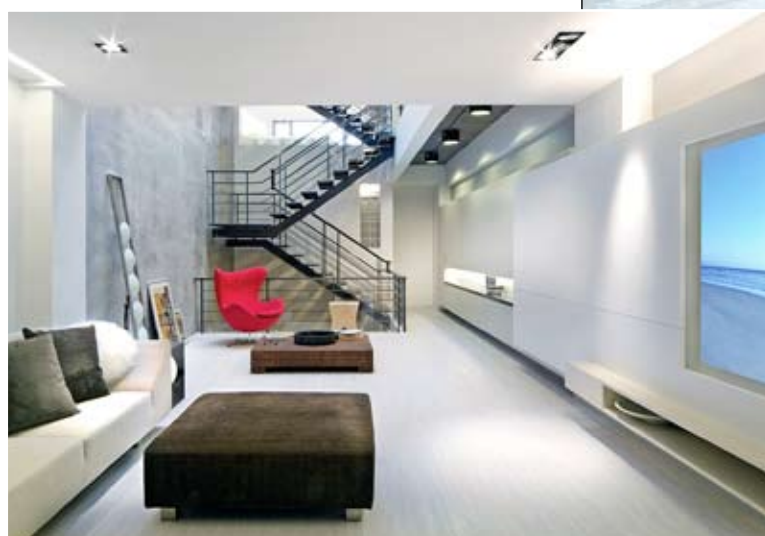


► Hoting Restaurant, Taipei City, designed by Yui Design Studio.
▼ Su residence, Hsinchu, designed by AWS Design.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARC GERRITSEN



Jack of all trades, master of all

Dutch photographer Marc Gerritsen hopes his 5kg tome on Taiwanese interior design will provide a blueprint for Taipei to become East Asia's 'coolest city'

BY NOAH BUCHAN
STAFF REPORTER



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARC GERRITSEN

Marc Gerritsen's first impression of Taiwan's urban landscape was of a country populated by ugly concrete apartment blocks hurriedly constructed during the Martial Law era, punctuated here and there with dilapidated Japanese buildings, remnants of the country's colonial past.

But in his recently published book, *Taiwan Mod: A Journey Through Taiwanese Design*, the Dutch photographer delves deeper.

Gerritsen is in a unique position to document Taiwan's urban landscape. A professional freelance photographer based in Taipei since 2004, he has been commissioned by many of the nation's top design and architecture firms to photograph hundreds of buildings and interiors.

Taiwan Mod, weighing roughly 5kg with more than 600 pages, is the first internationally published book about Taiwanese interior design. Lavishly illustrated with Gerritsen's photographs, the tome includes interviews with a veritable who's who of the country's design professionals.

But what is Taiwanese interior design like?

"It's a mixed salad," Gerritsen said in the kitchen of his renovated 1980s apartment in downtown Taipei.

"That looks very much like Dutch design, or that looks very American, or that looks French, or Chinese. Because most of the designers I have worked for studied outside of Taiwan, they have brought those aesthetics [back] and have combined them with Taiwan[ese elements]. And that is Taiwanese style: It's a combination of all these different things."

Gerritsen's own past is also something of a mixed salad. Born in the Netherlands, he spent stints in Belgium, France and England before returning home to study industrial design. After graduating, he "didn't really want to sit in an office designing

toasters and vacuum cleaners," so he set off for New York to build houses.

A few years later, he moved to Australia where he gained experience in interior design and architecture. He developed a keen eye for design and became a photographer for magazines such as *Forbes* and international brands including Louis Vuitton, Burberry and Getty Images' Global Assignment.

Since arriving in Taiwan, he has established himself as one of the country's top photographers of residential and commercial interiors. He has worked for IMP & Associates (Taishin Financial Tower, Taipei), Artech Architects (Quanta Headquarters, Taoyuan) and LWM Architects (UFO Building, Kaohsiung), to name but a few.

The interviews with local designers and architects reveal that the emergence of a Taiwanese-centered design industry was a recent phenomenon. As with fashion and the visual arts, Taiwan's interior design industry only began to develop in the late 1980s.

At the time, local designers felt it crucial to engage with the international community, which resulted in a mass exodus of local talent to universities overseas. But this led, according to one interviewee, to designers copying foreign ideas.

As local designers grew more confident about their work a Taiwanese style began to emerge — one that architect Albert Ho, in another of the book's interviews, dubs "regional modernism."

