COMMERCIAL
Interiordesign
May 2022 Vol.18 Issue 05 | An ITP Media Group Publi

LIVING THE DREAM

JACQUELINE TAN CO
YOUNG DESIGNER OF THE YEAR 2021

PLUS: NEW LOOK RETAIL + YAS ISLAND EATERY + DA VINCI LEGACY

Commercial Interior design

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Jacqueline is our Young Designer of the Year 2021

Searching for inspiration?



Awards season is gathering pace and it won't be long before we're celebrating at the *Commercial Interior Design* Awards in person. Winning an award continues to generate value all year round, and no-one appreciates that better than the winners themselves. Young Designer of the Year is always one of our favourite categories and makes for a fantastic story, following the eventual winner from nomination to successful career. So, we've kicked off the 2022 awards cycle by interviewing last year's winner, Jacqueline Tan Co. We hope you find her story as inspiring as our awards judges did.

Hopefully another source of inspiration was the recent *CID* Power Panels conference. The inaugural event saw speakers and panelists pondering on the design issues of the day. We've focused on what the retail panel discussed in this issue's Special Report on retail design. Also in the May Special Report are deep dives into the new face of supermarket design, a case study on lighting a fashion store for Saudi shoppers, and an opinion piece on experiential retail experience.

This month's First Look takes us out of the mall and into a restaurant, specifically Hunter & Barrel in Yas Bay, Abu Dhabi, which is the work of the collective creative mind of Design Partnership Australia.

Inspiration on every page!

JO'N

Jane O'Neill
Editor

FORTUNE & FATE

ONE YEAR ON – JACQUELINE TAN CO, *COMMERCIAL INTERIOR DESIGN* YOUNG DESIGNER OF THE YEAR, 2021

Sleeping peacefully in a different time zone, Jacqueline Tan Co was unaware that she'd been named *Commercial Interior Design* Young Designer of the Year 2021. She assumed the flurry of pings on her mobile meant issues with a project that she and her team of colleagues at LW were working on. After chatting with the talented young designer, we realise that this self-effacement is second nature, but also belies a gritty resolve that's taken her to the rank of senior interior designer with a rapidly expanding design firm.

Now Jacqueline is back where it all began, in LW's Hong Kong office, the city where she first headed as a graduate to hand out her CV and hustle for her first job.

Jacqueline credits both fortune and fate for her rise to award-winning status, but can't deny that hard work pays off. Here's her story in full...

Commercial Interior Design (CID): Congratulations again on being our young designer of the year, 2021. You couldn't be at the ceremony, so how did you find out and who was there to share the good news?

JACQUELINE TAN CO (J): Thank you! I wasn't expecting to win at all. I was very delighted and pleasantly surprised. Being in an earlier time zone, it was very late at night when I woke up to several messages from numerous colleagues. At first, I thought something has gone wrong with one of our projects, but all the messages were very celebratory. Pooja, our Design Director, filmed and sent me videos of the ceremony which made the event feel more tangible. I was very touched and overwhelmed by all the support and cheering of my colleagues.

I am very happy and honoured to win such a prestigious award and gain such wonderful feedback from my mentors, colleagues, friends, family, and suppliers. I shared the news with my professors too, and of course thanked them, as they were the first people who sent me along this path.

It was so unfortunate I could not be there to join the event in person, however, my colleagues Andrew and Jun represented me up on stage and their expressions are worth a thousand words. Jun later said that he felt as if he had won the award. I am very, very honoured and appreciative of the recognition, and happy that my colleagues were able to share the moment with me.



Jacqueline's colleagues collect her CID award

CID: Tell us about your career to date in terms of appointments, locations and your future ambitions?

J: Any success is attributed to hard work, but also fortune and fate have a lot to do with it. My career as it is today started on a planned trip to Hong Kong, with two of my best friends. Almost fresh out of university, I asked if they would accompany me to Hong Kong. Where, on weekdays, I handed out my portfolio to companies, and on the weekend enjoyed being a tourist. Everyone was convinced I was being naïve, that nobody goes on a holiday to a foreign country and finds a job.

