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STUFF LOVE

Furniture, cars, art and watches. Four collectors share their passion for their prized acquisitions





TERENCE CHAN
FURNITURE COLLECTOR

BY TAY SUAN CHIANG

VISITORS TO Terence Chan's home or office will never find themselves short of a seat. The director of Terre design studio has been collecting furniture for over 20 years, to the point that "I've lost count of how many pieces of designer furniture I have," he says. "I've also stopped calculating how much I've spent over the years. If I feel it is worth paying for a piece, I will get it."

Not one to keep anything in a warehouse, Mr Chan proudly displays his collection, both in his apartment in Pasir Ris, and at his office in Niven Road. And they are not just display pieces, because "all the chairs are meant to be used."

Some of the pieces that he has at home include Barcelona chairs by Mies van der Rohe, a Charles and Ray Eames lounge and ottoman, Tom Dixon's Pylon Chair and a Vitra Suita sofa by Antonio Citterio.

In his 3,600 sq ft office, scattered across three floors, are more pieces, such as an Eames rocker, a Swan sofa from Fritz Hansen, a Bertoia Diamond chair from Knoll, and several Wishbone chairs from Carl Hansen.

"I always enjoy collecting beautiful things that tell a story, whether it's its own story or an experience with someone or an event," he says of his passion. "Over the years, I've come to be interested more in the story than the brand, especially when you've collected a fair number of pieces."

The first chair he collected was the Eames Rocker.

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THE INVESTMENT VALUE OF
FURNITURE IS IT GIVES YOU
PLEASURE WHEN YOU USE IT
AND ENJOY ITS COMPANY.
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TERENCE CHAN

"It's price sensitive and everybody loves to sit on a rocker, especially in our hot and humid weather."

Pushed to name his favourite piece, he stops to ponder. "It will have to be the CH25," he finally says, referring to the lounge chair designed by the late Danish designer Hans Wegner for Carl Hansen.

Designed in 1950, the CH25 Lounge Chair is bold in its sculptural shape. Wegner's choice of woven paper cord for the seat and back was unheard-of at the time. Paper cord was actually a substitute material used during World War II. It takes a skilled craftsman 10 hours to hand-weave the seat and back of this chair in a unique pattern using about 400 metres of paper cord.

Explaining his pick, Mr Chan says that Wegner was a "key furniture designer for that generation. No one surpasses him".

When he is overseas for work, Mr Chan makes it a point to visit furniture factories, to "hear the stories before how each piece is made". He, however, buys most of his pieces in Singapore, "to support local retailers", he says. "If you buy online, there may be the risk of damage, which the local retailers will not cover."

Most of the pieces that he has are brand new, but he has no qualms about buying second-hand pieces or even display ones. "It is not too difficult to reupholster or repair a second-hand piece."

Mr Chan says he has not regretted buying any piece, "since some can cost quite a lot, so they are bought after consideration". But he admits that some pieces in his collection fare less well in Singapore's tropical weather.

For example, the glue used to keep the veneer strips together on the Cross Check chair by Frank Gehry has dried up and the strips are no longer held in place. Mr Chan has no plans to get rid of it, though.

"The investment value of furniture is that you purchase one that suits your budget and you like it. It gives you pleasure when you see it and enjoy their company."

He believes that some iconic pieces do increase in value over the years, but "I don't research into it, since I don't have plans to sell", he points out.

He describes his style as "eclectic, but controlled".

There are pieces that he wouldn't get, one of which is the Dream Chair by Japanese architect Tadao Ando for Carl Hansen. "I like Ando's architecture, but not the chair. I don't understand it. It doesn't look correct nor does it make sense," says Mr Chan.

His tip for would-be collectors is to always test out a particular chair that they like. "Beyond aesthetic, quality and price, comfort level is also important," he adds.



