

## Fresh eggs

**A winning horse** Douglas Young, founder of local homeware chain G.O.D., sees architect Alvar Aalto's curves in it. Paul Clarke, a design teacher, praises it for its "natural flow of line". Carmen Chan says it was inspired by rocking horses.

"It" is Chan's eye-catching Horse table (below), which is now selling at G.O.D. Her credentials should impress; she came up with the idea last year, at the age of 15, as part of her design and technology GCSE course.

"After I finished the course we had this crazy idea that [Young] might be interested, so we sent him photos and he was very interested," says Chan, who credits Clarke, her teacher at South Island School, for suggesting she should market the product.

An arts enthusiast, Chan, whose prototype of the table sits in the living room of her family's home, took a month to come up with the design and half a year to craft it.

The appeal was immediate, says Young, adding, "The lines of the table were very elegant; there is an effortless quality to the design."

He was also drawn to commissioning the work because young artists and designers, he says, do not receive enough support in Hong Kong.

"I feel local budding talent gets too little patronage. Commissions go to a handful of big firms or to foreign prestige names. We have to look after our own. We hope our little project will be the first of many involving local designers."

If they're like Chan, though, they'll be polishing their skills and knowledge overseas.

"I hope to go to the UK; the art scene in London is pretty hip," says Chan, adding that she'll be applying for a place at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design.

The Horse table is available for HK\$2,800 from G.O.D. (Leighton Centre, Sharp Street East Entrance, Causeway Bay, tel: 2890 5555; www.god.com.hk).  
*Charmaine Chan*



## Long-distance call

All-American boy Adrian Wong tells **Yvonne Lai** about finding his calling in art and how everything clicked into place in Hong Kong.



Life has hardly been formulaic for former calculus tutor Adrian Wong. Having left his suburban Chicago home at 14, to attend boarding school for the mathematically gifted and then a United Nations charter school that took him to Jerusalem, Israel, Wong was completing a master's degree in developmental psychology and moonlighting as a kindergarten teacher when he decided to make art for a living.

"I'm really happy that I don't know what I'll be doing in five years," says the 30-year-old, who currently teaches sculpture and theory at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is also putting together a solo show, "Troglodyte, See the Light," which will tour internationally through his gallery, Osage, in July.

For Wong, who came to Hong Kong low on money five years ago and departed a sought-after artist, this city is where his seemingly disparate life experiences began to click into place.

"It was complete serendipity that took me there," he says.

Born to Hong Kong immigrants, the Illinois native stopped speaking Cantonese when he entered preschool and was an all-American boy, down to his preferred diet of macaroni and cheese, steak and hamburgers.

Wong's parents had left Hong Kong to pursue lives away from their families. They met in Boston, where Wong's mother was working as a roller-skating waitress at the

1950s-themed Rock 'n Roll McDonald's that his father managed.

Growing up, Wong would ask about his relatives, "but my father rarely talked about [them]. I heard some stories about an uncle of his who was a children's television-show host in Hong Kong, described as 'the Chinese Mister Rogers'".

In 2002, his last year at Stanford University, Wong spent time with a close friend who was dying of cystic fibrosis. Through their long talks, Wong discovered, "the desire to take a more active role in deciding the course of my life, and the easiest path for me to accomplish that was via art", which led him away from science and towards a master of fine arts at Yale University.

"A lot of my early artwork plays off of the scientific, pseudo-objective context of psychology," says Wong.

One of the subjects he scrutinised in his art was his family.

"After over a year of researching and sending out e-mails to broadcast stations trying to track down my grand uncle, Calvin [Wong Hei], I was contacted by his son Harry [Wong], who was a well-known magician and television star himself [in the 80s]."

Calvin Wong's puppet show was the first programme to be broadcast in Hong Kong when Rediffusion Television launched in the late 50s. Video and installation piece "Sang Yat Fai Lok" (Happy Birthday, 2008; above left) – using a recreation of his grand uncle's original studio set – was, for Adrian Wong, a cathartic exploration of this newly rediscovered family past.

"Coming to Hong Kong and reinserting myself into the work really changed it and led to the practice that I'm engaged in now," which finds the sweet spot amid local socio-cultural beliefs and fears with an unerring sense of mischief. "[After the Happy Birthday project] I stopped having to hustle for shows; curators are approaching me," says Wong. "I find Hong Kong to be a continually inspiring place where a lot of good things have happened and I still have a lot of inroads for more."

## Toast rack

**Air supply** Imagine, Mr Tsang, your two sons are toddlers once again. Imagine them wheezing and choking their way to a play date, as many did last week, (or perhaps to the doctor's, to see if they've yet succumbed to asthma). Imagine them as primary-school students, stuck inside their classrooms at play time because the air outside is

too toxic to inhale (and little better inside). Imagine them now as young teenagers, gasping their way through a game of tennis or football. If your boys were younger, Mr Tsang, would you feel compelled to do something about the filth Hongkongers must inhale?

Obviously, there is nothing the government can do about the effects of sandstorms and little it

can do about pollution emanating from Pearl River Delta factories, but studies have found most of our muck is of our own making. What about that ban on idling motor engines – asked for by the public more than two years ago? What about exerting greater pressure on our power (and smog) generators to clean up their act? And what about addressing the harmful practices of our shipping and

port operators? All these issues have been talked about ad nauseam but vested interests have prevented much action being taken.

We realise that our health is of little importance to you, Mr Tsang, but, tell us, would you have sacrificed the well-being of your own sons when they were at their most vulnerable to benefit the friends of government? *Mark Footer*

