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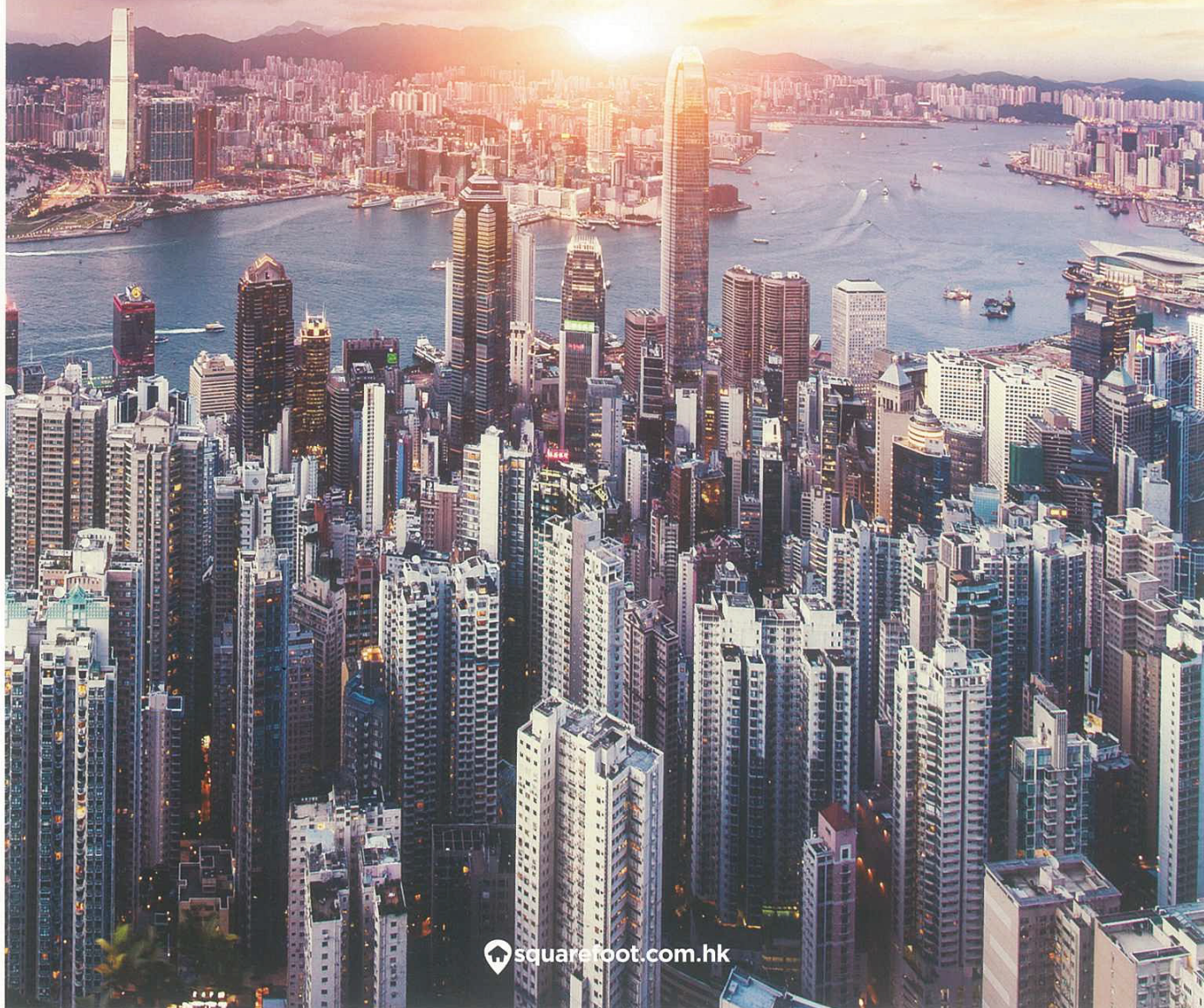
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LIVING A DREAM OF SUBSTANCE

夢想之旅

Maxime Dautresme, founder of the creative design agency,
A Work of Substance.

與A Work of Substance創辦人Maxime Dautresme對話。

TEXT BY KATE DAVIES PHOTOS COURTESY OF A WORK OF SUBSTANCE

Nestled among the hidden pedestrianised backstreets of Poho is where I find Maxime Dautresme and his staff of 25 quietly working away in their office. Surrounded by lush green foliage, natural light filtering in through glass front walls and a symphony of birdsong coming from the trees overhead, their ground floor workspace is unlike most others in this city of modern high rises.

