

Poetic·design

revealing the tacit aesthetic frameworks in a furniture design practice



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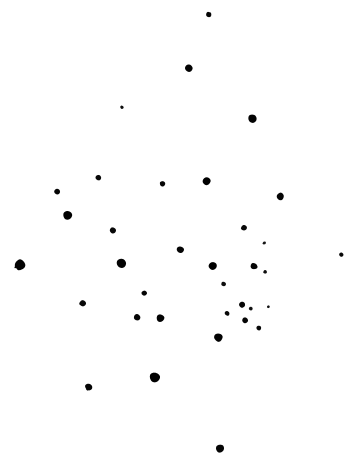
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Abstract

This research is an examination into the aesthetic values of a furniture design practice. In particular, I look at how my Chinese inheritance, my cultural and personal memory, and my assimilated tacit aesthetic values, find agency and expression through practice.

I arrived at this research by being immersed in the actual processes of creative design making. Through hands-on experience and application, I found the expressions and feelings I wanted to communicate. This manifested through a series of practices which included: lighting, material explorations, handcrafting, and my personal stories via varied methods and processes of design. Moreover, I gave myself space and time, critically, for self-reflection.

This manner of thinking about design is derived from my personal background — I am driven by my personal journey towards becoming a more authentic version of myself as a furniture designer. I chose to do this through real discernment and detailed understanding of the aesthetics of material. Through the design of interior objects, materials that possess aesthetic agency provide me with the ability to transcribe a particular value in my work — I call this ‘the poetic’.

The poetic design in my research has two aspects:

- 1) the respect of nature and self in everyday aesthetics and
- 2) design rooted in a Xiuxing, or spiritually informed and embodied making practice.

It is about furniture design. It is about the home. It is about relating emotionally with the materials. It is about telling a story. It is about a journey. The character of design has been transformed into a method that assists me in building the conversation. I hope the journey that I have experienced, filtered through the lens of a poetic design method, can inspire or resonate with other designers or crafters who have similar cultural affiliations.

Coming from a maker's perspective, I see the integration of utilitarianism and aesthetics, representing the ecology of self and the ecology of a maker. Moreover, I aim to break the geometric brick of utilitarian design works, breaking formalities in the process. I actively seek asperity, irregularity, and imperfections within art, craft, and design, inspired in part by Wabi Sabi, the ancient Japanese tradition of slow life.

In my research, I use a series of methods to explore a way of challenging perfection, machine manufacturing, and, ultimately, enjoying the moments of engagement with the materials. Through these tactics, the objective is to build an emotional connection between self and nature and use this design practice to come closer to myself. I experience the physical pleasures in sound, feeling, and movement, and enjoy seeing the irregularities of natural forms that correspond with the human body. The living form takes on its own breath, gaining freedom from the material substances.

Keywords:

Poetic Design, Aesthetics, Material Practice, Furniture Design, Oriental Design, Xiuxing

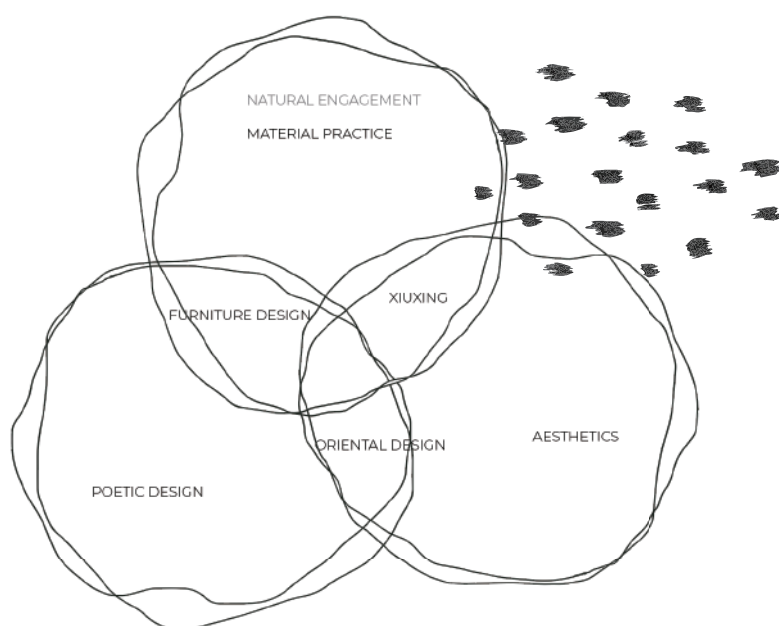


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Background

As a student in Industrial and Interdisciplinary Design at Emily Carr University of Art and Design (ECU) for 6 years, my enthusiasm for design has been completely galvanized. Developing skills and acquiring important knowledge regarding design, during this period, has been extremely fulfilling.

