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Engineered to Think:
The new A6 is smart and sophisticated

On the move: What drives
Audi Ambassador Yasminne Cheng

Two for the road:
An Audi-Marvel comic special

A6

Breaking new ground

Defying the rules and having the courage to change the playing field—that's how these two entrepreneurs stand out from the competition.

Low Shi Ping (copy), Andy Wong/Rave Photography (photos)

The transformational architect

Colin Seah, Design Director, Ministry of Design

Call it a quest, if you like, but every project by the design and architecture firm Ministry of Design (MOD) always starts with a question. Take the sales gallery that it created for developers Eco World in Penang, Malaysia, earlier this year.

Trying to answer if the old can “solely inform” the new, the resultant gallery is seamlessly connected to a heritage building on the plot. This novel approach alone warrants its own recognition.

But on a deeper level, the firm's founder Colin Seah reveals that the intention is also to question convention. The Audi owner says: “We don't see it as the enemy, but the starting point. Our belief is there is a need to innovate, and maybe become the new convention.”

This philosophy has underpinned his business since MOD started a decade ago. Even back then, he understood the importance of being a one-stop design shop, one that offered a consistent creative direction throughout each project.

He says: “No one was doing work across the design genres. Architects were focused solely on architecture; interior designers, purely interior design. The firms were all very discipline-specific, which led to projects having a disconnect.”

It was his friend Loh Lik Peng, entrepreneur and founder of the lifestyle conglomerate Unlisted Collection, who gave him the nudge needed to start his firm and apply his insights to real-life projects. Their first project together was Loh's New Majestic Hotel,

originally built in 1928. MOD designed the interior architecture for the hotel's 30 rooms.

New Majestic symbolised the start of a new way of approaching design and architecture. Today, Seah offers his clients a multi-disciplinary solution, from product design to masterplanning. Highlights in MOD's portfolio include the office of international advertising agency BBH and Tangs' flagship store in Singapore, and Macalister Mansion, a heritage boutique hotel in Penang.

This chosen route of defying convention might seem exhausting to most, yet Seah, who graduated with an architecture degree in 2000 from the University of Arizona, does not falter. He says: “I have a tendency to get bored. I don't like to repeat what we've done before, because things need to evolve.”

When it is time to relax and unwind, he climbs into his second-generation Audi TTS and zooms off to the B-roads in Malaysia. The white car is both sporty and “civilised”, qualities that Seah finds extremely attractive. With a laugh, this design whiz says: “Audi has created a conundrum for itself. Its beautiful models mean that owners don't feel the need to change cars. There's no push factor. But there will always be a pull factor.”

Case in point, the sleek design of the Audi TTS, which seems to “defy time and will still be relevant 20 years from now”. >>

Shia Shama using Shu Uemura colours and Sebastian Professional (hair and make-up), and Andrew Frederic & Sean Loo (photographer's assistants). Outfits, shoes and accessories are Colin and Min's own.

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