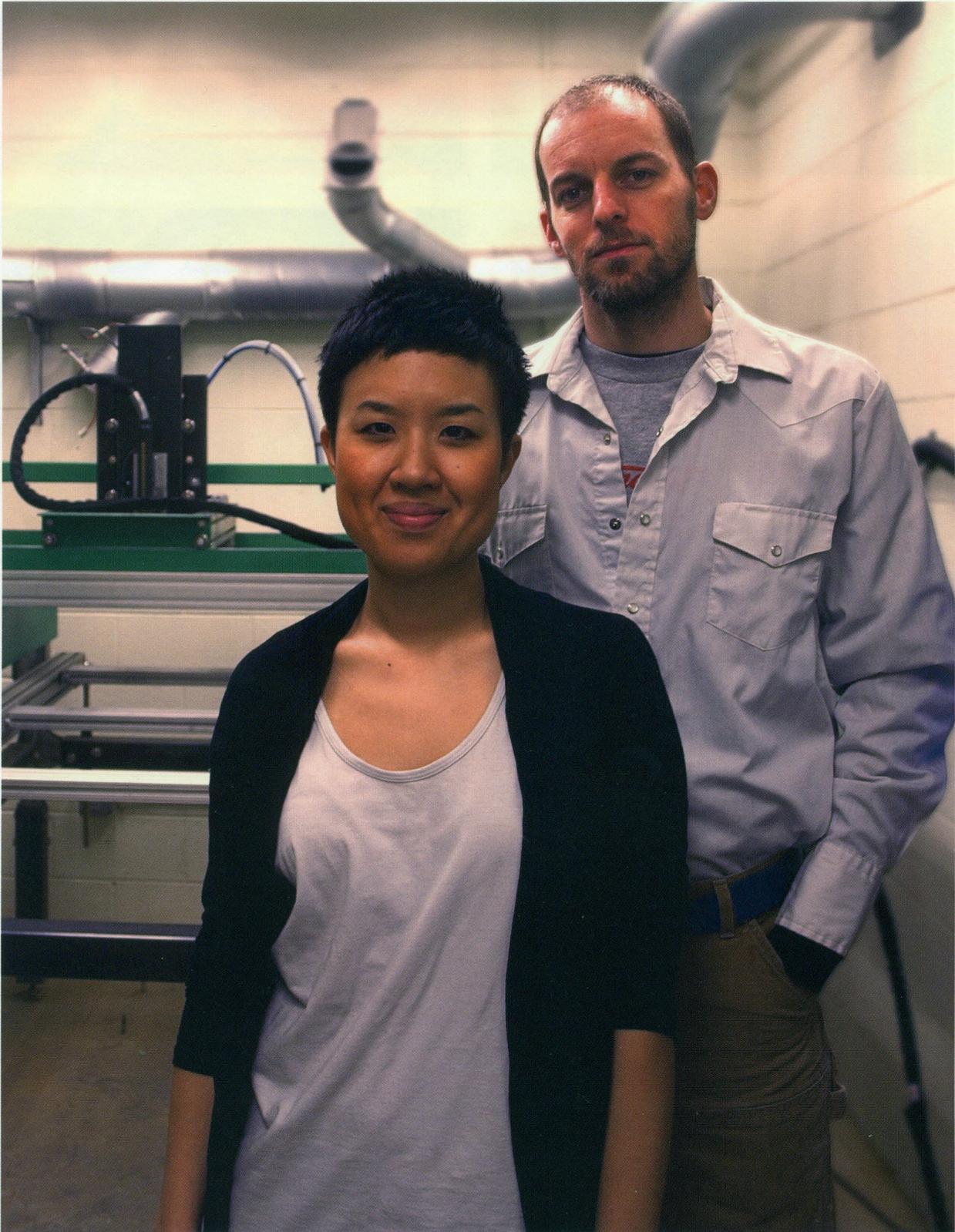


design

Studiomake

The design studio Studiomake in Thailand is run by American designer David Schafer and Thai designer Im Sarasalin Schafer. Here's what they have to say about their huge design studio and how they met.