> I was offered my dream job on the spot

However, I was blessed enough to be offered a job on the second day. So, I went home and packed my bags for what turned out to be the most rewarding 10 years of my life. For my second (and third) move, I was offered my dream job on the spot. Both of those events are forever etched in my heart for how unexpectedly wonderful things unfolded.

Both managers who had hired me later revealed their reason for employing me, they were both attributed to attitude. The first was for my perseverance and grit. She was very impressed with my courage to knock on her door for a second time – a young lady who barely had anything to show in her portfolio. The second, is for confidence and determination.

I was shown an extensive presentation and was asked whether I thought I would be able to do something of that level. I responded that there was no point in me being there if I did not believe I could. Half an hour later, I was shown around the office and introduced to the team.

Looking back, I am grateful for having the courage to be unfazed (or naïve) by external factors; instead, I was fully focused on persevering to achieve what I have set my goals on. I am incredibly fortunate to have been with the companies

Jacqueline is currently based in LW's Hong Kong office



A bar design for Qianhai Brewery Co

and the people I worked with. Everyone I crossed paths with has led me to where I am today.

The longer and more familiar I get with the industry, the more I hear different points of view – the consultants, the clients, and the vendors. There are so many challenges that will never be resolved with a singular solution, it's not a math problem. However, I like to actively take part in forming solutions.

I am working towards not only providing great designs to our clients and the public but also in truly uplifting the industry by educating the public so that the design industry will one day become valued and respected for all the priceless contributions it brings to daily lives – the perceptible and the imperceptible alike.

I am actively advocating for designers and artists so fellow peers are more aware of the long-term consequences of our decisions, and their impact on the larger industry, especially on the smaller, boutique companies and independent artists. We must stand together and work towards the betterment of our industry, and protect the people that come after us.

CID: You're not in Dubai right now – can you share more about the exciting LW development that you're working on?

J: I am currently in our Hong Kong studio. We are working on several projects simultaneously, the majority of which are in the Middle East, but also a couple of very exciting ones around this region, and one in Europe. There are a few projects that are confidential, but we are excited to share those when we can!

At the moment, what keeps our teams most excited are two luxury hotels that are defining milestones for the brands and the clients, and, of course, for us at LW. Designing two projects of the same scale and significance is challenging – it takes substantial experience and a keen eye to be able to design both and address each of the briefs uniquely and authentically.

We also have a lifestyle boutique hotel in Malta, which is equally as exciting. It's a lifestyle boutique hotel and residential development centered around wellness. It's a very unique project that we are



certain will be a destination venue. And we also have two more new projects in this region – an F&B in Vietnam that speaks of the current times whilst authentically showcasing the rich heritage and history of the country; and a casino hotel project that is unlike any expected casino aesthetic – we applied our signature LW contemporary approach to elevate and bring a sophisticated touch to the property. We can't wait for travel to resume so we can visit project sites.

CID: When did you decide you wanted to be an interior designer? What did your family and friends think?

J: Being an interior designer was a resolute dream I had since the age of 11. And my passion had been further fueled and encouraged by a video game called 'The Sims' – which a lot of interior designers may be aware of and equally obsessed over. Every day, for years, I would come home to design interiors through this software.

Prior to attending university for interior design, I used to be a carefree person who did not pay much attention to academics. I focused on things that were interesting or mattered to me, one of them was harnessing my passion for interior design albeit through a video game. What made me feel most fulfilled was designing homes with intensively designed layouts, for these virtual families that never got to enjoy their homes for long as I demolish them to give way to new ideas.

I also enjoyed collecting leaflets on new residential blocks which I rigorously study during the car ride home. I then redraw these to create different scenarios and layouts, picturing them with different types of demographics of people.

Through the years of shifting and changing, being an interior designer is the single thing I was sure I wanted to be. And this passion is what keeps me committed and on top of the game. When situations get extra challenging, I remind myself of how incredibly lucky I was to find my passion from a young age and to be able to pursue it and be successful.