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(1) From left: CH25, Swan Sofa and Bertoia Diamond Chair in Terence Chan's collection (2) Terence Chan on the Swan Chair (3) Wiggle Chair (4) Barcelona Chair (5) CH24 Wishbone Chair

(1) Roberto Galetti has 12 classic cars in his collection (2) His prized 1962 Jaguar E-Type Series 1 convertible (3) The 1951 Singer A4 convertible

ROBERTO GALETTI CAR COLLECTOR

by SAMUEL EE

ROBERTO GALETTI may be a newly-minted Michelin-starred chef who lives and breathes Italian food, but less well-known is his life-long passion for cars – sparked by his heritage and childhood fascination with action movies.

“I’ve always been crazy about cars – classic, vintage, modern, sporty, fast,” says the chef-owner of Garibaldi restaurant who owns an extensive collection of classic and vintage cars. He currently has 12, ranging in age from a 1951 Singer A4 convertible to a 2008 Ferrari 430 Scuderia, all kept safely at his bungalow in Johor Baru.

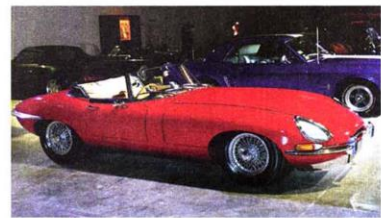
“I started my collection around 10 years ago when I bought the Singer A4. It cost me S\$60,000. I spent good money restoring it but I plan to send it in again next year because I want every detail to be correct.”

Mr Galetti was just an aspiring chef at the age of 14 when he worked in a restaurant that was popular for wedding parties. He was smitten not by the blushing brides but an old Rolls-Royce the restaurant rented out as the wedding car. “I loved it. During the afternoon break when the rest of the chefs would go home, I would spend three hours in the garage just looking at it, promising myself that I would one day buy one for myself.”

And he did. A 1967 Rolls-Royce Corniche coupe sits with the rest of his collection, all maintained by “a close mechanic friend who specialises in classic cars whom I call every time I have a problem”. Other models include a 1962 Jaguar E-Type Series 1 coupe, a 1964 Alfa Romeo Giulia Spider, a 1961 Chevrolet Corvette C1 convertible and four Ferraris dating from a 1985 Ferrari 328 GTS.

“I can’t say I specialise in any particular car, I just buy what I like,” shares Mr Galetti. “Most of the cars I own bring back old memories, like the Alfa Romeo which was featured in the most famous Italian movie *Il Sorpasso*. Also, when I was a kid I used to watch this cartoon called *Diabolik* and a thief in the show was driving a Jaguar. And in Italy – the home of the Ferrari – I grew up looking at all the Ferraris on the road. I would really like to buy a Ferrari Testarossa in white like in the TV show *Miami Vice*.”

There are those who buy and sell classic cars for investment, but not Mr Galetti. “They bring back memories, so it’s difficult for me to sell. I enjoy the



I CHANGED MY PASSPORT BUT NOT MY BLOOD.
AND CARS ARE IN MY BLOOD.

ROBERTO GALETTI

design, the lines, the feeling of saying: ‘Those are mine’. The investment value is there but it’s not my priority, my priority is to fulfil my childhood dream.”

Perhaps that’s why potential sellers go to him, rather than the other way round. “I don’t usually have to look for the cars. When you talk to people you’re sharing the same interest, and passion creates opportunity. When people want to sell their cars, they’re looking for someone who will take good care of their cars. That’s why they offer them to me.”

For Mr Galetti, life is about “balancing my duty as a husband and father with my passion and my job”. “My wife knows how important it is for me – as a celebrity chef my days are full of stress and responsibility – so the time I spend on my cars relaxes me. Yes, she complains I spend too much money but as long my family is not missing out on anything, I have the right to do what I want with my money, right?”

For budding collectors he has this advice: “Buy cars that you will enjoy driving and don’t focus only on the investment value. Know as much as you can about your cars so you can settle all the small issues and the basic maintenance. Get a good mechanic and win his trust. This is an expensive hobby, so if you want to get into it, don’t be cheap. When you repair or restore a car, do it at the best you can afford. When you sell, make sure it’s in good or perfect condition. The market is small and reputation is everything.”

“It’s easy to find a car online, but because there isn’t a formal market, two cars of the same model can have as much as a S\$100,000 price difference. So it’s always best to buy from someone with a good reputation.”

