

Hive of Industry

While branching beyond lighting and furniture into candles, glassware, fragrance and stationery, TOM DIXON decided it was high time to have a presence in Hong Kong. ZANETA CHENG peeks into the store – and the man

TOM DIXON IS an industrious fellow. This might seem an obvious epithet for the man responsible for setting the standard in contemporary design, but the principles underpinning the word – striving, assiduousness, indefatigability – characterise his entire trajectory, from his early welding days to the manner in which he continues to reinvent himself in existing and new categories. And most recently, Dixon opened his eponymous brand's first Asian flagship store right here in Hong Kong, on Hollywood Road, complete with in-house Nodi coffee shop.

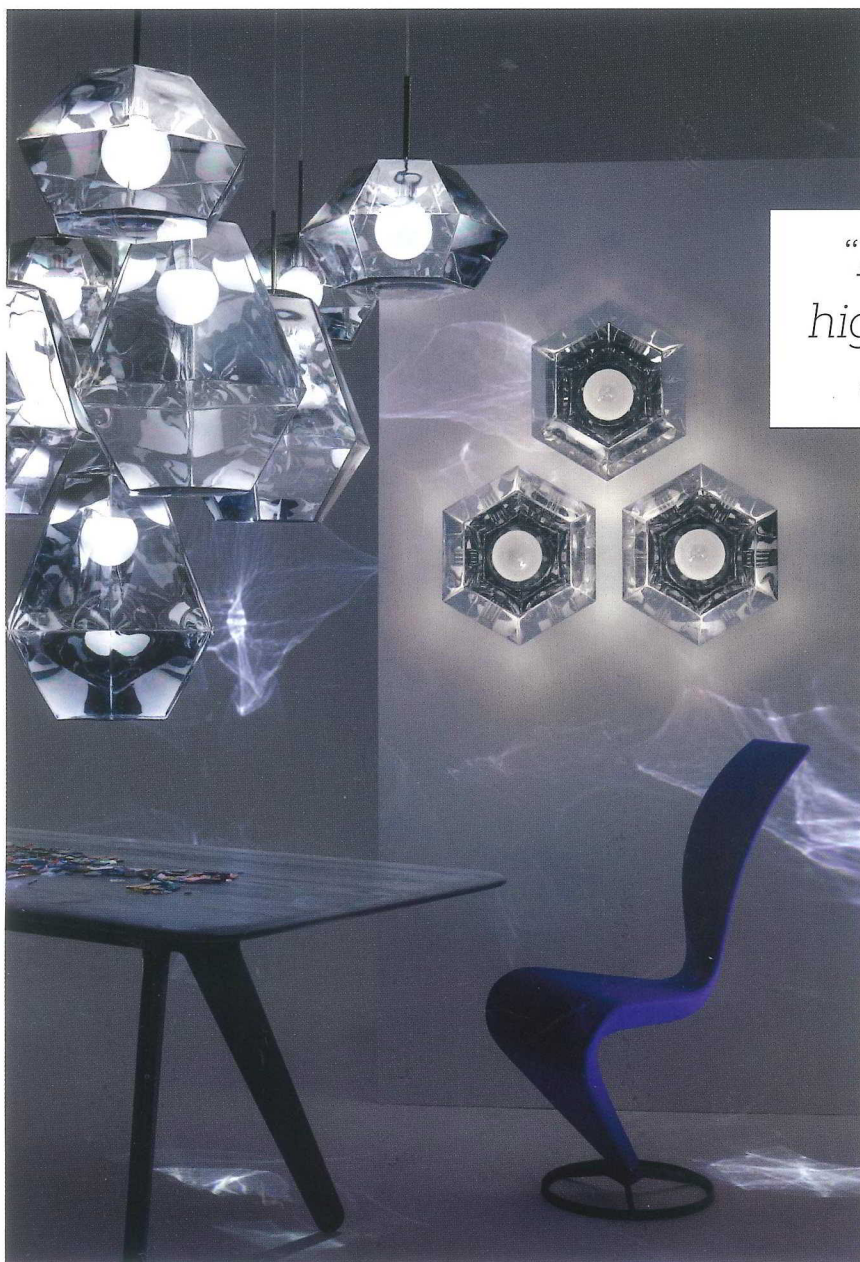
Opening the store, which is housed in an industrial three-storey building entirely painted in matt black, was only a matter of time. "We were