My family was not quite supportive to start with, consistently encouraging me to choose a different path. But after seeing how passionate I was at university, and to then actually be finally making an effort in school and excelling, they finally relented. My friends and my professors were integral in providing support and cheering me on. One of my many wonderful professors, Mr. Santos, saw my potential and he refused to accept anything beyond excellent from my submissions.

CID: What are the main challenges for young designers trying to gain employment and experience? What are your tips for overcoming them?

J: The challenges will be very unique depending on the background, and the changing times. However, regardless of the variables, it is important to remember that everyone starts from the bottom. It is better to grow slowly but surely. Foundation is very important, without it, failure will be inevitable.

I have been told many times, that attitude is more important – skills can be taught. Personally, what has proven most effective to me is working towards gaining the trust of colleagues right from the beginning, as a priority. This means giving it my 100% right from day one, and not being calculative on what tasks were on the job description. Be so busy to not have the time to complain.

> “Passion keeps me committed”

For most people in this industry, we spend more time at work than at home. So especially for the young ones, a strong leader and great mentor are defining and pivotal. Being in a team or encouraging your team to be one another's solid support system allows everyone to be comfortable in openly discussing and debating our creative goals and visions. This will always lead to greater things.

Lastly, have a purpose that is bigger than yourselves. This is what will keep you going when you lose sight amidst the inevitable stress and possible burnout.

CID: What projects are you working on and what's your preferred sector – residential, hotels, offices etc?

J: I am currently working on multiple things – a very exciting and anticipated destination luxury hotel in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a hip destination bar in China, a casino hotel in Macau, and a rooftop bar in Vietnam; and a few other projects in the background.

As a designer, I love exploring new design trends, rummaging through new inventive materials, experimenting with innovative technologies, and creating bespoke designs from the core of my imagination. These are best brought to life when doing luxury hospitality projects. I find the coordination for this scale of project very exciting and the challenge to successfully design spaces that would cater to different preferences, restrictions, regulations, and demographics is very stimulating and fulfilling.

CID: Your nominator to the 2021 awards praised your relationships with mentors and interns – how has your mentor helped shape your career and how do you try to give back to younger colleagues?

J: The person I am today is an amalgamation of all the beautiful people I have been and am currently surrounded by. At work, my attitude has been shaped by my passion, commitment, grit, and tenacity, but also my cherished work friendships. Work colleagues can make it or break it. I have had mentors who employ a more negative encouragement type of approach, and I have been with positive encouragers, and I am surprisingly adaptable to either.

By nature, I am quite petite and introverted so as I grow in my career and role at LW, we have engaged a coach, Ruth, to assist me in developing my own personal leadership style and presence, to be able to successfully convey my flair and vision to clients with poise and confidence. Digital meetings were also something to be familiarised with and at LW we all have been training on how to be more compelling online.

My nominator, Adrian Battisby, is my mentor and I am incredibly fortunate to be working alongside someone who is so confidently talented and ingenious; but also extremely kind, caring, and nurturing, all the while successfully leading our studio to bigger and brighter things. I watch him handle situations, especially the difficult ones, with humility, grace, compassion, empathy, and an unsurpassable kindness and positivity which undoubtedly inspires me to do better.

He has encouraged and supported me to be a better leader and to be the best designer I could be. I have a lot to learn and I am grateful to have Adrian as I navigate to finding my own unique path and leadership style. I am beyond grateful for Adrian's mentorship and the only way I could repay this is to pay it forward and make him proud.

