

TAPPING INTO A FROTHY BRAND WONDERLAND: AN EXCLUSIVE TOUR OF THE FORST BREWERY IN MERANO

# MONOCLE

A BRIEFING ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS, BUSINESS, CULTURE & DESIGN

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**DESIGN  
DIRECTORY** 02

## Design Directions: *from Beirut to São Paulo, Rovaniemi to Toronto*

**PART TWO** – of Monocle's overview of the best in handsome architecture, desirable furniture, retail outposts, fine craft folk and top designers



### THE MONOCLE MAKE-IT MANUAL

- 5** architects we'd hire for a project on any scale, from apartment to airport
- 25** well-turned-out products that can help fix spaces from home to office
- 3** residences that we'd be happy to call home
- 60** years of Ljubljana's graphic-design show that still sets the agenda
- 1** ever-growing fair for the best in garden furniture and budding talent



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**Kay Ngee Tan Architects**  
Singapore

"Architecture can be, dare I say it, incestuous," says Kay Ngee Tan of building trends and fads. While the Architectural Association-trained architect – who spreads his time across offices in London, Istanbul and Singapore – can draw inspiration from photography to film to nature, he eschews architecture books completely. "A lot of what is out there is derivative."

Tan's ability lies in reconciling seemingly contradictory elements to form a cohesive whole. In 1999 he was tapped to mastermind the Singapore outpost of Japanese bookshop chain Kinokuniya in mega-shopping centre Ngee Ann City. Deeply influenced by Steven Spielberg's classic *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, Tan designed the shop to resemble a spaceship while retaining a Japanese sensibility. "We're involved in designing every aspect of our projects including furnishings," he says.

The result was Southeast Asia's largest bookshop for a decade and Tan has since become the brand's go-to architect. He has spearheaded all new Kinokuniya shops in Taiwan, Thailand and the US. Each shop incorporates elements of the indigenous context while retaining an unmistakable brand identity. "I was very humbled when they asked me to start designing stores in Japan as well," he says. Last year when the bookshop was relocated to another floor in the same building, Tan updated the design with lighter marble walkways and wood panelling for the ceiling but kept most of the original aesthetic. "We wanted to respect customers'



- 01 Designs for life
- 02 Working on a miniature model
- 03 Owner Kay Ngee Tan
- 04 Kinokuniya bookstore at Ngee Ann City on Orchard Road
- 05 Reading hour
- 06 Finished model



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**Best for retail design**

memories of the place but include new interesting details," he says.

Besides designing bookshops for Kinokuniya, Tan also takes on projects of all scales, from mixed-use developments to single-family residences. After accepting a commission, Tan studies the geographical context of the project. "Then I try to understand what the project is really about beyond what the client says; everything has a deeper meaning," he says. "Next I'll mix it up with my personal inspiration and a dash of dry British humour." The outcome is always a spectacle to behold. — JZL [kayngeetanarchitects.com](http://kayngeetanarchitects.com)

**Why we'd hire them:** By making certain every design detail serves a purpose, Kay Ngee Tan deftly translates his clients' brand identity to serve different cultural contexts and markets.

**Pick of the projects**

**01. Prophoto Camera**  
Singapore's first official retailer of Swedish camera firm Hasselblad was designed as a blackbox with lit display units.

**02. Page One**  
Located in Taipei 101 – the city's tallest skyscraper – this bookshop chain's outpost is modelled after Chinese landscaped gardens.

**03. Vinum**  
The curvaceous design of this wine shop in Singapore's Shaw Centre drew inspiration from French vineyards.

**04. Kinokuniya, Sapporo**  
The city grid informed the angular layout, which juxtaposes nicely with the wavy ceilings inspired by the ocean.

