Tino Kwan Lighting Consultants moved to Hong Kong

1982

Sustaining Member of the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America

1995

Founded Tino Kwan Lighting Consultants Branch Office in Bangkok

2005

Founded Tino Kwan Lighting Consultants Associated Office in Beijing

2009

Celebrate 30th Anniversary of Tino Kwan Lighting Consultants



Lighting Architect – Tino Kwan

Internationally acclaimed lighting designer Tino Kwan is widely accepted as one of the world's most celebrated masters of his trade. His dazzling work can be found across the globe – from palaces in Iran to the most luxurious hotels in Tokyo. Professionals both within and outside the industry have heralded his design achievements. He was named one of Hong Kong's Ten Outstanding Designers in 2007 and was awarded the Outstanding Greater China Design Award for two consecutive years in 2008 and 2009. He also received awards from the China Illuminating Engineering Society for two consecutive years in 2007 and 2008.

“Lighting brings life to space, surroundings and objects. Light changes constantly during the day, from natural sunlight to artificial lighting at night. Different light sources can create different atmosphere and emotions in the same space. Lighting is important as it can affect and change our moods.”

Kwan's interest in design was cultivated from a young age through an interior designer uncle. Born and raised in Hong Kong, he graduated with an interior and industrial design degree from Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and later took a job with the US Spatial Light Environments Design Company in Hong Kong. Under the guidance of the world-renowned lighting designer John Marsteller, Kwan soon found his lifetime career in lighting design.

Kwan's obvious passion and hard work was quickly acknowledged, and he was sent to work in the new Athens office at the young age of 24, where he discovered western lighting design concepts and worked on an array of commissions, including a Greek shipping magnate's Northern Greece resort and a palace in Saudi Arabia. He soon became widely known in design circles when Dale Keller of Dale Keller & Associates (DKA) brought him to London to take on a job as director of lighting design.

“Lighting design is a duet between light and shadows. Light is invisible and intangible unless it is shone onto an object. Light is colourful. We do not notice the importance of light during the day, but it is valued come night time. Where light does not reach, it is called shadow. People find shadows frightening, but to an experienced lighting designer, it is a significant design aspect. Shadows have an important role in lighting design, because without it, a space will lose its dimensions. The depth and quality of space is expressed by shadows.”

During his time with DKA, Kwan’s clients included Hilton, Intercontinental, Sheraton and Hyatt hotels, and even an Iranian princess. In 1979, he started his own practice while continuing to work with DKA, creating the lighting for many European hotels and private residences. On a vacation to Hong Kong in 1980, he met American designer Joe Durso, who invited him to collaborate on the lighting design at the private club, I-Club. Spotting the potential for opportunities in Asia, Kwan closed up shop in London, sold his Wimbledon home and made the move to Hong Kong.

“Architectural lighting design can change a building’s physical form into a piece of living architecture. This kind of change is a part of the design process and artistic enhancement.”

He successfully created a market in lighting design in Hong Kong and eventually became the most well known lighting design consultant in the city, attracting clients from high-end fashion brands to international hotel chains. Tino Kwan Lighting Consultants now consists of 25 employees and has a partner company in Beijing, providing lighting consultancy services for renowned architect and interior design firms around the world, including SOM, RTKL, WATG, OMA, Foster & Partners, Japan’s Kajima, Nihon Sekkei, Nikken Sekkei, KKS and Super Potato, ect. Kwan’s lighting design has brightened many Asia’s interiors, and landmark architectures, including

Fendi’s many Asia retail stores, Louis Vuitton and Armani stores in Hong Kong, the Wing Kwong Pentecostal Holiness Church, the Hong Kong Police Headquarter, as well as numerous hotel and hospitality establishments, such as the Grand Hyatt Hotel Shanghai, Mandarin Oriental Tokyo Hotel and Four Seasons Hawaii. In the late 90s, Kwan took on his first project with Peninsula – the renovation of the Spring Moon restaurant in Hong Kong with interior designer Kenneth Ko. This was followed by renovations for the Beijing hotel and an expansion project in the Bangkok hotel. In 2003, he was commissioned to light the entire Peninsula Tokyo – a project that proved to be Kwan’s most challenging and rewarding.

