

Publication: Vulcan Post Online

Date: 13 March 2019

Headline: **Old Shanghai Meets Modern S'pore: They Make Award-Winning Furniture You Can 'Scene Shang'**

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- A banker and an interior designer decided to quit their full-time jobs in 2012 to go to Shanghai to learn about the furniture business.
- In 2014, the two JC-mates invested less than \$100,000 to start up SCENE SHANG and two years later, they opened their first flagship store at 263 Beach Road.
- They are due to open their second flagship store in mid-2019.

Have you ever been so inspired by a place you visited that you wanted to create something?

In 2007, Pamela Ting and Jessica Wong visited Shanghai, China, on separate internship programmes and they were struck by the “mix of heritage and cosmopolitan vibe that the city had”, they told **Straits Times (ST)**.

Seven years later, they founded SCENE SHANG, a bespoke furniture brand influenced by Chinese designs and clean-cut, contemporary forms.

“SCENE SHANG (新赏) literally means ‘new’ and ‘appreciation’. It is also a play on the Chinese words for appreciation ‘欣赏’ also pronounced *xin shang*,” founder Pamela explained in a **2016 interview**.  
East Meets West Meets Form



SCENE SHANG founders Pamela Ting (left) and Jessica Wong (right) / Image Credit: SCENE SHANG

Both 35-year-old founders, who met at Raffles Junior College through a mutual friend, share an “appreciation for the Chinese culture”.

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When they were on their internships, they noticed how Singapore and Shanghai had similar eastern and western influences that they could draw on both cultures to make something.

But at that time, they felt limited in their skills and lacked the know-how to start on it and returned to Singapore.



Founders Jessica (left) and Pamela (right) at an event held in their flagship store in 2017 / Image Credit: SCENE SHANG

Pamela graduated from the Singapore Management University (SMU) with a degree in Economics and Finance and worked in a bank, while Jessica, who holds an Honours degree in Architecture from the National University of Singapore (NUS), became co-founder and director of a graphic and interior design firm.

While she enjoyed what she did in wholesale banking, the **former vice-president with an American bank** told ST she couldn't envision herself doing it forever.



Image Credit: SCENE SHANG

When she got promoted, she realised that she'd be taking on more responsibilities and embarking on a different chapter of her career.

Her job was stable but she was searching for "something more".

"That got me thinking 'it's now or never'. I think that was the defining moment," she said.

As for Jessica, that moment came to her when she shopped for furniture with her clients in her line of work as an interior designer.

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The interior of the SCENE SHANG flagship store / Image Credit: @brianhe

She recalled when a customer wanted Chinese-style furniture but couldn't find one that was modern enough.

"So I suggested adding traditional Chinese brass knobs or handles – which I had gathered from Shanghai – to the carpentry. I started doing this for more clients and they really liked these little touches," Jessica told ST.

"I started questioning the work I was doing and wondered why so many people came to me asking for Scandinavian design when we have such a rich culture of our own."



Image Credit: SCENE SHANG

As a designer, she realised she could play a role "in extracting beauty" – in this case, she could give Chinese furniture a contemporary twist.

Pamela said they left their jobs after five years and went back to Shanghai some time between 2012 and 2013 to learn about the furniture business.

They met with many craftsmen and decided that Jessica could come up with the designs and then bring it to them to make it.

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Image Credit: SCENE SHANG

When asked how sure were they about establishing SCENE SHANG, Pamela replied, “We were not one bit sure.”

“The only thing we held on to was our mutual appreciation for culture and heritage, and our frequent discovery travels to China that was always exciting for us.”

In 2014, they took a leap of faith and launched SCENE SHANG online, working in a studio located at Institution Hill in Singapore, with Pamela leading the business development front and Jessica leading the creative and design direction.



SCENE SHANG's pop-up space at SingaPlural 2017 / Image Credit: Singapore Tatler

To raise awareness about their brand, they **participated in pop-up events and fairs** and SCENE SHANG was later stocked at local retailers.

They invested in a figure less than \$100,000 to start up.

“We don't come from wealthy backgrounds so whatever savings we had we put into building the brand.”

Their parents were worried when they decided to leave their stable and, probably, well-paying jobs to start their business but they still allowed them to do what they wanted, while friends were supportive and lived vicariously through them, Pamela told me.

“It was scary but also liberating because our lives became an open book.”

Past Influences Present In Products

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A 3D artform created by Pamela's father, Arthur P.Y. Ting sold at SCENE SHANG / Image Credit: SCENE SHANG

Despite taking the “sensible” and “easier” path her pragmatic mother wanted her to take, Pamela **said** finding “...beauty in art and design has never left [her]”.