"There are many Taiwanese architects who ... have gone overseas to study. But once back in Taiwan, many shift their focus to the regional and local aspects of their art," Ho said.

Though Gerritsen's photographs present a spectrum of designers' work — images he calls "very clean and clinical" — he said his book

isn't meant to be the last word on Taiwanese design.

"As I say in the beginning of the book, this is not necessarily a perfect snapshot of the interior [design] and architectural landscape of Taiwan. To do that I would have to involve other photographers," he said.

Taiwan Mod focuses on the upper echelons of Taiwanese society, those who are able to spend lavishly on renovating their homes.

But Gerritsen is against tearing down buildings constructed from the 1960s to the 1980s to make way for luxury apartments. He hopes that his book can serve as a blueprint to transform these older structures.

"These buildings should be preserved for future generations. [The government] should take out 300 or 400 of the most beautiful and fix them up properly to give an example to the developers — replace all the glass, insulate the floors and walls, make them eco-friendly. And they can fix up the facade so that when you look at the building, you think it looks pleasing. It would bring so much more value to the street," he said.

Like some of the interiors found in Gerritsen's book, his own two-level apartment in central Taipei offers an example of the potential of Taiwan's older buildings.

The open-plan minimalist interior, accentuated with natural light, is a well-designed urban living environment that was inexpensive to renovate.

"It's coming to a tipping point right now where there are more people living here who like a gentrified city," Gerritsen said. "People like a healthier lifestyle. People who like to do something else than shopping on the weekend ... And once we get to that tipping point, suddenly Taipei will become the coolest city in East Asia."

On the Net: www.marcgerritsen.com



Chou Yu-cheng, *Paper Work #3*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ANI GALLERY

In his solo exhibit **Very Hard (很辛苦)**, Chou Yu-cheng (周育正) appropriates images from mass media to criticize how they are produced. According to Chou, the innumerable images that bombard our visual environment deserve further scrutiny. His photographs offer a different narrative on contemporary consumption.

■ Aki Gallery (也趣), 141 Minzu W Rd, Taipei City (台北市民族西路141號). Open Tuesdays to Sundays from noon to 6:30pm. Tel: (02) 2599-1171
■ Until Jan. 31

Saint Everything (聖物昇天) is a solo exhibit by Chen Wen-hsiang (陳文祥). In his digital images, Chen seeks to recreate drawings of artistic muses, such as Venus and Guanyin (觀音), to illustrate the universal nature of artistic creation.

■ La Chambre Art Gallery (小室藝廊), 31, Ln 52, Siwei Rd, Taipei City (台北市西維路52巷31號). Open Tuesdays to Sundays from noon to 9pm. Tel: (02) 2700-3689
■ Until Jan. 31

Painter Shih Yi-shan (施懿珊) positions himself as a biologist studying nature to find deeper truths about human behavior in **Once Human (聽說·我們曾經是人類)**. Shih's delicate paintings of blooming flowers and vast seascapes offer much for reflective souls.

■ Galerie Grand Siecle (新苑藝術), 17, Alley 51, Ln 12, Bade Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市八德路三段12巷51弄17號). Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 1pm to 6pm. Tel: (02) 2578-5630
■ Until Feb. 11

Chen Yu-zhi (陳昱志) depicts completely nude men and women in various poses in his solo exhibition at Ping Pong (乒乓). Chen's photo-realistic paintings depict pairs of young Taiwanese who stare directly at the viewer in an almost confrontational show of sexuality.

■ Ping Pong (乒乓), 290, Zhongyang N Rd Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市中央北路二段290號). Open Wednesdays to Sundays from 1pm to 6pm. Tel: (02) 2895-8883
■ Until Sunday

Tsai Hsien-yiu (蔡獻友)

continues his examination of Taiwan's environment with a new series of oil paintings at Kaohsiung City's Show Gallery (小畫廊). The solo show depicts the richness and variety of the country's flora.

■ Show Gallery (小畫廊), 166, Shizhong 1st Rd, Kaohsiung City (高雄市市中一路166號). Open Thursdays to Mondays from 1pm to 7pm. Tel: (07) 215-0798
■ Until Feb. 11

Harmony Mask is a series of oil paintings by contemporary Lithuanian artist Sigita Staniunas. Staniunas' surreal paintings draw on a vocabulary of mythical figures placed in dreamlike landscapes.

■ A lot of People (一票人票畫空間), 63-1 Yongkang St, Taipei City (台北市永康街63-1號). Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 2pm to 10pm. Tel: (02) 2358-3713
■ Until Jan. 30