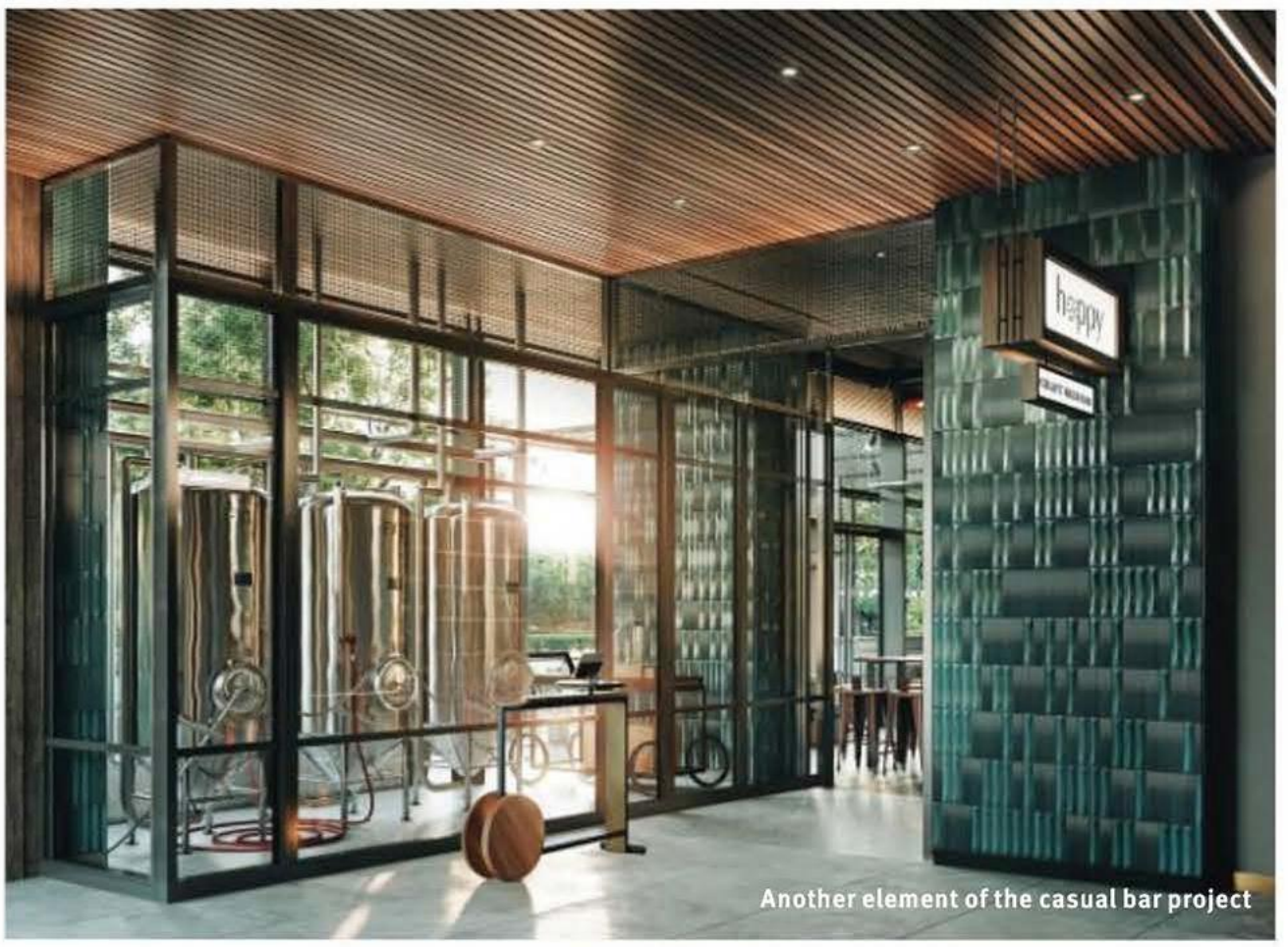
CID: What's a typical day like at LW? What made you decide to work for a studio instead of going freelance?

J: Every day is very, very packed. We run a thousand miles an hour and it keeps things exciting. We used to travel to sites a lot more often for coordination, inspections,



A coach helped develop Jacqueline's leadership style





Another element of the casual bar project

and meetings, but these days we are all on video calls. Sometimes there are three or four other calls running parallel in the background.