Editor. Anna Choi
Images courtesy. Studiomake





Q. Could you please tell us a bit about Studiomake?

Studiomake is an interdisciplinary design studio—a team of architects, designers, fabricators, and creative wizards working in the realm of architecture, interior, furniture and object design. We are inspired by tradition, technology, and constant questioning. We work at varying scales—small, medium, and large—in order to pull connections between different crafts.

Q. You are known for producing architecture, interior, furniture, and object design. Which of these would you consider to be your specialty?

We're working on a few different projects right now. We're building a home/studio/workshop for ourselves. We designed this building when we first moved to Thailand two years ago, and now we are building it ourselves. It is a work in progress! It's been such an exciting challenge to see this very personal dream finally materialize. We just wrapped up a very small seafood restaurant in Bangkok, using simple elements like wood, terrazzo, and rope to create an intimate dining space. We designed a 3-story, 1500-square meter steel building with art galleries, a library, and offices for Rangsit University, which is currently under construction. We're also designing a shipping container project on the same university campus that allows us to understand factory fabrication. We're still constantly producing ceramic products, mostly tableware and decorative pieces, which has been a great tool for working with very skilled artisans in this area.

Q. Could you tell us a bit about yourselves and how you work together?

David and I both studied architecture in the US. That is where we met and began making things together, mostly furniture and architecture projects for school. Studiomake emerged naturally out of this collaboration, and we gave our collaboration a name Studiomake to describe an evolving team of people that we would work with in our practice. Whether it's contractors, craftsmen, technicians, engineers, designers, or artists, Studiomake is about people getting together and making things. It's the spirit of teamwork, communication and sharing that drives our practice. After we became licensed architects, David and I went to graduate school at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. David practiced metalsmithing, and I practiced ceramics. Cranbrook really gave us the time and space to explore material, craft, and detail at a scale and pace that is uncommon for architects. As an architect, you may spend a year conceptualizing, modeling, and drawing a building, which is then built by someone else. At Cranbrook, we conceptualized and made things simultaneously. It was such a nice change of pace.

Q. How is it possible for you to approach various different areas of design?

As architects, we gravitate towards issues of material, detail, and construction. So it was only natural that from designing buildings, we began to look at interior spaces, then furniture, then finally, small objects that belong on or within furniture. And now, two years after graduating from Cranbrook, we are in Bangkok designing and building architecture. It is all very related the big and the small. Some ideas are best explored as

architecture, and some ideas are best explored as ceramic tableware. For instance, we have a line of ceramic tableware called Flawed in which the slip-cast pieces are left with their production flaws. It is the flaw that adds beauty and character to the piece. I suppose this is also an idea that can be explored in a building, but of course, with a lot more risk! So ceramic tableware was the perfect tool for us to talk about mass production, perfection vs. imperfection, and flaws turning into strengths. It made sense to explore these issues with something small, not an entire building.

Q. What are the benefits from having all of these strings to your bow?

Being interdisciplinary really keeps us inspired as designers. We may discover a technique in furniture production and want to use it in the structural detail of a building. Because we work on so many different kinds of projects, we are able to meet such interesting people, all of whom take great pride in their craft. From gold painters to bricklayers to engineers, we've been lucky to develop creative relationships and make things with them. At the end of the day, it's all connected. Whether you are making a table or a building, you work through problems with inspiration through material, craftsmanship, and performance.

Q. Are there any drawbacks?

I have to say, there are none! It's all very good for the curious mind.

