

TimeOut
Hong Kong

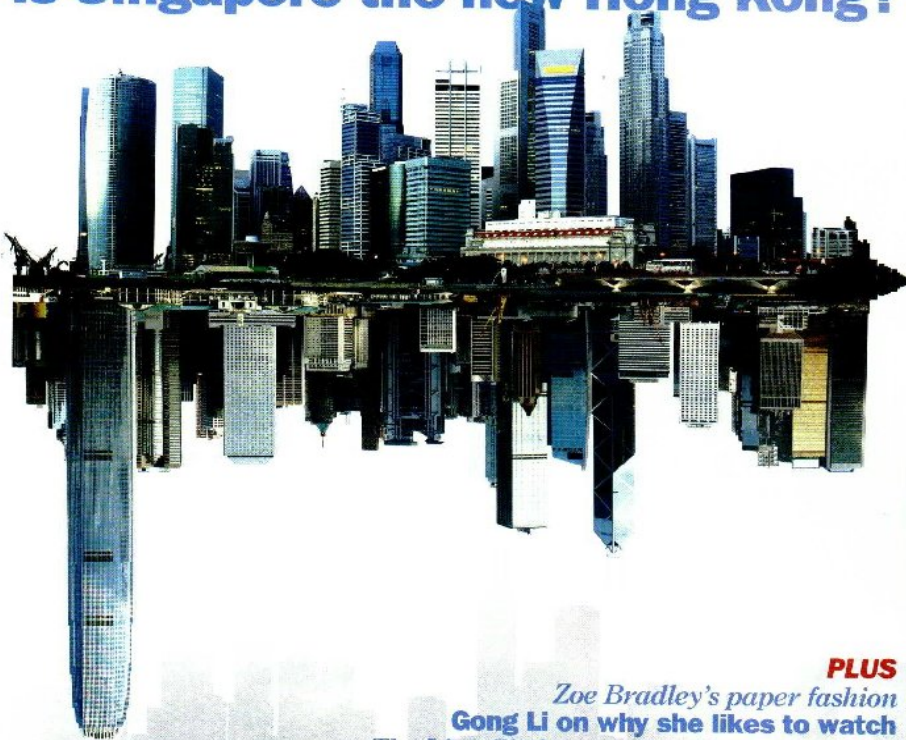
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We ♥ functional shoes

Shopping

Twinkle toes

First came the UGG, then the Croc, and now comes Five Fingers. It seems fuggliness has an insatiable ambition to conquer the footwear industry. But similar to its predecessor, the Five Fingers has comfort in mind, and also aims to let you run barefoot (or at least as close as possible) and reap the benefits of letting your mid-foot tendons absorb the shock, thus saving your hip and knees. These awkward-looking shoes can count Matthew McConaughey as a fan. Not entirely uncool, then. *Kawai Wong*

From \$890, Escapade Sports, 1/F, Yee Hing Bldg, 19 Leighton Rd, Causeway Bay, 2891 1855.



Made in Hong Kong Kenny Wong of Kennyswork

The toy designer tells **Kawai Wong** about going solo, and being inspired by a cute little girl called Molly

After graduating from an advertising course at Caritas Bianchi College of Careers, Kenny Wong spent 20 years working as a visualiser and an illustrator for various advertising agencies, before moving on to brand-illustrate information graphics for the news programme at ATV. He then started the toy studio Brotherswork with his ex-colleagues, making a set of award-winning astronaut action figures. He now owns his personal studio, Kennyswork, which has been commissioned by Disney to give Mickey Mouse a facelift. Kennyswork's star toy, Molly the Painter, has been used in collaboration with such established names as Tokidoki and Medicom.

So you are in your forties? You most certainly don't look it. [Laughs] Most of my designer friends look young for their age. Maybe having a childish interest in toys beats any anti-ageing serum.

What was the 'light bulb moment' to start you up on designing toys?

You'd think that advertising agencies are creative havens. But in fact there were no margins for creativity. At most I was a robot for clients who gave me explicit instructions of how they wanted things. In 2000, I visited a toy exhibition with my colleagues and friends Winson and William.



Painter, sculpter Kenny in his studio and Molly (right)

The exhibition, which was called The Gardener, showcased 101 of Michael Lau's figures and dolls. We have always wanted to do something creative, and through this exhibition we became incredibly inspired by Michael's spirit to do things his way. We then set up our studio, Brothersfree, where we would go to after work and make toys at night.

How did you turn into a full-time designer?

At the end of 2000, Winson, William and I had decided that neither our day job nor our own designs benefited from our half-hearted effort. We quit our day jobs and

focussed on Brothersfree.

When did Kennyswork come about?

Brothersfree is still going, but I wanted more creative control. So I set up my own studio where I can truly do things in my own way.

On to Molly. Who is this cute little girl?

Brothersfree designed a lot of hard looking toys for boys. I have been actively searching for inspiration for a girl's toy for years. And then I was at The Peak for a charity event (organised) by UNICEF. I sat across

from one child at a time, and I drew portraits of them and vice versa. I was sitting across from this little girl who must have been three years old. She sat up straight in her seat, held out a pen vertically and closed one eye to measure the dimension of my face. Between me and her, she seemed the more professional one! She had short blonde hair and emerald eyes. And when she drew, her lips puckered. When we finished drawing, I asked what her name was. And at the top of her voice she replied "Molly!" I couldn't shake off the cute little baby look off my mind, so when I got home I drew a draft image of her. Little did I know at the time Molly was the perfect inspiration for a girl's toy.

What would you say to a budding toy designer?

Don't dive into toy design straight away. Anyone can churn out good designs, but success is more than just the look of things. Join a company and work a few years. Firstly, you still need to eat and pay bills for the six to 12 months while working full time on your own project. Secondly, even a small production can cost a considerable amount of cash. Finally, you'll need the connection to help promoting and distributing your toys. I'd recommend joining an advertising company; you will meet people from all walks of life.

Molly Exhibition, Hong Kong Design Gallery, 1/F, HKCEC, 1 Harbour Rd, Wan Chai. Until Sept 30.