Depending on the day, it can be full of meetings – coordination and presentations; or a sourcing and materials day, a CAD or sketching day, or the most exciting – brainstorming sessions. Nine times out of 10, it is a combination of everything. Occasionally, there are days filled with only working on numerous material boards, and these days give me time to step back and reflect on what we are designing and what could be improved. I genuinely enjoy all aspects of design; each task provides a unique growth and some rare moments of Zen too.

I enjoy working on luxury hospitality projects the most. For this, longevity and a solid company track record is required which is currently not what freelancers are able to do, or be fully involved with. At LW, I am with an incredible leader and mentor who gives me the freedom to be creative and harnesses my leadership skills; I have amazingly talented colleagues who are there for work and play, and we have exceptionally exciting projects, so I am enjoying the experience very much.

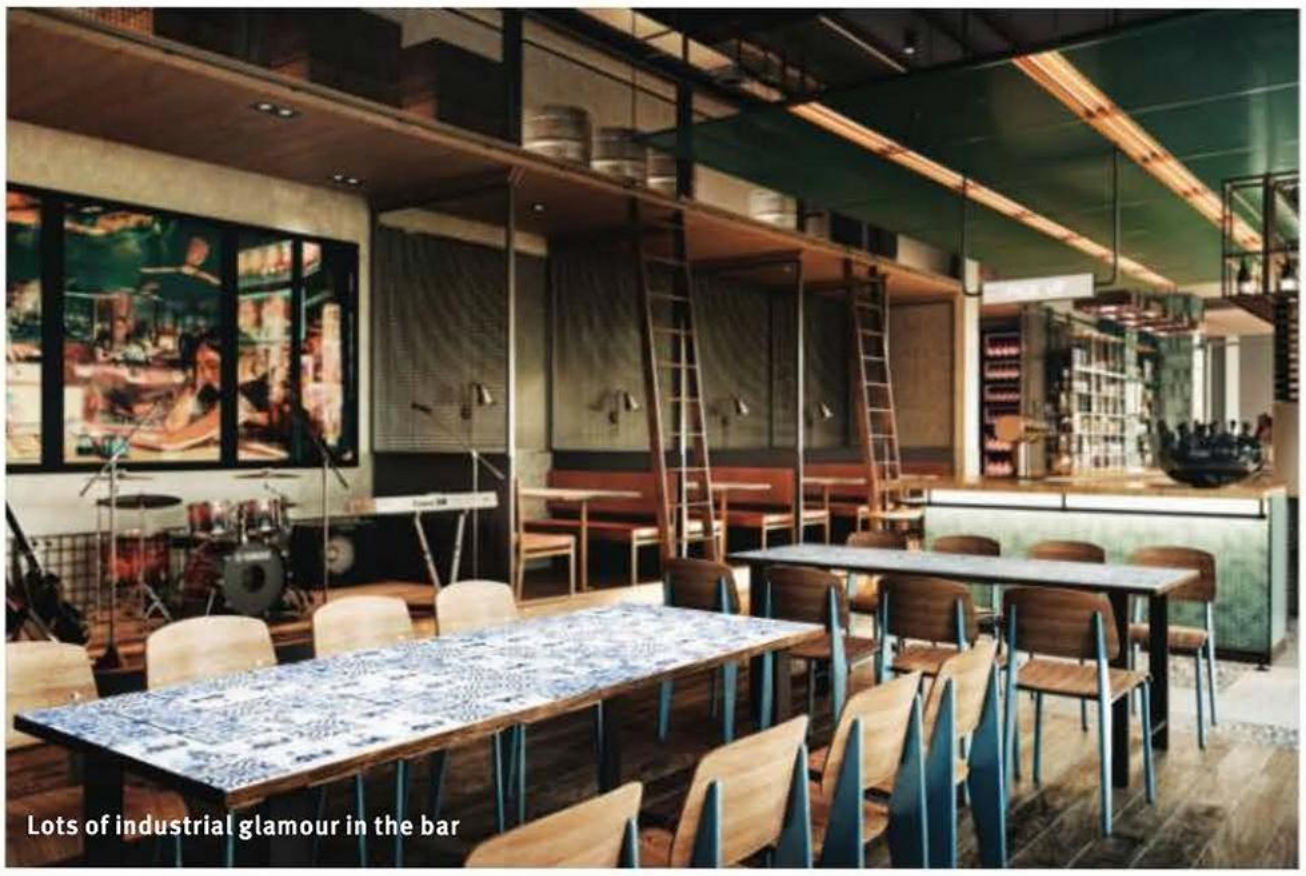
CID: Your career goals for the next 12 months – will we see you at the CID awards again?

