

C E R E A L

In this volume, we look towards Korea. We explore the architecture of Itami Jun, the photography of Koo Bohnchang, and the Dansaekhwa art movement. We converse with David Chang and Eunjo Park, visit Charlotte Perriand's Méribel chalet with Aēsop, and share our cultural guide to Seoul.

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BLUE
PINE

Teo Yang's

Contemporary Hanok



TEO YANG — Making a beautiful interior is never my final goal... I use spaces as tools to achieve my goals, which, in this case, is to demonstrate the potential of traditional Korean architecture for contemporary living.

A pine tree reaches up from the courtyard of a low-lying *hanok* in Bukchon, Seoul, its crown a prickly green cloud rising above the dark grey roof tiles that surround it. Pinewood beams along the walls, window frames and eaves of the property glow warmly in the early sun. I remove my shoes and follow designer Teo Yang inside his private residence and studio. He places green tea in small ceramic cups on Korean stands, raised on a round table.

“This *hanok* is named *Cheongsongjae*, meaning ‘Blue Pine House’, after the tree in the courtyard,” says Yang. “Pines are a symbol of strength and longevity for Korean people; the house was built in 1917, during the Japanese occupation, so the name was a small act of resistance.” Yang’s demeanour is entirely gentle; he speaks softly, and cradles his wrist in one hand as he talks. “I was very lucky to discover the house and learn its history. Most people in Seoul live in modern apartments, and because the country as a whole celebrates development, innovation and entrepreneurship so much, traditional elements of our culture can easily be overlooked and lost. I think it is important for me as a designer to champion and celebrate this history.”



MAGPIES AND TIGERS

Kkachi horangi (magpies and tigers) were a common subject in *minhwa* (Korean folk paintings). The magpies often symbolised the dignity of the common people, while the tigers were associated with the *yangban*, or noble class. The tigers were frequently depicted with outlandish facial expressions, leading to their nickname *babohorangi*, meaning ‘idiot tiger’. Therefore, *minhwa* stood to satirise the feudal hierarchy of Joseon society.

Yang grew up between Seoul and the US and studied interior and environmental design at the Art Institute of Chicago and ArtCenter College of Design in Pasadena, before moving to Amsterdam to work for Dutch designer Marcel Wanders. When he returned to Seoul in 2009, he rediscovered the beauty of Korea and its traditional culture, and launched Teo Yang Studio in the same year. In 2011, he moved into the *hanok*. “I was very unfamiliar with *hanok* and had only ever seen them in pictures or on TV,” Yang says. “I had no idea I would ever live in one, especially as they are so rare. They used to be common in this district, even as late as the 1980s, but they were not well protected, and many have been destroyed. I felt an obligation to inherit this tradition, to modernise it, and to create this platform. Making a beautiful interior is never my final goal. There are countless beautiful spaces; I don’t want to simply add another rendition of that, devoid of any personal meaning. I use spaces as tools to achieve my goals, which, in this case, is to demonstrate the potential of traditional Korean architecture for contemporary living.”

Each room Yang shows me testifies to his reverence for this tradition. We step into an intimate dining area, where a narrow table is flanked by two long walls of glass in elegant pinewood frames. A modern painting by Lee Ufan hangs at the end of the room: an enigmatic composition of blue vertical lines dissolving into yellow mist. I ask about the intricate lattice woodwork that holds the glazing delicately in place, casting a web of geometric shadows on the floor. “The design is derived from the Chinese character of the turtle,” says Yang, “which is one of the 10 Korean symbols of longevity.” In the sitting room, my attention is drawn to a painting on *hanji* paper, depicting two slender magpies resting on a pine branch, above a cluster of wiry, grinning tigers. “This is a 17th century *minhwa*, a folk painting believed to possess magical properties, which would be hung on the front door of the house as protection,” Yang tells me. “Magpies were believed to be good luck in Korea. If they visited your home, people said good news was coming. The tigers ward off bad spirits. There used to be a large tiger population in Korea, but they were hunted to near extinction in the early 20th century.”

I follow Yang around the low-hanging boughs of the pine to a bedroom across the courtyard. A biscuit-toned Chow Chow with a mane of long straight hair lies sleeping on the stone paving. I imagine the scene here in winter: the courtyard a sheet of snow, Yang walking under the deep, sheltering eaves as flakes gather silently on top, meltwater trickling from the mouths of the metal phoenix heads fixed to the corners of the roof. Inside the bedroom, three intersecting orbs are raised on stilts behind the double bed, with moveable panels fitted to the two outer circles; when folded forwards, these create further crescent moon shapes. “I designed this headboard for Savoir in London, in reference to Korean customs surrounding the moon,” Yang says. “Traditionally, during full moon and especially around harvest season, Korean women dressed in white *hanbok* and gathered in circles at the highest point of the mountain to dance and sing in the moonlight. The moon is like a mother figure. Even today, my mother and other women of her generation pray to the full moon, sharing their issues and asking her to resolve them during their sleep.”



Yang also references traditionally male aspects of Joseon society in his small library. Full-length shelves are lined with books on Korean culture and art, each wrapped in white *hanji*. To the right is a wooden chair with a wide armrest and a hanging leather cushion against its back. I recognise the piece from Yang's furniture line, designed as a modern interpretation of the *sarangbang* — the men's reading room in a traditional *hanok*. "Hanok were very segregated places,



APPLE THE CHOW CHOW

Yang's Chow Chow is named Apple, after Yang's young nephew once observed she looks like a spiky pineapple.



with a strict hierarchy," he says. "There would have been separate men's and women's quarters — although this *hanok* is more modernised and does not have that organisation. The *sarangbang* in the men's quarters was typically a place for reading, studying, and enriching oneself. I wanted to design furniture inspired by this concept, while being non-specific about space or gender."

At the far end of the library is a basin, oil burner and selection of products from EATH Library, Yang's skincare brand, launched in December 2018. EATH's cosmetics are informed by Korean traditional medicine, which Yang first encountered during a consultation with a practitioner to treat insomnia. He went on to develop EATH's products in conjunction with the doctor. "In the same way I use interior design to celebrate Korea's traditional architecture, I developed EATH Library to elevate this element of Korean culture that is so undervalued," he says, his immaculate skin suddenly impossible to miss.

We pause at the doorway to the outside, gazing at the rest of the *hanok*, which surrounds the stone courtyard in a quiet embrace. "The concept of *jagyeong*, of looking and reflecting on oneself, is an important consideration in Korean culture," says Yang. "It relates to a Confucian notion of the house as a reflection of its owner. *Hanok* are arranged so that you can sit inside the house and simultaneously look out across the courtyard at your home, which, as an extension of yourself, becomes an act of self-reflection." I look out through the wooden frame. I see reflected someone with a deep respect for cultural roots, for learning, and a cultivated ease of living. •

