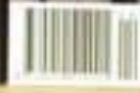


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(left to right) Eddy Kim, Kevin Lim, Edward Kim (photo by Rebecca Le)

## youthful ambitions

BY REBECCA LE | PHOTOS COURTESY OPENUU

Three 20-something architects who form the Hong Kong-based practice openUU are forging their own path with thought-provoking installations and spaces.

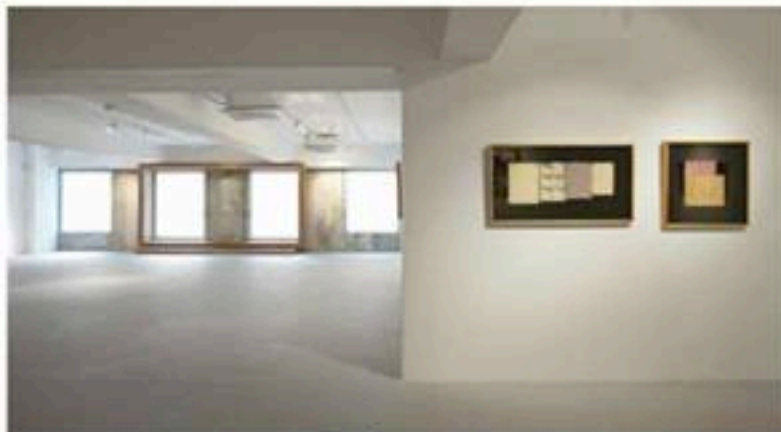
**W**hen life hands you a lemon, make lemonade. That was the thinking behind three university schoolmates Kevin Chin Kwok Lim, Edward Yipong Kim and Eddy Man Kim. They met when they studied architecture at Cornell University and they shared a love for music – in fact, they all used to DJ when they were students.

Afterwards, Kevin continued his studies in culinary school at Le Cordon Bleu and worked in the kitchen of Blue Ginger; he also did a stint at the office of SAT (The Architectural Team). Edward paid his dues at the offices of Samoco and Group 3 in Seoul, Tadao Ando in Tokyo, and SYSTEMarchitects and studioU.M.O in New York. Eddy got his masters in design studies at Harvard University before working in Seoul at POCO-ASC and at Robert A.M. Stern's office in New York, but the economic slump in the US brought on by the 2008 housing crisis meant that real opportunities were few and far between. In 2009, they decided to form their own company and relocate to Hong Kong, where they are ensconced in a lofty warehouse space that doubles as their studio, research lab and occasional private kitchen or barbecue hangout.

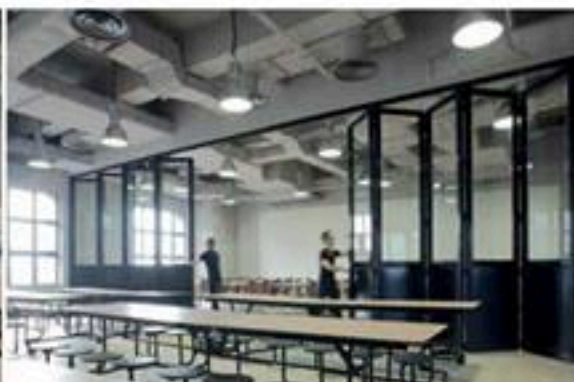
"The idea to do our own thing started in school, when we collaborated on school projects," says Eddy. "It grew organically from there. I was the last to join, and arrived in Hong Kong about a year ago."

"Some of our first projects were collaborations with my dad," says Kevin, referring to CL3 founder and managing director William Lim. These include their studio, a space that the elder Lim also uses to house his vast art collection.

They decided to call their company openUU, as a playful way to present themselves as outside the box thinkers. Although they each work on all aspects of a project, Kevin tends to handle project management. "I have an interest in it and can communicate more easily with contractors here since I speak Chinese," he says.



Design Gallery



Eddy focuses on the technical aspects of a project plus to overall big picture. Edward makes sure that things look good and is considered a master of detail by his colleagues.

"I think what makes us different from other firms is that we cater to our client's needs," says Kevin. "Some designers insist on pushing their concepts and making their clients accept them. We prefer to work together with them to come up with the best solution. Our strength is that we will spend time to mould something with our client until they are satisfied. After all, they are the ones who will be using the space."

"We are trying to get into the practice of dividing up work based on each of our strengths," says Edward. "But we will brainstorm together. Our advantage is that we are a three-man team and so far in our practice."

openUU first went under the spotlight with their installations in the previous two Hong Kong Shenzhen Biennale for Architecture and Urbanism. "We wanted to create something that will engage people yet we knew they would be very temporary and disappear from memory after a short time," says Edward. "It was a great opportunity to provide such meaningful impact to a wide audience."

