

DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

Alexander Wong explains how going to the movies is about to become a fantasy within a fantasy.

UA is continuing to bring concept to cinema and, hot on the heels of this summer's IMAX theatre, this month will see the unveiling of HK's first designer movie theatre. Situated at Tuen Mun Town Plaza and designed by renowned architect Alexander Wong, the theatre was conceived around the theme of fairy tales and dreams. According to Wong, "Cinema is all about a thirst for imagination, fantasy, dreams and super realities." After making one's way through what he calls 'the Rabbit Hole', "one enters a world of stimulations both sensual and visually evocative... there is something deeply Freudian in using Alice in Wonderland's theme as the entry point, where one, driven by one's subconscious, would find it rather hard to resist not going inside," he says, playing Lewis Carroll.

The screening rooms are a designer's playground with themes like The Inferno, The Magic Forest, The Cave and Golden Dreams. Even the snacks counter doesn't escape - as the Liquid Bar it evokes a club-like environment to help kids enjoy what Wong describes as a "sensual environment to hang out with their friends at a cost still relatively low".

On the practicalities of his breakthrough cinema, the architect explains, somewhat enigmatically, "Function cannot manifest the true essence of beauty simply by meeting a set of criteria like functions, proportions and tectonics." Instead, his approach is "not only based on surrealism but on post-structuralism. The concept of a designer cinema has to be understood as part of an evolutionary trend in the history and development of cinema. Hong Kong is Asia's Hollywood, so I think it is entirely appropriate that we stay at the vanguard, not only in cinematic achievements but also in cinema design."

And then he explains how he uses post-structuralism in his work: "Multiple layers of meaning are created that invite different ways of interpretation in spatial experience... a reaction towards the impending collapse of linear narrative architecture, or what one might call 'theme park architecture'. The result," he concludes, "provides a multitude of narrative stimulations for all of us who are looking for a unique and personalized definition in our understanding of realities."

Mmm. Okay. So if it's such an important project, why Tuen Mun and not, say, Central? "Tuen Mun is where the growth is. A relatively higher proportion of its residents come from a younger generation

than many other areas of this city, which is gradually getting older as a result of an overall lower birth rate. And in the world of young entrepreneurs, you need a healthy balance of both risk-taking and risk-aversion, perhaps a bit more of the risk-taking, ballsy attitude. 'Trying something new' is definitely not to be missed in Tuen Mun where 'No Guts, No Glory' is still very much alive and kicking."

Wong's confidence in the cinema is resounding. "People always love the latest excitement, iconic symbols, colourful stimuli, and even bolder re-interpretations of their realities... cinema is all about imagination," he says, and just by looking at the concept art for Tuen Mun's flagship architectural adventure, it is quite clear he has fully capitalized on that.

The Tuen Mun Town Plaza Cinema is slated to open in early December. It has room for approximately 450-500 moviegoers and tickets are roughly anchored around the \$55 mark.

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