Q. How do you get your inspiration from?

We are very inspired by tradition and technology. We like the mix of the two. We read a lot of books, but we also go driving around town with our eyes open. Moving to Thailand has really made us alert, aware, and inspired in such a fresh way. For David, of course, much of it is new. For me, returning home after 10 years, I am given a chance to see things that I thought I understood, but now hold new meaning for me. We see such inspired improvisation in this country- People here are able to adapt to anything. As designers, we are the opposite, because we are planners. We plan, and re-plan, arrange, and re-arrange until we get it right. Walking down a Bangkok street, you will see much more organic, unplanned growth. So it is this marriage of quickly made things and carefully planned things that really inspires us.

Q. What kind of design philosophy does Studiomake have?

Studiomake likes to experiment and explore. We're not content with doing things that are expected, and because of that, we like to challenge the way things are made. Our curiosity drives us to question the traditional ways of making things. Sometimes we discover that there is a beautiful reason for doing things a certain way (like traditional Thai houses, made entirely of wood, for instance), and sometimes we discover that the reason is not as compelling. If we are not convinced by the line of reason, we challenge the standard. Our home and studio, for example, is made entirely of steel and other lightweight materials. It is this way because we expect it to grow, change, and mutate over the years like a reflection of our own selves, I guess. So it is built with these materials and details because it will grow and develop Walls will be taken apart, cladding materials will change, etc. To build this house using normal contemporary Thai construction, heavy concrete and

brick-- would not make sense. So when we first conceptualized this building, everyone told us we were crazy to expect a house to change. 'A house is a permanent structure!' they told us, 'It should be strong, solid, without needing any maintenance!' This has somehow become the norm in Thailand, and as the climate is changing, people are realizing that perhaps this is not the smartest way to build buildings. I suppose what I am trying to say is that we always begin a project very open-minded, but also with a sense of suspicion. The questions we ask really shape the things we make.

Q. Which project springs to mind as a typical Studiomake project?

I'd like to talk about Dude Cigar Bar. It was our first project when we began working in Bangkok in 2010. Dude Cigar Bar maintains an uneasy relationship with its neighbors. It's located next door to a busy Au Bon Pain and is meters away from a brightly lit pharmacy, so there is plenty of context worth ignoring. In a very public, somewhat unlikely location, we sought to create the exclusive feel of a speakeasy without being exclusionary. The front brick wall attempts to balance this task by presenting an imposing solid front, however it features a surface treatment that begs for closer inspection. Select bricks rotate in plan to allow a peak inside; a humidor is revealed, and glimpses of dark teak, hound's tooth cloth and black leather start to reveal the nature of the place. The name refers not only to the character of its clientele but is also a play on the Thai word *duut*, which means to suck on an object, and

here we are specifically talking about cigars. Once the brick wall draws you over and invites you around the corner, you are presented with a direct view to the humidor. Come on in and check out the Habanos. Inside the manly materials abound, wrinkle black powder coated steel brackets affix the shelves to the wall, support the long bench, and form the base of the small tables. The Dude logo is repeated in furniture and hardware, small details throughout your visual experience of the space.

Q. What have you got planned for the future?

We're moving into our new studio and workshop this May, which will be very, very exciting. We've been without our wood, metal, and ceramic tools for almost two years! The reunion will feel very good, and we plan to take a nice break from client work, close our doors for a couple of weeks, and just have fun in the workshop the entire Studiomake team. As for more long-term goals, we'd like to be able to initiate more projects. I think the design profession is traditionally a service industry, in the sense that clients approach designers for a specific task, and the designer's role is limited. But this working model is changing, and designers should be responsible for more than just the end product. We can be the initiator of ideas and projects because we have the tools and connections to make things happen.

www.studiomake.com



Five Easy Pieces / 2009



Ornament and Crime - Rotary Club / 2011



Ornament and Crime - Rotary Club / 2011



Ornament and Crime - Bowl Deep / ongoing



Dude Cigar Bar / 2010 / ©Nantiya Bussabong



Sumi Sea / 2011 / ©Nantiya Bussabong



Sumi Sea / 2011 / ©Nantiya Bussabong