



Buddha in the background, drapes and shades in brown and black silk velvet, bronze statue of a gymnast on a black-lacquered table painted with gold.

From Saigon with love ...



Chocolate brown, vanilla white with a dash of saffron yellow – sensual colors and shapes that whet the appetite to redecorate. That's the recipe for success used by interior designer Thái Công Quách. A Vietnamese born in Saigon, his Hamburg showroom is now a mecca for people seeking exquisite decoration ideas.

By Petra Mikutta Photos Mark Seelen



Silk wallcovering with embroidered blossoms in the hall: Chairs from Philippe Starck, wall lamps from Jacques Garcia, table lamps of Murano glass.



Antique and classic – black marble fireplace, framed wallpaper panels on fabric-covered walls. Coco the dog with a matching brown coat.

ong jellyfish tentacles dangle from the ceiling. They are the contemporary lighting. The disembodied heads of twins stare off into the distance from beneath a pair of glass bell jars. Green creepers wind themselves around two soulfully smiling wooden heads – these are modern objets d’art. Exquisite, long-legged Louis-XVI chairs seductively covered with brown fur simply cry out to be stroked. The surface of a 1940s-style console table covered in stingray skin looks like it’s made up of frozen champagne bubbles, but in fact it is soft, warm and slightly rough to the touch, rather like a cow’s tongue. Next to it stands something of a wallflower – an inconspicuous white chest of drawers. Stroking this piece of furniture will send pleasant shivers down your spine. It is covered with fine, smooth, silky goatskin parchment.

The furniture, lamps, fabrics, objets d’art and accessories in Thái Công Quách’s Hamburg showroom tend to shock, stimulate and awaken emotions. Customers grin at the bizarre items, admire the antiques and classic exhibits, frown at the contemporary ones, leave the bathroom either giggling or outraged at the graceful rococo figures happily copulating away on the wallpaper. “All kinds of different styles can be combined at will, provided that they all have a common denominator – exquisite craftsmanship, elegance and high design quality,” explains Thái Công Quách.

He discovers creations that meet his criteria at international exhibitions, in stores, workshops and even in hotels and restaurants. “When I see something I like, I find out who designed and manufactured it and either buy it or have it copied,” he explains. For example, the grandiose armchairs that were designed exclusively for the Faena Hotel in Buenos Aires by Philippe Starck; austere items of furniture in the style of star designer Jean Michel Frank from the Paris of the 1930s and ’40s; amusing objects created by French-born designer Jacques Garcia, 61,

for the luxury hotels Victor in Miami and Costes in Paris. “What I offer is unique,” says Thái Công Quách. But that is only of secondary importance to him. “What really interests me is what one can do with all these things.” He calls it “preparing the menu,” because he views his work like that of any good cook. “Anybody with a bit of experience can buy a nice, ripe pineapple and some fresh clams, but that doesn’t make him a master chef. What is necessary is the idea of how to combine these two ingredients in a single dish, plus the experience and technical know-how, of course.”

Thái Công Quách came to Hamburg from Saigon in 1980 with his parents at the age of 10. He studied fashion, then worked as a stylist and a fashion and lifestyle photographer. He published three internationally successful illustrated books on his parents, whose black-and-white photographs exude happiness and enjoyment of life in galleries around the world. In 2003 he opened Thái Công Interior Design – initially the size of a modest living room, but now

filling half an office block. Lounge chairs, stylish window boxes and Asian sculptures on the Hamburg sidewalk radiate an aura of New York’s Fifth Avenue. Passers-by sometimes mistake the showroom for an up-market bar and come in for a drink,” says Thái Công Quách. “Some of them even end up buying something they have seen.” But casual trade is the exception. His real clients know exactly why they want to go to him. “Elderly people in the process of re-inventing themselves, young couples furnishing their first nest, boxing champions like Vladimir Klitschko, who dislike shopping because they are constantly mobbed by fans – in short, well-heeled people from all age groups and professions,” says Thái Công Quách. His theory is that the people who seek the services of a professional interior decorator are those who realize how difficult the job really is. He is amazed at the number of people who are satisfied with do-it-yourself design jobs and amateurish compromises. “Hardly anyone comes up with the idea of cutting their own hair or sewing their own evening gown or defending themselves in court. But they all seem to think they are born interior decorators.”

Anyone who thinks he or she can give Thái Công Quách the order, hand him the key and go away for a few weeks before returning to a tastefully decorated apartment is in for a big surprise. It’s not just a question of giving the OK for a bureau, a lamp, a picture or a shade of paint. “Apartments reflect their occupants’ personality and I need to get to know my clients. I visit with them at home, talk about their lives and ideas on design. This is all input into my work,” explains Thái Công Quách. After all, a rock musician’s ideas of good interior decoration tend to differ from those of a banker or an Africa freak. What about clients who don’t buy your ideas? “My curiosity wins out in those cases and I just go along with

them. I once did a Swiss chalet for a passionate skier despite the fact that that I have my doubts about the Alpine look, and I was pleasantly surprised at how elegant rustic design can be.” Do you ever turn down orders or requests? “Not so far. But if someone were to come along with a photo from a magazine saying I want it just like that, I would advise them to go some place else. I need imagination and creativity. The manual and technical side alone don’t interest me.”

His own apartment, where he has lived since his student days is a veritable gem – with masses of silk and treasures, both material and sentimental. “When my preferences or financial situation change, I redesign the rooms. Over the years the decoration has kept pace with my lifestyle.” He shares the apartment, which is only some 800 square feet in area, with business partner and life companion Oliver Haarker-Schuetz and his dog Coco. Thái Công Quách has no plans to move. “For one thing, my roots are here. Secondly, size per se is not a key issue. Elegance and style function best on a small scale.” PM



High-precision work: Thái Công Quách, born in Saigon, opened his Hamburg showroom and office 5 years back. He planned every detail at this desk.



The options Thái Công Quách has created three interior landscapes in his Hamburg showroom:
1 The *Beach House* offers clients airy, lighthearted elegance inspired by California beach villas. Photos of Slim Aaron’s pool, objets d’art, elaborate ornamental lamps and light-colored furniture help create just the right vacation mood. “A relaxed, informal atmosphere, but one with style,” says Thái Công Quách.
2 The charm and chic of the ’30s and ’40s come to life again in the *Urban Living Salon*. The tables and armchairs are the work of French designer Jean Michel Frank, but they have been covered with contemporary fabrics. The set is lit by an Empire candleabra. The fleecy carpet is a hit with Coco, the resident dog.
3 The *Alpine Chalet* offers up-market country-house romanticism thanks to the warm colors, folksy items like a hunting trophy, art deco lighting, 1940s-style armchairs and a velvet-covered sofa. “An interior proving that rustic can be elegant, too,” says Thái Công Quách.

