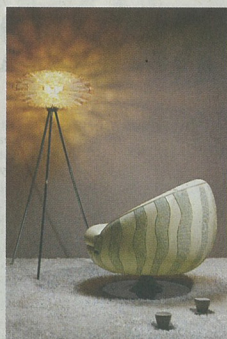


Clockwise from left: James Law's Cybertecture Love Seat, Ed Ng's Celeste Bench, Kevin Ng's Enego Chair, Barrie Ho's Zen Chair.

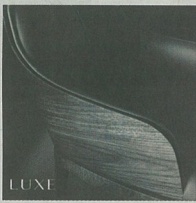


# ORDINARY OBJECTS BECOME INSPIRATION YOU CAN SIT ON

**Architecture** and design luminaries reflect on daily items and change them into a simple piece of furniture, which is both functional yet artistic



Clockwise from above: Wing Lee's Repair chair, Dan Lee's Jie Chair, Steve Leung's Luxe Chair, Freeman Lau's Agenda No 2 chairs. Below right: Douglas Young's Sham Shui Po Chair.



**Christopher DeWolf**

Glowing a cool blue, the Cybertecture Love Seat is no ordinary bench. Sit down with a friend and the light becomes violet. Nudge closer together and the bench cycles through yellow and orange before finally reaching crimson red.

"I'm interested in daily objects that could be more intelligent and react to people's relationships and emotions," says the seat's creator, architect James Law, who embedded the transparent acrylic bench with sensors and LED lights.

"I thought, 'A bench is meant for two people, so why doesn't it react to their emotions through sensors and lighting?' If they're in love the bench will react vibrantly; if not it will be much more subdued.

"It's a way of letting the furniture become a window into people's souls."

Law's bench was one of nine pieces shown at Art Basel Hong Kong in Seats with a View, an exhibition of locally designed chairs organised by the Hong Kong Design Centre.

Local luminaries Barrie Ho, Lee Chi-wing, Dan Lee, Steve Leung, Ed Ng and Kelvin Ng drew chairs from their collections, while Law, Douglas Young and Freeman Lau designed creations for the show.

"A chair is an essential signature piece for any designer," says project director Evelyn Chan. "It's not easy to create a good chair, but if you do, it can become

both an art piece and a functional object."

Chan points to Celeste, designed by Ed Ng, co-founder of interior design firm AB Concept. The bench has elegantly carved wooden legs inspired by the "celestial cloud", a motif often found in historical Chinese art and architecture. "It's making tradition contemporary," she says.

That is true for other works in the show, notably the Jie Chair by Dan Lee, co-founder of OVO Group, and architect Barrie Ho's Zen Chair, which both draw heavily from the simplicity of Ming Dynasty furniture.

Milk Design founder Lee Chi-wing contributed the more experimental Repair, a stool and a chair made from recycled materials. Giormani's Kelvin Ng, meanwhile, showcased leather craftsmanship with Enego, a vaguely egg-shaped lounge chair.

Grabbing the most attention were three pieces designed for the show. The Sham Shui Po Chair, by G.O.D. co-founder Douglas Young, transforms the ubiquitous metal pushcart into a lounge.

To make the chair, he first approached a pushcart maker and asked him to create a version with two legs on the bottom; he then

fastened nylon ribbon on to the back and coated the top in a petroleum jelly substance that solidified to serve as a semi-transparent cushion.

The idea for the chair came from an afternoon stroll through Sham Shui Po, when Young noticed how pushcart users wrapped the rear of their carts in nylon cords to prevent boxes and other goods from falling off.

The idea of furniture as a device for social commentary is also explored by Freeman Lau in Agenda No. 2, an installation of black-and-white chairs that lock together like jigsaw pieces.

"It symbolises a group of people sitting together," says Lau. "They can sit together or apart depending on their attitudes."

"I started using chairs as a graphic symbol to represent people, because when you see a chair, you expect someone to sit there. Later I made them into real chairs, which was a challenge for me because I had to learn the technical side of making things with different materials."

All of the chairs in Seats With a View have been returned to the designers, but their public lives are far from over. Law plans to refine his chair for next year's Milan Furniture Fair.

Young also will keep toying with the Sham Shui Po Chair and scouring Hong Kong's streets for inspiration, which so far has provided him with no shortage of material.

"The more common something is, the more shocking or surprising it can be when it's turned into a design object," he says. "People always ask if I'm going to run out of local things to do, but the more I think about it, the more there are."