Maxime Dautresme is also not your regular designer. His family's story is one of fine art, travel and passion with links to Pablo Picasso, the world of private banking and Chinese antiques. As we sit in the window-side conference room Dautresme explains his own personal journey to me. It too involves travel, passion, and China, and has led him to start up the award-winning creative brand and design agency A Work of Substance. "I basically think this is heaven," he tells me with a smile, "there's no place afterwards!"

Brazilian-French by birth, Dautresme's father's job in private banking took him, his brother and his artist mother (god-daughter of Pablo Picasso) to the likes of Brazil, Panama, Japan, Korea, Monaco and Paris. "I remember Seoul with only

在 普慶坊後街的一條行人路，有一間隱蔽的設計工作室，Maxime Dautresme與他的25位同事就在裡面安靜地工作。位於地面層的辦公室被一片翠綠環抱，自然光從前方落地玻璃照進室內，偶爾傳來樹上鳥兒的歌聲，如此舒適的工作環境，確實有別於市區的高樓大廈。

Maxime Dautresme不是一般的設計師，他的家族歷史由藝術、旅遊、畢加索、私人銀行和中國古董編織而成。我們坐在會議室窗旁，Dautresme娓娓道出他的心路歷程。他的一生也是與旅遊、熱誠和中國有莫大關係，繼而創立這間得獎的設計代理公司，他笑說：「我認為這兒是個天堂，最好的就在這裡。」

Dautresme的父親是法裔巴西籍人士，在一家私人銀行工作，那時他帶著藝術家妻子（畢加索的義女）、Dautresme和他的弟弟僑居巴西、巴拿馬、日本、韓國、摩納哥及巴黎。「我記得首爾的道路那時滿佈灰塵。」他憶起80年代在韓國的短暫生活：「多年後，當我再次回到首爾（處理項目）時，哇！現在的首爾比東京發展更快。」童年時四處遊歷，及後在巴黎修讀建築，他曾與普立茲克建築獎得主Christian de Portzamparc共事，最大得著竟然是「不要當一位建築師」！「Christian de Portzamparc當然很滿意自己的事業發展，但他一直埋頭苦幹，竟



dirt roads," he smiles, recalling his stint there in the 80's, "but I went back [with a project years later] I was like 'Wow! ... Seoul [now] is Tokyo on steroids basically." After a childhood of travel, he studied architecture in Paris and worked with the Pritzker Prize-winning architect Christian de Portzamparc from whom his major lesson was not simply to become an architect. "Christian de Portzamparc, obviously being a starchitect was happy with his career, but at that time he was in his early 50's and only then did he start to find a bit of comfort in his life, having struggled before." That was not the pace of life that Dautresme wanted for himself.

So, after a brief flirtation with the idea of opening a restaurant in Miami, he moved to the U.S. and began what he describes as his 'mini American dream'. "I met the right people at the right time, opened a business, started doing design work, went into advertising as a freelancer for Crispin Porter and Bogusky—a big advertising company in Miami—and did some work for TBWA in Paris." From architecture to advertising, his pace of life sped up dramatically. Arming himself with professional training as an Artistic Director he was drawn to branding and then presented with an opportunity to work in Shanghai, which he took. "I was craving a bit of Asia," he tells me. That was 11 years ago and he's still here.

Working in China opened the door to the world of brand experience and also opened his eyes to the demography of the country while doing shop audits for American Standard. "I saw sales staff sleeping in a bathtub!" he explains, noting that the population in general were good at making things happen fast, although key skills that involve education take time. "I have tremendous respect for [the Chinese people]," Dautresme adds. His uncle on his father's side loved the country so much that he spent 50 years travelling around it, during which time he collected personal possessions that sweetened the lives of people who lived through Mao's Cultural Revolution. He took his huge collection back to France and opened a museum.

Dautresme then found himself lured to Hong Kong by the advertising agency DDB, to work with industry titans such as Cirque du Soleil, the Financial Times and Chow Tai Fook among others, establishing and strengthening their brands in Asia. When this came to an end, he found himself freelancing and thanks to the interest and financial support from a friend, he founded A Work of Substance.

Eight years on, the business has a presence in Paris and Stockholm although each branch operates mostly independently.

到50歲的生才感到生活中的一點舒適。」顯然，這不是Dautresme想過的人生。

自他萌生起在邁亞密開餐廳的念頭，便很快到了美國，追求他所指的「小小美國夢」。他表示：「我在適當的時候遇上適當的人，由最初開展飲食事業，到投身設計工作，在邁亞密著名的廣告公司 Crispin Porter and Bogusky擔任特約設計師，亦曾替巴黎TBWA處理過一些項目。」由建築至廣告，他的人生步伐越走越快。在接受成為藝術總監的專業訓練時，他對品牌推廣甚感興趣，及後更有機會到上海工作。他告訴我：「當時我很想到亞洲看看。」那是11年前的事，目前仍在那裡。

