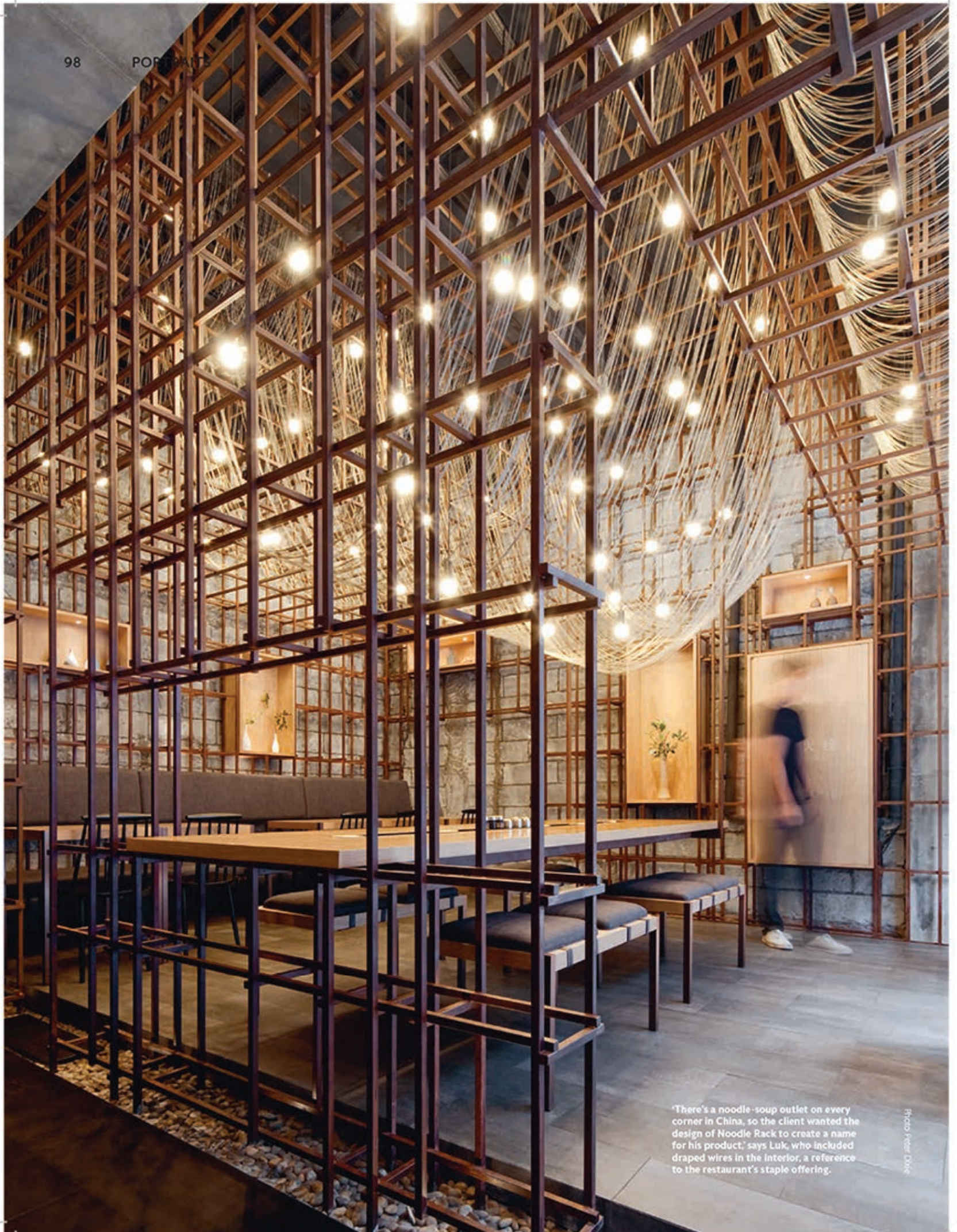


A portrait of Christina Luk, a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a grey sweater. She is looking slightly to the right of the camera. The background is a light-colored wall with a pattern of vertical lines and diamond shapes. The title 'Stroke of Luk' is overlaid on the image in a large, white, serif font.

Stroke of **Luk**

Christina Luk hopes the recognition gained from Lukstudio's small-scale interiors will allow her to *tackle more serious issues.*

Words Michael Webb Portraits Olivier H. Dressen



'There's a noodle-soup outlet on every corner in China, so the client wanted the design of Noodle Rack to create a name for his product,' says Luk, who included draped wires in the interior, a reference to the restaurant's staple offering.

