

The world is your oyster

Drawing on a whole wide world of influences, Casey Chua has created a multi-cultural salon, Casey Inc in Singapore. **Report by Tracy Johnson**

Casey Chua loves to travel the world, catching up on the hairdressing scene and checking out the latest salons. So when he recently came to move the location of his Singapore salon, he seized the opportunity to combine all he'd seen on his travels with the creation of his ideal hairdressing and beauty salon.

"I knew exactly what I wanted – somewhere cosy but bright, and with a warm atmosphere and plenty of working space," he says. "Somewhere clients would be comfortable without being intimidated."

The result – Casey Inc Hair & Beauty – is a tremendous mix of natural materials: in this salon, wood, slate and marble are adorned with rich, colourful rugs, sofas and fabulous tropical plants. The salon itself is large and light and carries a distinct air of professionalism. With split levels, divisions and the thematic use of curves, this salon is a true celebration of design. But when it comes to attributing influences, Chua is non-committal.

"I wasn't influenced in the design by one particular place I'd worked in, but simply a mix of workplaces and areas I'd visited," he says. "New York inspired me, and I go to London twice a year to see what's happening there. And when in Europe, I try to make sure I visit Paris and maybe Germany or Italy." Chua's travels also taught him what to avoid. "I didn't want the salon to be too high-tech, like some I'd seen," he explains. "It's important to achieve a look that won't date too quickly."

So Chua also drew on his prior experience as a salon owner – Casey Inc Hair & Beauty had been situated in a hotel for eight years before moving to the present location in an exclusive shopping mall. "It took one-and-a-half years to find the perfect situation," he explains, "somewhere not too public, but convenient and with selective shops. These premises were very basic, with a cement floor and bare walls." But over five weeks the building was renovated, including major rewiring (to add more voltage) and an extra drain outlet to prevent the common problem of blockages.

Chua admits that he was anxious about the move at times. "I was slightly apprehensive because working within the hotel had provided

a back-up of clients," he recalls, "and there was a high degree of privacy, which is important for us because a number of our clients are diplomats and royalty. But on the other hand, this was a chance to learn from the past and eradicate all the minor inconveniences we had in the old salon. I changed the entry area, and created the stock cupboards and mixing desk we'd always missed having."

With so much at stake, Chua called in designer Domus Mea, whom he praises for "creativity and ability to work from the hairdresser's point of view". The first problem the pair addressed was the lack of windows in the new salon, making the lighting and colour scheme major priorities. "The ceiling was kept simple and painted an off-white colour to keep the salon bright," explains Chua. "The interior walls are also light – lime-stained with orchid-beige skirting."

Indeed, the lime-stain was perfect for Chua's needs as it doesn't disguise the natural wood, but results in an exceptionally fresh finish which is easy to maintain and which could be used throughout the salon – on the walls, dividers and styling stations. "It's only in the waiting area that the tone changes slightly," continues Chua. "The walls are rag-rolled in warm beiges and creams to create a welcoming effect."

When it came to the lighting there were several factors to consider. "As well as compensating for the lack of natural light," says Chua, "it's important to remember that Asian hair is basically black, so the lighting needs to be exceptional. But at the same time I didn't want a harsh white light – it was important to me to have a soothing atmosphere."

"Finally, halogen bulbs were combined with what we call in Singapore a daylight-energy light ▶

"They are consistent in their work and have always managed to update my look for the last 12 years. The salon is busy but they maintain a friendly mood"

Lilian Aeriola, 35, airline co-ordinator



PROFILE

Casey Chua, 38, hadn't always wanted to be a hairdresser, yet perhaps due to the influence of his hairdresser mother, he began his training in London at the age of 18. Vidal Sassoon, Jingles and Robert Fielding all served to build up his skills, and Chua subsequently lived and worked in London for nine-and-a-half years.

Working spells in Germany and Paris ensued, before Chua finally returned to Singapore to open his own hair and beauty salon, Casey Inc Hair & Beauty. Formerly situated in a hotel, Casey Inc is now located in an exclusive shopping mall.