“Light, which represents our heart and spirit, is also the most powerful tool for expressing emotions.”

Even though Kwan has tried his hand at the restaurant business, successfully opening Italian, Japanese, French, Vietnamese restaurants, and even an English Pub, he could never wander too far away from lighting design. Nor has he forgotten his Chinese roots. With the swift economic growth in China, many local landmarks and hotels have approached Kwan for his expertise. Much of his work can be found in Beijing, Changzhou, Chaozhou, Chengdu, Dongguan, Fushan, Guangzhou, Hangzhou, Huangshan, Lijiang, Nanchang, Nanjing, Ningbo, Qingdao, Shanghai, Shenyang, Shenzhen, Tianjin, Wuxi, Xi’an, Xiamen. Recently, Tsinghua University has also asked him to teach at the elite institution to help nurture a new breed of lighting designers. With his passion, wisdom, talent and creativity, adding to that his expertise in lighting design, Kwan has managed to light up the interior design of China.

“Lights light up our home, and light up our lives.”

More Insights from Tino Kwan

Which elements define your design style?

My philosophy is to use the minimum amount of lighting equipment to achieve maximum lighting effects, so when I finish my lighting plan I'll always ask myself: if I had one more light it would be too many, and if I were to take one out would it be enough? I pay a lot of respect to the architecture, or with interiors, to the ceiling design. Imagine a ceiling full of light – the sense of space will immediately disappear. Over-designing something comes from a lack of confidence. If you look at the spaces I've designed for, you don't find them cluttered with lighting but you still get the effect.

What were your aspirations as a Hong Kong student?

I wanted to be a product designer. Philippe Starck wasn't even famous then, but I had wanted to design products that could be sold all over the world. In the early 70s, product design was just coming up in Hong Kong and designers were doing small radios, cassette players, and other electronics. The best design products were from northern Europe, some from Japan. After trying furniture design, I took a job with an American company who designed lighting for interiors and architecture, and from there I was sent work in the company's new branch in Athens, Greece.

Did your time in Greece have much influence on your work?

It gave me the bigger picture, especially when I was able to travel around in Europe and see other kinds of lighting design. Design information was very limited in Hong Kong back then. For many hotels in northern Greece, design themes revolved around ancient Greek architecture but with a modern twist. In those early days lighting designers also designed decorative lights, so I would spend a lot of time at different museums making sketches of Greek jewellery, incorporating them onto designs for chandeliers.

After a few years in Athens, you moved to London with Dale Keller & Associates, the largest interior design company in the world at the time. How did you find the London scene?

I felt more at home with the English language, for a start. It was also the beginning of the punk generation and quite a lot of creative things were happening in art galleries and with fashion. It didn't really get into my designs though. When the Middle Eastern economy was booming, we were working on meticulous projects, such as hotels, small airplanes and palaces, so I never incorporated 'disco' elements in the designs. I once designed for an Iranian princess, but she didn't like punk... I did turn my hair pink though!

Was it difficult to set up your own firm in London?

Business slowed down after the economic boom in the Middle East and DKA wanted to scale down the office, so the first to be cut was the lighting department. At that time most of the companies in London did not have a lighting design department – it was all done by interior designers. But when I set up on my own firm, I was working for them on a contract basis, so I got the best of both worlds. At that point I moved from an apartment to a house in Wimbledon with a garden – practically becoming a local! I had no intention of coming back to Hong Kong.

So what happened?

I used to go back once a year and one summer, a famous American interior designer Joe Durso came to Hong Kong for a very large private club concept. American interior designers like to work with lighting professionals. I happened to be in Hong Kong, where there were really no other major lighting designers at the time, and we hit it off. The I-Club was a beautiful design based heavily on art, but it was very much ahead of its time. At that time Andy Warhol was still around, and to promote the club he brought a lot of his paintings. He was also doing portraits for a lot of Hong Kong socialites. After that, each project led to another and I was sort of stuck in Hong Kong. My garden in Wimbledon became overgrown, the neighbors started to complain, then my pipes froze over and burst. It seemed like a good idea to stay...