Photo: Peter D'Almeida

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You grew up in Hong Kong, studied art and architecture in London and Toronto, and then relocated to Shanghai, where you established your own studio. Why did you decide to make design your career? CHRISTINA LUK: I've always loved the concept of beauty. Like most kids, I drew and doodled. My mum thought I could put that talent to use and encouraged me to take drawing classes. I realized that was the path I wanted to follow and can't think of anything else I would rather be doing. I was quite good at math when I was young, but I knew I didn't want to deal with numbers – even though sometimes I have to. Working in design gives you the opportunity to solve problems and to create. Now that I have my own team, passing on knowledge to them and seeing them grow is really gratifying.

What have you learned from living on three continents? The biggest transition was leaving home for London, where I studied for three years, before spending another ten years in Toronto. The pace is different in the West. All Hong Kongers have a passion for speed and effective solutions. Even in the arts, you try to arrive at a result right away. In London it took me a while to embrace a different world of process and experimentation – of time used to explore the unknowns. Going to art and architecture schools abroad encouraged me to take it easy and be open-minded, and I liked the ethnic diversity of Toronto. Now I've been away from Hong Kong for as long as I lived there, but I still feel that I need to identify goals and achieve them.

Why did you choose to settle in Shanghai? I found it very exciting when I first came to work here, with lots of opportunities to design. Shanghai is not China; it's an international hub – the New York of the Orient – a place that the Chinese look to for new ideas. It's a platform for the best talent, with a constant influx of interesting



The team at Lukstudio (left to right): Christina Luk, PaoYee Lim, Ray Ou, Marcello Chiadò Rana, Yiye Lin, Cai Jin Hong and Leo Wang. Alba Beroiz Blazquez is absent.

speakers and exhibitions. And it has a culture of the custom-made. When we meet, the talk is about where to get clothes or furniture made. People are very receptive to innovative ideas or a reinterpretation of traditions. I don't pretend to know the city that well, though; my life revolves around my home, office and yoga studio.

What does your office space say about your firm? It's homey, and our multicultural team is a bit like a family. I've never understood designers who spend a lot of time getting everything right for their clients while neglecting their own work environment. Toronto gave me a love of nature, so I was excited about adapting a house that opens onto a tree-shaded courtyard and is full of natural light. Working so closely together has made us good communicators. One of my helpers comes in to cook lunch for us twice a week, so we get to socialize. We also take ten-minute breaks outside. Six to eight people work for Lukstudio at present, and we probably won't grow much larger. I'll be 39 this year, and the others are all younger. Each has strengths and weaknesses, but because we're a start-up, they have to be multitalented in order to tackle every aspect of a job. »



Clients demand that everything be fast, economical and have a wow factor



The Chinese look to Shanghai for new ideas



For Aimé Pâtisserie, Lukstudio translated the brand's packaging – a box with four semicircular leaves of rice paper – into the wall and ceiling of its interior design.



Photos Peter Dole

What are your guiding design principles? We try to create something with a strong identity that serves the client's needs. We reinterpret everyday objects in our work, assembling them in an artistic way to give them new life. Surprise is another important ingredient. We try to engage our users and make them remember us as the makers of the space. Each project is a unique journey, having to do with the chemistry of the people involved. It's important for us to explore different forms and find new concepts; I don't want to churn out more of the same. Once we've proven ourselves as creative people, we'll be able to explore more serious issues, such as sustainable architecture and the design of innovative products.

What would you like to be doing five years from now? We're currently working on retail and restaurants, and we'd like to diversify. Cultural and institutional projects. Schools and public housing. We approach all our projects as architecture, thinking more about space than finishes, and we'd like to be able to design those spaces from the ground up.

How do you rate the Chinese design community in comparison with their peers worldwide? If you are a talented designer, China is the place to be. There's a strong demand for spatial design: often the buildings here work as objects but are badly planned and executed inside. Despite the downturn in the economy, people are still flooding into Shanghai. But it's not easy. We have to communicate and work harder to meet very tight schedules. Clients demand that everything be fast, economical and have a wow factor. On the plus side, you don't have a long wait for permits. We've started to collaborate with a few contractors, but they have to be quite brave to work with us. To make sure something happens, you have to push. That's exciting, and because we're young we still have fire inside us. ●
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