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# The Standard WEEKEND GLITZ

Friday, December 8, 2017

## Interview



■ Joanne Chow with, from far left, husband Christopher Lee, their children Gabrielle, Zachary and Cameron, and her parents; her family and two generations of BoConcept; her family at the store; with the BoConcept team; and with Torben Paulin, the former chief executive at the Herring, Denmark, hq. Inset: chair from the Adelaide collection.

### CELEBRATING 65 YEARS OF DANISH DESIGN



# SIMPLY THE BEST

Jourdan Ma is furnished with fundamental truths from an entrepreneur who's very much at home in Danish concepts

Joanne Chow Hoi-yu knows from personal experience how daunting shopping for furniture can be. Relocating here from San Francisco, the mother of three had to make a home cozy with Scandinavian-style designs.

Chow is now managing director of A Matter of Design, distributor for Danish furniture brand BoConcept and Britain's Tom Dixon.

Established in 1952, BoConcept has made the leap from a tiny factory into an international chain, operating over 260 stores in 65 countries.

Chow said BoConcept's attraction lies in its simplicity, modernity and functionality.

The brand has interior designers who help with measurements and configurations, creating the kind of home customers dream of.

From decor to furniture, its designs ooze a minimalist aesthetic homeowners adore.

Chow made her first BoConcept purchase in San Francisco around 10 years ago. "I ordered eight chairs – each cost me around US\$300, [HK\$2,340]," she said. "It might sound like a lot, but they were really well suited to my unit with its more than 80 years of history."

Relocating here with her husband, who is in finance, she couldn't find a similar brand.

"I wondered why there wasn't a BoConcept store in Hong Kong, so I e-mailed them as a consumer. It was out of the blue," she recalls.

In 2013, she brought BoConcept to Hong Kong, opening the first store on Wyndham Street in Central.

"It was ambitious to place a furniture store amid bars and restaurants, but I look at challenges as opportunities," she said.

The brand gradually built up a solid fan base in Central and Mid-Levels, and two years ago its second store opened at HomeSquare in Sha Tin.

Furniture selections, as we all know, vary with flat sizes, styles, or penchants for palettes and textures. "To each his own, a comfort to one person can be a discomfort to others," she said.

Shoppers should scour the store. Those new to the brand can opt for knick-knacks. A cushion, or a candle, can light up the flat, she said.

Nifty gadgets include mugs and breakfast plates embellished with floral patterns, alongside other tableware in porcelain, bamboo, glass and stainless steel.

People seeking a suite should consider the acorn-inspired Adelaide collection, complete with oak legs. "Our designer, Henrik Pedersen, has recently updated the set with sofa, lounge chair and coffee table," she said.

Beans, the fast-growing hipster cafe, recently featured the set in its alfresco areas.

Another option is the award-winning and nature-inspired Ottawa Collection, launched in 2012. Its latest modular sofas can be great mix-and-match pieces for the lounge, or even the workplace.

Other features include the wall-storage system to avoid clutter, the stackable Florence chair, the foldable

Billund table and the extendable Vancouver dining table. Customers with high ceilings can complement natural light with a chandelier.

"Singles prefer pieces that are multifunctional – for instance, a coffee table that becomes a desk," she said. A table with built-in storage can also eschew the need for an additional piece.

"Couples, in particular, may move from city to city, so they should ensure furniture can enter elevators and go through narrow staircases."

"Families with kids usually prefer pieces that are durable and practical, like beds with hidden storage to hide toys, or sofas to be folded out into beds for in-laws to stay over."

Chow also manages the family business Ausco, a renowned garment manufacturer her grandfather started over 57 years ago.

"We have manufactured for All Saints, Reiss, Ted Baker, Comptoir des Cotonniers, Sandro, Maje and, recently, Adidas."

It's really tough to juggle two businesses and three kids, she said.

On a recent business trip to Denmark, she managed to take time out for a Legoland visit "without kids," she said in jest.

Over the years she has trained her teams, both in the workplace and at home, to lay out plans and solve problems independently. She terms it "ownership and responsibility."

Next year will be exciting for her.

The third BoConcept store is slated to open at Lee Gardens in May, and she is becoming the mother of four.



■ From top: some of the types of furniture that can be customized; the color schemes available at the Central store; and Chow at the opening of the store.