HOW TO ACHIEVE THE LOOK

Trolleys, washbasins, cutting chairs, shampoo, chairs – all from
Khai Hair & Beauty Equipment. Tel: 00 65 4824781
Hairdryers – **Welonda. Tel: 00 65 2842255**
Roller Ball – **NCM (Takara Belmont). Tel: 00 65 2744444**

“Casey is very creative and professional in his work. He is also a very good colourist and always has good ideas. The salon is efficient and comfortable.”
Laura Huang, 26, lawyer



FACT FILE

Name – Casey Inc Hair & Beauty

Address – 390 Orchard Road, Palais Renaissance #03-01, Singapore 0923

Size – 2,200sq ft

Clientèle – 55% local, 45% expatriate, ranging from working girls, directors' wives, diplomats and royalty

Stylists – ten

Positions – 20 styling units, three make-up chairs

Budget – S\$250,000

Finance – self-financing

Design – Domus Mea

Furniture – assorted pieces from around the world

Features – marble, wooden and slate flooring. Split-level, dual-function reception desk



– in Britain that's a U-shaped fluorescent tube," he says. "It gives off a warm tone, rather than a harsh white light. We've used these throughout the salon to give an even distribution without creating shadows."

A further challenge presented by the refurbishment was how to divide the 2,200sq ft into separate areas – including make-up and beauty rooms, as well as work stations and waiting areas – while keeping the salon spacious and open. It was decided that dividers should be used to separate parts of the salon, creating privacy and yet maintaining the fluidity necessary in a busy salon.

In retrospect, the dividers proved a felicitous choice. Their curved form not only softens the lines of the salon, but their marbled appearance creates a pleasing aesthetic. In the larger styling area, dividers are used to separate the studio from the rest of salon and create privacy around the two central styling stations.

With 20 styling stations in total, Chua knew the layout would be important if he was to avoid feelings of both tedium and intimidation. As a result, there are two separate studios – one with 14 and another with six stations. Each styling station has a bevelled mirror set in a lime-stain wooden frame, a stone table top and lime-stain wooden base. The black leather-look hydraulic cutting chairs bear the influence of yet another country – they are Japanese.

The reclining backwash chairs also come from Japan, their black colour contrasting sharply with the white banks set in a lime-stain wood surround. The backwashes are separated from the make-up area by a wonderful oriental glass and wood divider.

One of the most distinctive aspects of this intriguing salon is the flooring, which changes throughout the salon, serving to alter the atmosphere slightly. In the backwash area, vinyl tiles were chosen for practicality, whereas marble brings a distinguished tone to the cutting area.

The split-level reception and waiting area, meanwhile, is a magnificent combination of timber, parquet floor and slate tiles.

The reception area is Chua's favourite part of the salon. "It was something I wanted to change in my last salon," he says. So this time around he grabbed the chance to create something truly stunning. Entering the salon through the double glass-fronted doors, clients arrive at a splendid circular reception desk, where light polished wood is complemented by vases of impossibly bright flowers, instantly creating an uplifting tone. The desk is Chua's pride and joy; built on a split level, it is also divided in function – one side for taking appointments and the other side for the cashier.

Behind the desk, a Grecian bust presides over product displays housed in a wooden and glass cabinet. In the adjacent waiting area, a curved sofa, upholstered in a rich, red pattern, acts to continue the circular theme of the salon, softening the harsh lines and creating soothing ambience. A painting of an Oriental lady brightens the opposite wall and, nearby, two wooden chairs boast the same rich upholstery. The overall effect is a rare combination of high class and comfort, and the mix of cultural influences is perfect for a clientèle comprising half locals and half expatriates.

Now that he has created his perfect salon, Chua plans to expand. "I want to open more salons in this region," he says. "But I won't shut my eyes to the rest of the world – I'll still visit other countries and look out for ideas." ■

FLOORPLAN