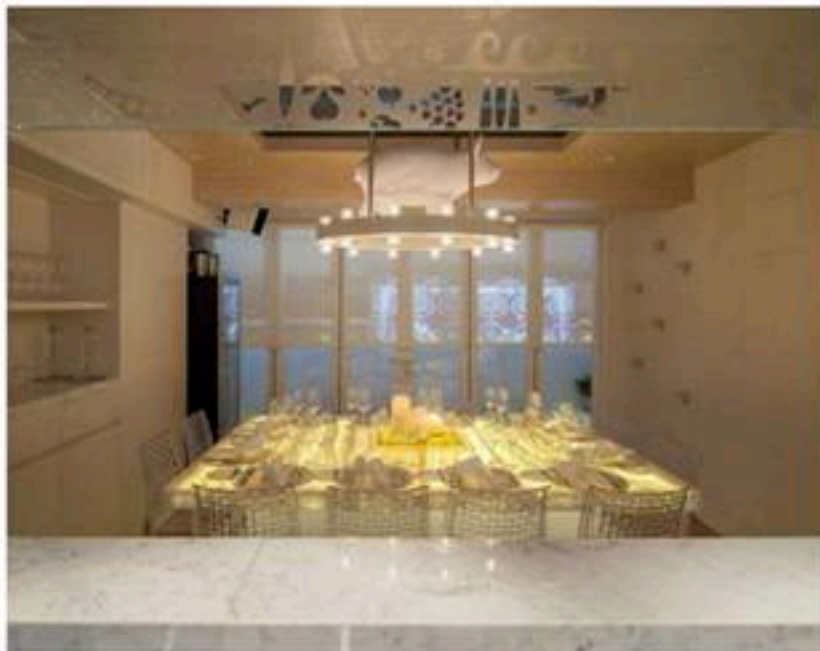
Their interior projects have so far included a canteen for Chinese International School, the first phase of Google gallery's Kevin Tong convenience and FoFo, a private kitchen restaurant.



Canteen of HK's Chinese International School



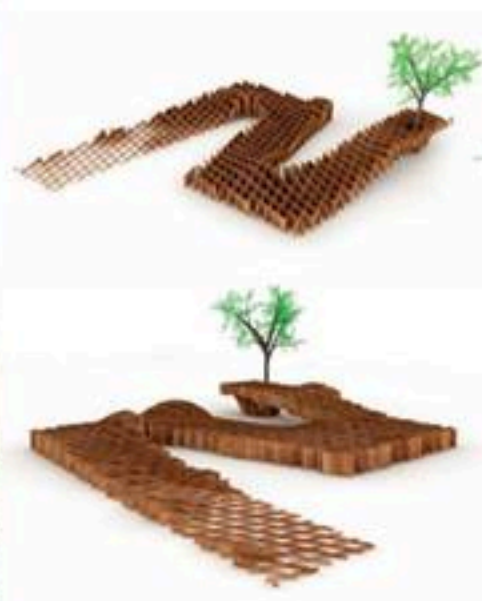




Felis by El Willy (restaurant for contemporary spanish food)



group E. urbanPLFT (2012) pavilion/installation for Hong Kong & Shenzhen Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/ Architecture. The streets of Hong Kong are filled with a collage of urban artifacts that serve as amenities and destinations for the everyday citizen. In urbanPLFT, a selection of these oft-forgotten elements of the everyday street vendors, stalls, pagodas, gardens, billboards, newsstands are combined to form an urban furniture. Situated within a man-made landscape of natural elements - Kowloon Park, urbanPLFT is a transplant of urban elements featuring a garden of artificial green. (paperXX)



Sanlitun (2008) pavilion installation for Hong Kong & Shenzhen Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/ Architecture. Terracotta is an event- space, an engaged pavilion that requires the visitor's help to re-imagine the traditional pavilion as a post-industrial landscape that multi-directionally affects and impacts life within a local ecosystem. A device of both nature and artificiality, and venue for the community, it takes cues from the temporal nature of the terracotta as well as the rapidly changing landscape of Hong Kong. Visitors are allowed to "steal" individual pots within the site and encouraged to plant seeds of their choice from a catalog of local species ultimately leading to the rebirth of seeds of local presence. (paperXX)

Although some of the partners would advise venturing out to start an architectural firm as soon after graduation, they have no regrets. "Our inexperience has worked to our advantage," says Edward. "We draw on the walls in order to communicate with contractors. Many opportunities have come our way that were unplanned. What we don't know has equated to more opportunities."

Eddy has a dream project that he would like to pursue. Eddy would like to work on housing developments. "I question the formulaic development of the public housing I see all around me in Hong Kong," he says. "Mass housing is almost relentless. There could be more academic study for these types of projects."

Edward would love to work on a public park and a hotel. "What could be more artificial than a park to replace nature and a hotel to replace a home?" he muses.

Karin would love to open his own restaurant specializing in southeast Asian fusion cuisine. "The restaurant industry is one that a lot of people take for granted," he says. "If they knew what it was like to work in it, they wouldn't act so uncivilized in a restaurant."

They would love to be able to tackle architectural projects, but enjoy the immediate gratification of working on installations and interiors. "Architecture takes a long time, five to seven years before a building is completed," says Karin. "I see the same results. It's similar to cooking."

"We're good at turning over ideas quickly," says Eddy. "And we try to focus on opportunities to get our ideas out there more quickly. It was that people can understand, as frequently as possible." \*