

munge//leung: design associates

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Upon meeting Alessandro Munge, you can't help but feel captivated by his genuine presence and warm smile. This man is passionately in love with his work. If you have ever stepped inside a space designed by Munge & Leung, you, too, have felt the love. It's impossible to avoid being seduced upon entering the duo's Ultra Supper Club, the recently re-vamped Orange Room, and even the eternally queued Salad King. When asked where his partner in crime Sai Leung is, Alessandro explains that he is the managing partner linking client to studio while the elusive Sai prefers to reside in the studio, detailing what they have conceptualized. I suppose we'll have to settle for only half the genius today.

CM: How did you & Mr. Leung originally meet?

AM: We met working with the prominent Yabu Pushelberg about eight and a half years ago. We were partnered together on some pretty high profile projects. I had decided it was time to go off and start [interior decorating] on my own, and in saying goodbye to Sai, he asked if he could come along. It was a pretty scary time in both of our careers knowing that we were not meant to be employed by someone - it just felt like it was the right time. All I had was a very small lead on a restaurant and we worked on the designs on my dining room table. It was good to be hit with a dose of reality. After designing the Government Nightclub with Charles Khabouth, things kind of exploded and we haven't looked back since!

CM: Besides the client's requests, what inspires you to design a space?

AM: I often get asked this question, and I don't have a perfect answer. Life inspires me, my family; I see that we're contributing to the way people live - that inspires me! For us, our ideas come from our travels, our everyday life.

I can be sitting in front of the TV and there will be nothing on. Suddenly, a commercial or a cartoon will come on, and I'll find myself studying it graphically; it wasn't until I was having dinner with a graphic designer who told me he does the same that I realized I was doing it! To me, it's about watching people's reactions in the three dimensional spaces

that we've created for them. When we do a nightclub, for instance, I'm always curious to see how people react emotionally within the space. When we begin a new project we'll do the research on what's successful so that we're not only approaching it from a design perspective, but from a business aspect as well. A prime example of this is the success of Salad King.

CM: Do you think that you (Munge & Leung) have a 'trademark' look?

AM: In looking at some of our portfolio work, people will say that it's not easily recognizable. I'm proud that we can create a restaurant, a nightclub, and a condominium that look completely different. You can't really tell that it's a "Munge & Leung" space. I don't want to become predictable and I think Sai & I would become bored if we couldn't rise to different challenges. I don't want to do projects that don't survive. There is always a Munge & Leung look and feel, but it's not as distinctive as a corporate brand.

CM: What are some of the words you would use to describe a Munge & Leung interior?

AM: We always strive for a sense of timelessness. Our spaces are warm, approachable, sleek, modern and contemporary. We don't do much traditional work per se. Most importantly, they have personality.

CM: Where do you see Munge & Leung five years from now?

AM: Sometimes, I fear that we'll grow too big. I wouldn't want to lose creative control. Sai and I enjoy the process so much, but as we grow, we have to delegate certain roles to others. I'd love to see us doing similar projects, but on a larger scale. We are currently being considered for some new hotels, which is something we've always dreamed of doing. We both have a passion for furniture as well, so we may pursue this more in the future.

CM: What do you have in the works now?

AM: We're definitely expanding beyond this city. We have some current projects in Las Vegas, as well as some high profile residential ventures. There is an abundance of high design in Toronto, but it's too bad there aren't more 'Ultra's' out there for people to enjoy - there shouldn't be only one!

Considering what they have accomplished so far, Munge & Leung will undoubtedly continue to set and surpass the bar for superior design in Toronto and abroad. We certainly cannot wait to see what these design gurus have in store for the city in years to come. Stay tuned!



“Munge & Leung are re-inventing Toronto...one whimsical design at a time”