Mr Galetti will never give up his passion because “I’m Italian”, although he is also proudly Singaporean as well. “I changed my passport but not my blood. And cars are in my blood.”

**CHONG HUAI SENG
& NING CHONG**
ART COLLECTOR

HELMY YUSOF

CHONG HUAI SENG fell in love with art collecting in 1980s London. Back then, he was the managing director of Vickers Da Costa Securities in Singapore and later John Govett (Asia), and had to shuttle between London and Singapore. He spent his weekends strolling through London's galleries and museums, and began acquiring works by mostly Western artists such as Sydney Harpley and Sergei Chepik.

Over more than three decades, Mr Chong has seen his taste evolve and expand dramatically, moving from figurative to abstract, and from European to Chinese to Singapore and South-east Asian. He says: "Your taste changes as you learn more about art and expose yourself to the aesthetics of different regions. In the past decade, I started collecting more Singapore art – you could say I'm returning to my roots."

Little did he imagine that he would one day turn his passion into a business venture. But last month, he and his daughter Ning launched The Culture Story – a space for artists, patrons, connoisseurs and enthusiasts to gather and discuss art. The Culture Story offers art-consultancy services, helping new and seasoned collectors with art acquisition, and asset and inventory management.

Ms Chong explains: "The space we've created in The Culture Story harks back to the popular Paris salons of the early 1900s when artists, intellectuals and other influential figures gathered to discuss various matters of the day. We're inspired by the Paris salon of collector Gertrude Stein and her brother Leo which attracted Picasso, Matisse, Hemingway and others.



(1) Wong Keen, *Dancing in the Woods*, 2015, acrylic on rice paper (2) Augusto Albor, *Temple*, 2017, plexiglass and aluminium plate (3) Hsiao Chin, *Chi* - 278, 1988, ink and acrylic on canvas (4) Chong Huai Seng and his daughter Ning Chong offer consultancy services at The Culture Story.



EACH ARTWORK THAT I PURCHASE
HAS A STORY TO TELL. THEY BECOME
MARKERS OF MY LIFE.

CHONG HUAI SENG

"We want to re-introduce the concept of the art salon in Singapore so that like-minded individuals can come together to discover, discuss and collect new artists and their works. Appreciating art is not reserved for the elite – we encourage friends to bring their friends."

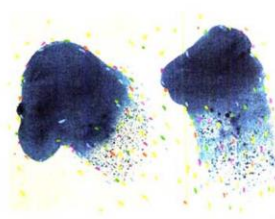
Located in Thye Hong Centre in Leng Kee Road, Culture Story plans to hold talks and get-togethers, surrounded by choice works from the Chongs' collection.

To date, the collection has over 300 pieces from some 30 countries, including local works by Cheong Soo Pieng, Chua Mia Tee, Iskandar Jalil, Han Sai Por and Wong Keen. Some of the more unusual pieces include a rare painting created by married couple Anthony Chua and Hong Sek Chern, who don't typically paint together.

The Chongs also have gorgeous abstracts by Filipino master Augusto Albor which were showcased at the 2015 Venice Biennale. They have a large canvas of Russian ballerino Rudolf Nureyev executed by Chepik, as well as a rare bronze bust by Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. They have a couple of priceless works on which they decline to go on record.

Mr Chong says: "I find art collecting extremely fulfilling instead of, say, watch or car collecting. For me, each artwork has a story to tell. They become markers of a moment in my life, that of the artist, and also markers of the cultural and political times. That's why I prefer art to other collectibles... To wit, I have been wearing the same Rolex watch since I was a young man."

Though most of the works from their collection are not for sale, a few may be in the near future, as the Chongs decide which works to divest so as to bring a sharper focus to their collection. But Mr Chong admits: "We've sold works from which we made more than 10 times their original prices. But my heart breaks each time I sell – I wish I hadn't."