在中國為American Standard工作期間，Dautresme累積了豐富的品牌管理經驗，在巡視店舖時，更親睹內地人民生活實況。他說：「我見到有店員在浴缸內睡覺。」他解釋雖然在培訓技巧方面需時，但內地人一般來說很有效率。他補充：「我很尊重內地人。」他的叔父很喜歡中國，用了50年時間遊遍各地，期間收集了許多紀念品，這些物品曾令生活在文化大革命期間的人民過活得好一點，之後他把這些收藏品帶回法國，並開設了一間博物館。

後來，Dautresme投身香港廣告公司DDB，為不同業界翹楚工作，例如Cirque du Soleil、Financial Times和周大福等，鞏固品牌在亞洲的知名度及地位。完成這份工作後，他回復自由身，多得一位對他工作感興趣的朋友，資助他成立A Work of Substance。

八年來，公司在巴黎及斯德哥爾摩開設分公司，每間幾乎是獨立運作，Dautresme管理約25人的團隊，這個人數讓他容易管控創作過程，也讓他騰出時間參與所有項目，公司一些項目曾在Cannes、D&AD、Spikes Asia及Red Dot等比賽中獲獎，公司專注擬訂策略、定位、包裝、數碼營銷、廣告、社交媒體及室內設計，同時銷售自家品牌的浴室產品及燈飾。當我打趣問他有甚麼不做時，他回答道：「(創作)是不可停止的！限制也不存在。」

Dautresme對工作的熱誠，是公司發展下去的動力，過了八年時間，公司才踏入收成期。他說：「我們在這裡有點像局外人，但競爭對手不算多；如果在紐約和倫敦，可能更難經營。」從一開始，他們選擇與實力雄厚的客戶合作，如Madam Sixty Ate，後來因與Black Sheep合作提升



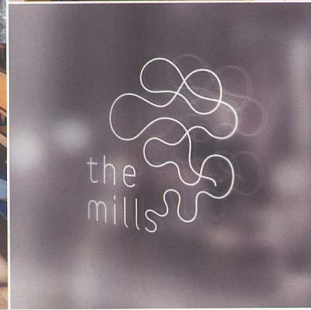
Dautresme oversees some 25 people, a number with which he is happy so he can maintain creative control and be a part of all the projects. These projects which have seen them win awards such as Cannes, D&AD, Spikes Asia and Red Dot. Their expertise runs the gamut of strategy, identity and packaging to digital, advertising, social and interiors. They are also branching out with their own bath-related product line and lighting line. When I joke if there's anything he won't do he replies, "you can't stop [creating]! There's no limit."

Substance has no doubt been fueled by Dautresme's passion and at eight years old they are only just starting to make a profit. "We were kind of outsiders here," he says, "there are not many competitors; if we had done this in New York or London it would have been much harder." From the beginning, they worked with strong clients such as Madam Sixty Ate and gained visibility working with Black Sheep. Today they are working with the daughter of the head of the Hong Kong property heavyweight, The Nan

Fung Group on a one-of-a-kind venture, The Mills, that celebrates Hong Kong's history in textiles and Nan Fung's part in heritage.

Dautresme doesn't have a favourite project per se but he does admit, "it's obviously more rewarding when a client gives you space to work". For this reason, he loved working on The Fleming hotel, because it was "a blank canvas". They used all their expertise on the project from branding to interiors, conjuring up a genuine sense of nostalgia for Hong Kong with their Star Ferry inspired nautical theme which is evident throughout the building and its details.

A Work of Substance appears to be a direct reflection of a man whose life has intersected with art, architecture, advertising, history and travel, and has given him the ability to adapt, all of which he applies to projects. "I think design is finding an answer to a problem. It's like solving an equation in a way." He explains, "The ability to craft or the ability to add comes with a certain level of experience."



了知名度，現時他們正與香港地產界翹楚南豐集團的主席女兒合作，打造一個獨一無二的項目—南豐紗廠，以回顧香港紡織業的歷史，以及南豐在這段光輝歲月所扮演的角色。

Dautresme並沒有有一個特別喜歡的項目，但他表示：「當客戶願意給你創作空間，會特別有成就感。」因此，他喜歡與The Fleming酒店合作，因為那是一塊「白畫布」，Dautresme在這項目上可以用上所有專業知識，由品牌推廣至室內設計，以天星小輪作靈感，從酒店的大樓及細節之中，帶出香港懷舊之情。

事實上，A Work of Substance代表了Dautresme的人生，一趟由藝術、建築、廣告、歷史和旅遊等元素交織起來的經歷，品牌同時讓他鍛煉出強大的適應力。他解釋：「設計就是解決問題，就像解答一條方程式，增加與減少可從經驗判斷。」