always going to be an international company," Dixon tells me, as we chat on the second floor. We're sipping Nodi coffee from Dixon-branded, brass-rimmed glassware while seated on black furniture under gold light fixtures, all designed by the man himself and for sale in the store. Natural light bathes the space. This seems counterintuitive to a brand so famous for indoor lighting, but it works to soften the harder industrial surrounds.

"Hong Kong was an obvious choice," he says. "There's the



CULTURE DESIGN



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some fashion. The store in New York taught us that having the right kind of mix of fashion, art and furniture is good for us. I like the kind of high life and low life of Hong Kong. This is also an auspicious place because it's at the crossing of six roads."

Dixon's interest in Asia is rooted in the support he's found here, Malaysia and Indonesia being just two of the countries that have taken to his work, while Japan was the earliest supporter. Korea, too, has his attention.

"We've got a great new partner in Samsung," he explains. "It's an interesting country. If you don't travel a lot in Asia, you tend to think of it as a block of countries that act in the same way, but Korea has always been very different in all aspects – culture especially. It's had a strong industrial base for a really long time, so they're interested in design from a slightly different angle, because they actually make things and see it as a means of adding value to industry."

Manufacturing holds Dixon in its thrall. It's as though he sees the very process, each movement, as a vehicle that enhances the landscape of design.

British connection – so [there's the] language and a big international community. Here, people are early adopters of fashion, food and just culture in general. It's also a matter of the right site at the right time. Asia's working well for us and we

use Hong Kong as a hub for places like Japan, Australia and Indonesia."

But why Hollywood Road and not a pristine, mammoth, up-market mall? "I like the real, gritty Hong Kong," he says. "It's great when you've got people selling vegetables on the street. There are art galleries and other designers as well, and

ABOVE: TOM DIXON CUT LIGHTING COLLECTION, S CHAIR AND SLAB TABLE, OPPOSITE: THE UPPER FLOOR OF THE TOM DIXON FLAGSHIP ON HOLLYWOOD ROAD



"I've always had a very big interest in the manufacturing process and that's evolving very quickly," he says. "It's an exciting time for designers now in general, as there's more flexibility because of digitalisation. There's an industrial revolution in design right now that will impact the way we make things."

"I also get obsessed with a variety of materials, depending on the season. Right now, it's textiles – and that's a whole other world of possibilities in terms of texture, colour, comfort. I'm learning it from zero, which gets me excited."

Being thrust out of his comfort zone in this ever-changing landscape of creating product is a prospect that Dixon relishes. The

designer gets visibly more animated: "There's always a danger of being too expert and repeating yourself, so collaborations are a means to keep yourself fresh. I collaborated with Adidas three to four years ago with clothes, bags and shoes. That gave me a real insight into multi-textiles and new types of knitting, but especially how quickly you can make things. They were prototyping shoes in mere hours."

"I'm quite impatient," he adds, "and when I started I had the same impatience with welding. All of a sudden I could make big things quickly. So working with this US\$2-billion company that's expert in manufacturing, textiles and shaping textiles into different things got me quite interested. Maybe I'll do fashion next."

With multiple channels of output, and the prospect of ever more, is Dixon concerned that this might dilute his signature style? Drawing on the past to allude to the future, his answer is no.

"I was away in my own studio, knowing not a great deal about design at all, making things that were more influenced by art movements, music, trends, design," he says. "I produced stuff for fun and a lot of it. You make your own mistakes and adapt or adjust yourself rather than having input from other people. There was no tutor saying do this or do that. It was a self-propelled impatience. By the time you've built a body of work you've defined your own style without other people telling you that it's wrong."

"Practice is underestimated I think. By producing a lot of stuff you come to a lot of conclusions. It's always a learning process." ■