J: I definitely hope so. We have a lot more exciting projects which would be so lovely to share with the larger industry, and I look forward to getting them recognized with events such as the CID Awards. I look forward to opening more projects with LW as we are nearing the completion of some of our current projects. As a career goal, I am constantly striving to be on a vertical trajectory to doing greater things, more exciting projects, and hopefully prove to be a good leader to others too.

> I am constantly striving to do greater things

CID: Where do you take inspiration from in your work and what do you do outside of work that compliments this?

J: I work on dedicated and specific research for each individual project. It has been my habit since the beginning to immerse myself in the history, culture, music, tradition, and aesthetics of specific project locations. I search for


Lots of industrial glamour in the bar

up-and-coming artists and acclaimed craftsmen who I believe would add value to the project.

Each project must be unique and full of creative integrity. I also familiarise and try to embody the brand standards of the specific hotel operator as well. From there, I venture online, to get inspired with what design language is suitable, applicable design trends, and classic mantras to follow, etc.

My colleagues inspire me greatly; our brainstorming sessions enrich and add layers to the final product, which in turn makes our projects that even more unique and extraordinary.

Social media has proven to be a valuable tool, especially during this time when travel is very restricted. I very much look forward to traveling again and seeing what is new in the world.

Pre-pandemic, I used to travel quite often, and I would spend at least one or two full days just going around hotels and F&B destinations to immerse myself in the design and operational flows. I enjoy scrutinising the design in my head so that I could learn from what has been done, what could be done, and what should not be done.

Thank you to Jacqueline, Esra Lemmens and the LW team for this month's cover feature. Entries for the 2022 *Commercial Interior Design* Awards are now open, so you can nominate the next young interior designer of the year at *www.itp.events/CIDAwards*


Brasserie 27

Under her belt

Projects Jacqueline has worked on with LW Hong Kong include The Qianhai Brewery Co, a casual bar designed with a significant nod to industrial glamour. The bar features an on-site craft brewery, extensive wine cellar, lounge and restaurant.

Prototype project Brasserie 27 embodies the distinctly European spirit of savouring the good life, the art of travel, and European heritage.

The brief called for regionalising the hardworking design so it would be relevant for hotel properties in all areas in of the APAC (Asia-Pacific region), so Jacqueline and her colleagues created a colour and pattern story that would be a signature to the four regions in APAC: Oceania, South East Asia, Greater China, North Asia.

She shows great vision



Adrian Battisby, Partner & Senior Director of Interior Design at LW: "Jacqueline consistently showcases originality and creative vision, she is always a great collaborator, a colleague who is unafraid to share, always eager to learn and improve her talent. She has always excelled in visual presentations as they always feature expressive graphic content representing the design narrative.

"What has impressed me the most is Jacqueline's motivated attitude, which goes hand in hand with her love for design, she is always positive.

"I fondly recall a significant moment on Vida Dubai Hills we were designing the hotel and serviced apartments as part of a new master planned community, we were presenting the design narrative to the client, they were all just so impressed and really loved the design, we all loved that design. In that project Jacqueline was able to distil the client and operator brief in beautifully way; she created an authentic, thoughtful, and well-balanced design.

"Collaborating on projects has been a joyous and inspiring experience and for us to have such a dedicated and passionate interior designer in the team is really wonderful."