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• **Lessons from tiny living** A beautifully collaborative and well-designed space • **Pioneering Japanese aesthetics** How a local brand carved out a niche in Singapore's furniture and lifestyle market • **Navigating real estate with passion** The journey from family influence to industry expertise •

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Designing dreams

Discover the challenges and rewards of shaping environments and futures through design. We speak with Don Wong to find out more.





Embarking on a career in interior design is not just about embracing creativity—it's about transforming spaces, lives, and ultimately, your own future. Whether you are a budding student with a flair for the artistic or an established designer contemplating the leap into your own firm, the journey is as challenging as it is rewarding. We speak with Don Wong, an interior designer and owner of SqM², to discuss the insights and experiences that can guide you toward making informed decisions in your own interior design career.

Tell us about yourself and what inspired you to pursue a career in interior design?

I began my career at a creative agency before transitioning to work for interior and architecture magazines. Through my role at these magazines, I developed a passion for interior design, having had the opportunity to style and photograph homes. This experience ignited my idea to merge my creativity and skills to design beautiful and functional spaces.

Can you share your journey from starting out in the industry to owning your own design firm?

After leaving my position as an Art Director at a magazine, I decided to pursue a new path. Since I enjoyed shooting and styling homes, I thought, "Why not try interior design?" I learned from a friend who is an Interior Designer and gained hands-on experience by working with contractors, who became my mentors. After eight years in the industry, I aimed to build a strong personal brand and offer additional services such as

styling, product design, and consulting. Thus, I founded SqM² to turn my dream into reality.

How would you describe your design philosophy?

I design homes that are warm and welcoming, tailored to each client's needs rather than merely being basic physical structures. My goal is to create spaces that truly feel like home, where people can build memories and live comfortably. With nine years of experience, I work closely with clients to create personalised spaces that suit their unique lifestyles. I listen to their needs and strive to create a unified home that reflects their personal stories. Through this process, I aim to solve on-site problems and bring the design to life. Ultimately, my goal is to create designs that align with my values and enhance the homeowner's experience.

Could you walk us through your creative process when starting a new project?

I enjoy meeting homeowners in person to learn about their lifestyle and story. Understanding their needs allows me to create a personalised space plan and design style that fits their lifestyle perfectly. I also take pleasure in sharing ideas and exploring new possibilities with them, as I am always excited to discover fresh designs and concepts.

How do you balance client desires with your professional opinion and aesthetic?

Everyone has their own idea of beauty, so it's important for me to first earn their trust in my design choices, including colours



and materials. However, I always listen to their input, and together, we work to find the best solution that meets their practical and functional needs. As I often say, I build a home, not just a house. In doing so, I'm also building a relationship with them, not just a physical space.

What sets your design firm apart from others in the industry?

SqM² creates spaces that enhance well-being. We develop a unique style or aesthetic for each client. Our additional services include space planning, furniture design, and styling. We stay current with industry trends and continuously learn about new products. Our portfolio showcases our creativity and problem-solving skills.

What current trends in interior design are you excited about, and how do you integrate them into your work?

I'm still exploring different design genres to find my specialty. I'm particularly interested in biophilic design, which incorporates elements of nature into interiors. I enjoy adding plants, green walls, or living walls to introduce a natural touch. My designs often feature organic shapes and curves inspired by nature. Additionally, I prefer a color palette inspired by nature, including earth tones, blues, and greens.

What are some of the biggest business challenges you face as an owner of a design firm?

The interior design industry is intensely competitive, populated by many established studios and individual designers. To succeed, one must dedicate significant time and effort to both finding and retaining clients. Managing client demands, expectations,

and delivering projects on time and within budget can be highly stressful. Moreover, balancing the demands of design work, administrative tasks, and marketing efforts presents a formidable challenge. Additionally, the constant need to produce innovative and fresh ideas, especially under tight deadlines, is a significant obstacle.

What advice would you give to aspiring interior designers?

Learning as much as you can will greatly benefit your future design work and client interactions. Building strong relationships with contractors is also crucial. Always remain curious and eager to learn new things, and explore as much as possible. These values will ultimately benefit the homeowners who hire you, as they will appreciate your expertise and dedication.

What skills do you believe are crucial for success in this field?

Be creative and develop innovative, functional designs that meet clients' needs. Communicate effectively with clients to understand their requirements and clearly present your design vision. Pay meticulous attention to detail to ensure accuracy and precision in your work. Build strong relationships with clients, contractors, and project stakeholders to ensure successful collaborations. Stay updated on the latest industry trends, technologies, and sustainable design practices to continuously improve your skills.

What are your future goals for your firm?

I wish I could mentor people who want to become interior designers and develop my own design and marketing team.