She was always surrounded by art and design as her father was “one of Singapore's preeminent ‘Second Generation artist’”, who came here 50 years ago to study at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA).

“So growing up with a house filled with canvases, sculptures, scrap craft material is a different kind of playground for a kid,” Pamela told **Asian Entrepreneur in 2016**.



Mr Ting creating his work / Image Credit: SCENE SHANG

Having always been a creative, Jessica said she has a penchant to “create spaces and objects that are emotive, relevant, and beautiful” and would chase after memories and *shifus* (mastercraftsmen).

“Most, if not all, of our designs draw from a story or an experience in childhood; it could be grandma's stories while on her rocking chair, or laughing over dinner around the marble table,” Pamela explained.

“It is the essence of our inspirations for our modern designs.”



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Image Credit: SCENE SHANG

The popular SHANG System, a Ming dynasty-inspired stackable set of hand-carved drawers and trays, won a special commendation at the 2014 President's Design Award, Pamela told ST.

It also won the Golden A' Design Award in Furniture, Decorative Items and Homeware Design in Italy in 2016.

She added, "There's also the Jia Ju range, which draws upon memories and emotional bonds that people have with certain pieces of furniture as they were growing up."



Image Credit: SCENE SHANG

Jessica said that they surveyed people on their "feelings and memories of furniture" in their childhood and what would be considered an heirloom to them.

"We noticed that people developed feelings for certain pieces of furniture, for example, a rattan rocking horse, which still looks good in a home today but may not be so functional now that you're grown up. That gave us the idea to create the Jia Ju Rocking Stool."

It's become a habit of theirs to observe the little nuances of their own lives or others at home or while travelling for inspiration or an idea for a design.

"We then discuss and brainstorm between ourselves before taking it to the larger team," Pamela shared.

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Image Credit: SCENE SHANG

Then they would make a prototype and critique it before deciding on whether to produce it.

“A lot of factors go into deciding if an item goes into production – Does it have a story? Is it beautiful? Is it functional? Is it marketable? What is the product lifespan?”

She continued, “How much does it cost? Which maker is going to do this best? How much are we going to sell it for? How many units over how long? What is its packaging like? Can we distribute? Can we deliver overseas? And it goes on...”

Enjoying The Scenery



Pamela at the night of the store's launch in 2016 / Image Credit: SCENE SHANG

At the start, crystallising and communicating what their brand is about to people was a challenge, so they kept talking to friends and family until they were both satisfied with the direction.

Five years later, the challenges they face “are the same and more”.

“[All] I can say is tackle them one at a time, breathe, sip some whisky, surround yourself with a beautiful scent and grow some plants,” Pamela said purposefully.

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Jessica (in blue) at an annual event held at the store / Image Credit: SCENE SHANG

In every business relationship, there is bound to have its difficulties and victories, and theirs is no different.

They revealed that they have had quarrels so bad that it almost ended the business.

But eventually, they learned to communicate better, be more understanding respectful, and that has translated to their success today, to which Pamela credits it to their longstanding friendship.

“In that same way, we apply that to our team as well, guiding them but also giving them respect and space to grow,” she added.

Pamela described SCENE SHANG’s growth as “extremely encouraging”.



The team in 2018 / Image Credit: SCENE SHANG

“We started with just the two of us and our ‘first two interns’ – my cats – and [we] literally had to do everything ourselves,” she recalled.

“We now have a very capable team of 10 of us, each one having full ownership of the brand.”

On top of a larger customer base, their main and biggest customers are their returning customers.



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The SCENE SHANG store in 2016 / Image Credit: SCENE SHANG

They went from selling their wares at fairs and events to stocking at retailers to opening their first flagship store in 2016.

Come mid-2019, SCENE SHANG will open its second store in a “beautiful and prominent building”, Pamela teased.

They are also looking to work with partners in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China to expand to these markets.



The SCENE SHANG store in 2018 during an event / Image Credit: SCENE SHANG

Pamela thinks that they haven't “achieved longevity” as they're only five years old and “have many more years to go”.

“But for all that we have now, it is by the grace of God.”

If she could go back in time, Pamela said she would tell herself to not worry so much.

“Everything happens for a reason – whether they seem good or bad in the moment that it happened, there is a reason for it,” she mulled.

“And if you can see things in that perspective, it'll be easier to move through the journey.”

Visit their website [here](#), and find furniture inspiration on their Facebook [here](#) or Instagram [here](#).