(1) "An attractive watch for me needs the complete package," SJX says. (2) A sample of Su Jia Xian's "diverse" watch collection

SU JIA XIAN WATCH COLLECTOR

CHUANG PECK MING

SU JIA XIAN has been collecting, talking and writing about watches since he was 12. The catalyst was his mother, who bought him a TAG Heuer 2000 Series timepiece for his birthday. It cost S\$500 – a big sum at the time – and led him to trawl the then-fledgling Internet for more information about his precious gift. He hit paydirt when he came upon the watch forum Time Zone, and a watch connoisseur was born.

"Everyone in the forum was an amateur enthusiast. It was the ideal place to contribute my thoughts," recalls the 32-year-old who is better known in the watch community by his initials.

He was perhaps the youngest participant in the forum and now, the boy wonder of watches is highly regarded in the industry, alternately described as "Singapore's premier horology aficionado" and "one of Asia's leading watch experts". The Japanese edition of *Chronos* watch magazine in 2014 included him in "Who's Who of the World's Watch Persons", a list of 100 notable personalities in the global watch industry.

The Singapore Management University graduate with a double degree in economics and management now has his own blog, *Watches By SJ*, which ranks in the world's top 10 websites in the English language. He writes for over a dozen publications in Asia, and advises watch companies, auction houses, institutional investors and collectors.



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SU JIA XIAN

Like most serious watch collectors, SJX is coy about disclosing the size of his collection. But he lets on that it's "diverse".

"I've a one-button Seiko chronograph made for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics," SJX shares. "I also like independent watchmaking – the watchmakers are alive and it feels more real and personal – so I've an F P Journe Resonance in steel."

Another favourite is a 1980s IWC Porsche Design dive watch made for combat divers of the German Navy which he says is "exceptionally functional but also brilliantly designed – a rare combination".

"An attractive watch for me needs to be the complete package," SJX says. "It has to be both visually and intellectually appealing."

Which explains his penchant for chronographs whose mechanisms he finds "visually compelling and also complex to make". He also loves "time-only" watches because they're functional and, for all their simplicity, "very hard to execute well".

Super-complicated tourbillons, minute repeaters and perpetual calendars surprisingly are not the timepieces he yearns most for.

"If they are well-made they are marvellous mechanical objects," SJX says of such super complications. "(But) too many of these have been produced in the last decade, many of which are not especially notable, so that has diluted the value of the idea somewhat."

He also buys rare and odd timepieces. Examples are a 20-year-old Daniel Roth mono-pusher chronograph and the recent Tudor Black Bay Bronze Blue, a special edition for the Swiss retailer.

His advice for the first-time buyer is this: First, consider what kind of watch you want and whether it has a specific purpose. "Do you want a dress or sports watch, do you prefer flashy and large or small and subtle?" he says. "Does it need to be water-resistant or able to withstand scuba diving?"

The snob appeal is not for him. "I know enough about watches that I can see through most of the marketing," SJX says. "But for the average watch buyer, it does convey a silent statement."

Good value in a watch is key but the watch doesn't have to be pricey. "Whether it is S\$3,000 or S\$100,000, you should be getting bang for your buck," he notes.

SJX cautions against buying watches for investment: "Very, very rarely are watches investments, although the recent fad of vintage watches may make them seem the case."

Watches should be for pleasure but they should not depreciate excessively, according to him. "That's the most reasonable approach (in watch collecting) since it keeps the hobby sustainable," he adds.

MELABUR DALAM KOMUNITI KAMI

Membina Masyarakat yang Cantik budi pekerti

Sbagai pengelola yang dipercayai, kami menyumbang kepada komuniti-komuniti kita di Singapura dan serata dunia berdasarkan dua asas iaitu kelestarian dan tadbir urus yang baik.

Kami telah menubuhkan 17 endowment yang tertumpu kepada membina manusia, membina masyarakat, membina keupayaan dan membina semula kehidupan. Setakat ini, endowment tersebut telah mengubah kehidupan lebih 500,000 orang di Asia dan Singapura.

Pada tahun 2016, kami mengumpulkan semula 17 endowment kami untuk diuruskan oleh enam Yayasan Temasek, untuk memperbaiki perancangan dan penganjuran program yang memenuhi keperluan masyarakat yang kian berubah.