Any regrets?

Looking back, if I didn't come back to Hong Kong I'd have been very happy working in London, but I wouldn't have done as much, because in Asia there are so many more opportunities.

Back then did you find Asia more open to your craft, or more conservative?

Most of my projects then were in hospitality since few developers would think of working with a lighting designer in office buildings, for example, or shopping malls. Just 'light', for them, was sufficient. When I got a shopping mall project in Yuen Long (the New Territories) in 1986, I knew people were starting to realize that lighting was important.

How did you break into the luxury fashion market?

My first high-end retail project was for Fendi. Every two to three years, fashion labels would come up with a new image, usually at the head office. For Fendi then, it was a 'dark concept'. The problem became evident when in the first few stores people kept falling down, bumping into shelves and hurting themselves. When the design director Stuart Young from LVMH Hong Kong asked me for help, I looked at their lighting plans and knew what the problem was. Nothing was wrong with the fittings themselves, but the planning was wrong: where light should have been, there was not enough; where light wasn't needed, it was full of light. I took their plans and reworked them, and it was a total success. Since then I've done who knows how many Fendi stores in Asia.

You've collaborated quite often with the Peninsula group over the years?

It's one of the hotel chains I've enjoyed working with the most. For Peninsula Tokyo, we had the chance to do every part of it, including architecture, interiors and landscaping. There is also a trend among clients to employ different interior designers for each part of a project. It's difficult in a way that we're dealing with more consultants, but working with so many talented international designers is enjoyable. It's one of the perks of being a lighting designer.

So how do you pitch a lighting scheme in the 21st century?

Nowadays we can use computer simulation to show lighting effects, perhaps using an architect's or interior designer's rendering. It's much more convincing and it's easier for a client to understand. In the old days we had to use hand renderings and sketches.

Do you have a passion outside of work?

I got involved in the restaurant business soon after my return to Hong Kong. Eating out was becoming a big thing, but in the 80s I remember the first thing you did every morning was to call friends from the office and decide where to have lunch, because there weren't so many great restaurants and a reservation was always necessary. One day my friends and I were discussing the inconvenience of it all, and decided to open up our own! A friend's family owned a warehouse in Lan Kwai Fong, so we took on the lease and created a restaurant called Central Park. Unfortunately the food concept, a Japanese-French fusion, was a bit ahead of its time. In the end we changed it into an Italian restaurant, Va Bene, which did extremely well. I've sold it now, but most recently opened the Stable, an English pub in Happy Valley.

I also like to collect cars but my passion is cooking Italian food. My wife and I enjoy good food and we always look for great restaurants wherever we travel to, be it Michelin-star restaurants in Tokyo and Paris or family-run establishments in small villages in Tuscany. I entertain a lot and very often cook for close friends at home.

Has lighting your home been a big project?

I do have influence with the interior designers I work with, in terms of slightly adjusting an interior to get a better lighting effect, but I still need to respect the designer's scheme. At home I can demonstrate the use of lighting and natural lighting with complete freedom; how it can increase or enhance a space. I've tried to make it very simple though. For example the corridor leading to the main bedroom was originally like a dark alley, so I knocked down the study room wall and put in a frosted glass wall in order to 'borrow' natural light from windows in the study. In the guest bathroom I created a wall of light to create the illusion of a bigger space.

Which project would you consider the height of good taste, in terms of lighting design?

I would say the lighting of many traditional Parisian buildings. Unlike most old colonial buildings in China, they're tasteful and so beautifully done, not over lit or too loud. They fit in with neighbouring buildings and with the environment; you don't see the light sources or the fittings. As old as the buildings are, the designers have hidden them quite nicely.

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