

## First Person

Art director **William Chang Suk-ping** is legendary in the local film industry. He's won multiple awards and earned international recognition for his inspired collaborations with director Wong Kar-wai, which began with "As Tears Go By" and continued with classics such as "Chungking Express" and "In the Mood for Love." He talks to Winnie Yeung about making a career out of being introverted.



**I was an introvert** when I was young. I still am.

**Growing up**, I was scared of being in a group—I didn't like talking to anyone, I locked myself in my room a lot. My family thought there was something wrong with me.

**At seven years old** I started to draw a lot. I drew everything and I started to design stuff. I challenged myself to design something.

**"The Graduate"** changed my life—it taught me how a film is not merely a tool for storytelling, but an art as well. After seeing it, I was determined to join the film business.

**But my parents** were not happy I chose this path—my father told me not to tell anyone that I studied art because art is "useless."

**A friend's friend** introduced me to [new wave director] Patrick Tam, who was looking for an art director for "Love Massacre" in 1980. That's how I got my first job. There wasn't much art direction back then.

**I had a grand plan**—I wanted to change the film industry because I was so disappointed with the quality of films then.

Your life is over if you stop using your brain.

**Art direction is fun**; it is basically creating a world for each film.

**I have always** had confidence in my decisions in films. I always think I am right.

**But I don't** have a lot of self-esteem. It's contradictory—I am usually confident of my choices, then I think of what others think and my self-esteem sinks.

**I spend a long time** evaluating my work. I set the bar really high, and in the end I suffer.

**I have made mistakes**. Thinking that my art direction is so good, I have overdone it at times. Now I have learned the art of being subtle.

**I am fortunate**—the directors I have worked with have given me a lot of freedom. They let me make the decisions.

**Working with Wong Kar-wai** is like that—he gives me all the freedom, and will just say "hmm" when he checks on how I am doing. We each know what the other wants.

**When we first met** he was a screenwriter and we would drink and talk about films till the wee hours.

**I don't mind** people talking about Wong Kar-wai when they talk to me. We have done so many films together.

**We developed a trust** in each other. That's why I stopped working with mainland directors.

**The mainland film industry** is director-oriented. Directors have too much power and they don't allow other people's opinions.

**They might have** perfected historical details when it comes to art direction for period films, but they haven't grasped the style.

**Mainland directors** don't trust my ideas. Yet they hire me in the first place because they like what I have done.

**They hired me** because of the "William Chang Style." I really resent this—this is like saying I have been doing the same things in different films over and over. But I have always tried to be different.

**I never stop working**. Your life is over if you stop using your brain. That's why I always look for other projects to work on in between films—in fact, I recently designed a range of furniture.

**I hate being photographed**, and I try not to receive any film awards myself. I don't like being the center of attention. When I am, my low self-esteem kicks in as well.

**There is no definition** of beauty—beauty can be found in things that are traditionally not beautiful; beauty can be found in ruins; beauty can be found in imperfection.

**Chang has designed 10 pieces of furniture and red packets for Elements mall. See p.23 for details.**

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