

# JIANG QIONG ER ON SHANG XIA

SHANG XIA'S DESIGNER, CEO, AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR, JIANG QIONG ER, TALKS TO US ABOUT THE MISSION SHE CALLS "THE SHANG XIA PROJECT" OR "THE SHANG XIA HOUSE." UNDER THE AEGIS OF HERMÈS, THE PROJECT USES CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES AND AESTHETICS TO REVIVE THE AGE-OLD CHINESE ART DE VIVRE AND REINVENT TRADITIONAL CRAFTS THAT HAVE BEEN NEGLECTED OVER THE COUNTRY'S RECENT HISTORY. IT'S A BIG IDEA PACKED INTO TWO SMALL WORDS: SHANG XIA, A CHINESE PROVERB ABOUT BRINGING THE PAST AND TRADITION INTO THE FUTURE THROUGH DIALOGUE, BALANCE, AND HARMONY BETWEEN SEEMINGLY OPPOSED ELEMENTS.



QIONG ER

**YOU'RE A PAINTER WITH ARTWORKS EXHIBITED IN MUSEUMS. AND SINCE 2010 YOU'VE SERVED AS DESIGNER, CEO, AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF SHANG XIA. HOW DO YOU MANAGE ALL OF YOUR CREATIVE COMMITMENTS?** I think it's the inspiration that comes from life that continually feeds creativity. Pretty soon we'll start seeing similarities between the different art forms used in the Shang Xia collection. I think being an artist, designer, creative director, and even Shang Xia manager demand the same management skills and ability to look ahead to the future. The essence of the creative dynamic always comes from the love of life, of people, and the passion that drive me.

**AT THE 2012 LUXURY SUMMIT, "GOLD IN THE HANDS: THE BRIGHT FUTURE OF THE LUXURY SECTOR", WHERE YOU WERE INVITED TO SPEAK (EDITOR'S NOTE: THE CREATIVE DIRECTOR COULD NOT ATTEND DUE TO HER PREGNANCY), WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE SAID ABOUT EMERGING BRANDS AND NEW LUXURY MARKETS? YOU OFTEN TALK ABOUT THE "SHANG XIA PROJECT"... YOU DON'T REFER TO IT AS A BRAND, EVEN THOUGH SHANG XIA IS OWNED BY THE HERMÈS GROUP... SAYING THE SHANG XIA "PROJECT" OR "HOUSE" INSTEAD OF "BRAND" EXPRESSES OUR CORE VALUES MORE EFFECTIVELY: IT'S ABOUT EMOTIONAL TIME. A CHINESE PROVERB SAYS IT'S THE TIME WHEN WE PLACE OUR EMOTIONS INTO OBJECTS. AND AN OBJECT INVESTED WITH THIS EMOTION WILL BE ALL THE MORE PRECIOUS AND FIRMLY ROOTED IN TIME. FOLLOWING THIS PROVERB, THE SHANG XIA HOUSE IS DRIVING A RENAISSANCE OF QUALITY AND CHINESE ART DE VIVRE AS HANDED DOWN THROUGH AN AGE-OLD HERITAGE OF ANCESTRAL CRAFTS. OUR GOAL IS REINVENTION THROUGH CREATION, INNOVATION, AND CONTEMPORARY DETAIL. "SHANG" MEANS ABOVE AND "XIA" MEANS BELOW. AND TOGETHER THEY REFER TO ANOTHER CHINESE PROVERB: SHANG XIA, OR BRINGING THE PAST AND TRADITION INTO THE FUTURE. IT INCLUDES TIME, SPACE, LIFE, HISTORY, AND ENCOURAGES DIALOGUE, BALANCE, AND HARMONY BETWEEN SEEMINGLY OPPOSED ELEMENTS LIKE THE PAST AND THE FUTURE, THE TRADITIONAL AND THE CONTEMPORARY...**

**WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION OF TRADITIONAL CRAFTSMANSHIP IN CHINA?** Today, Chinese artisans, who are quite old for the most part, generally produce beautiful objects that are traditional and decorative. But protecting these crafts in today's world also means instilling them with new functions and new aesthetics in line with our daily lives. This is our mission: to reinvent these crafts. So a new market for is springing up among young people who are increasingly drawn to these crafts as they learn more about them. It's a project that carries a strong cultural value. *d'une valeur culturelle très forte.*

**VIEWERS OF THE SHANG XIA WEBSITE ARE ALSO ENCOURAGED TO CONTACT YOU TO TALK ABOUT CHINESE CRAFTS. YOU'RE CONSTANTLY ON THE HUNT FOR NEW ARTISANS...** Though it's very Chinese, the project isn't limited to China. But in terms of Chinese culture: some crafts have been lost or have declined dramatically since the Cultural Revolution. However, some of them survived in nearby countries like India and Nepal, where hand weaving is still alive, or even in Japan, where there is a wealth of techniques for using enamel.

**IN RECENT YEARS, FRANCE HAS SEEN A MAJOR CAMPAIGN LED BY LUXURY PROFESSIONALS, ARTISANS, AND THE GOVERNMENT TO SAVE AND PROMOTE TRADITIONAL CRAFTS. IS THERE A SIMILAR EFFORT IN CHINA?** That brings us back to the question of emerging economies and the logic of development in general. With the Chinese economic boom over the past thirty years, a Chinese cultural renaissance will now be on the agenda for the next thirty years. For 3 or 5 years now, we've seen some signs of a second phase of development that's closely tied to culture: a desire for enjoyment, refinement, comfort, poetry, and quality. A growing number of Chinese now want to reconnect with their cultural roots. The Chinese government has noted this trend and a few promising initiatives have appeared.

**WHAT IS THE DESIGNER-ARTISAN COLLABORATION PROCESS LIKE?** Since the important thing is not to create an individual item, but a small series in order to generate more visibility for artisanal crafts, the designers have to commit to a rather long procedure: finding artisans, learning and understanding their work before trying to update it through design. So designers and artisans have to work together. Take a porcelain tea set, for example, which requires high temperatures and is hard to produce: to get a white color with hints of jade, it has to be wrapped in woven bamboo – a totally new application for bamboo. And it's a real challenge for an artisan because the bamboo has to cover a curved surface. Two or three years, or more in some cases, are needed to produce each item.

**WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU?** I'm opening a store in Beijing in 2012, then another in Paris later on. Last year we opened a temporary Shang Xia house where people could catch a glimpse of Chinese art de vivre by sitting in a tea house or an incense room. Afterwards, the natural materials and stones used to build the spaces were then reused to build a school. So materials originally intended for temporary use ended up building something that will last! That's the kind of thing we would like to do again. *INTERVIEW BY STÉPHANIE BUI*

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