Gradually, I have also discovered and created my own philosophy, which breaks the limitations of art, craft and design: poetic design. My artworks depict the vicissitudes of my inner self. The true purpose of poetic design is to discover the designer within. This also supports a 'healthier lifestyle' (both physical and spiritual) through specific aesthetic languages. For me, the nature of design is pure and simple: each product expresses the designer's bright outlook and their wishes for life. Industrial design can be an expression of the spiritual ethos of its designer, full of emotion and soul.

Chinese traditional design spaces pay attention to *the unity between man and nature*. In the process of continuation and the inheritance of traditions, it is necessary to find valuable and meaningful things from Chinese culture to uphold and illuminate. This is not only the continuation of traditional Chinese forms and symbols, but, more importantly, to convey the spiritual connotations that are drawn from these sources.

—— Natural, poetic, simple, and authentic.



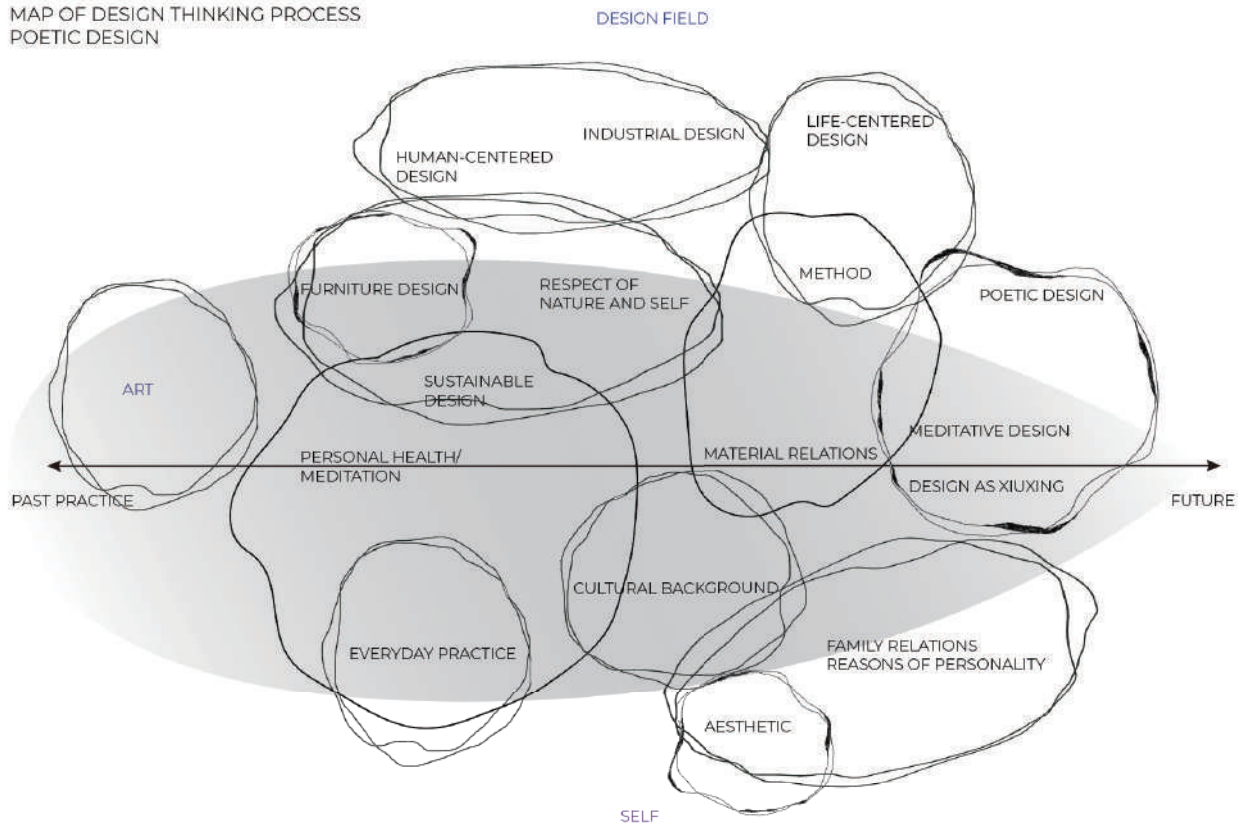
Figure 1.1 Emily Carr University of Art and Design on Granville Island, 2017



Figure 1.2 Emily Carr University of Art and Design at Great Northern Way - INDD Studio, 2017

The Research Question

MAP OF DESIGN THINKING PROCESS
POETIC DESIGN



I began this research with the intention of gaining a deeper understanding into my own practice. I have seen a change in myself and have updated and formed my own design philosophy. The intention of starting this journey was to continue exploring pure intentions initiated from design, keeping away from the disruptions of commercial-led design; to find and try to pass on comfort and a feeling of tranquility in our everyday aesthetics.

"True beauty is not possible devoid of simplicity" (Yanagi, 2013, p.47). Pure and unintentional creation without the explicit purpose of solely making it beautiful is the objective of real aesthetics. The artifact is the cause and condition of the *heart* of the designer and is the carrier of that inner life.

Further, my perspective on design has changed through my experiences as a student and as a designer. Poetic design allows for a new design approach with purer design intentions, using material, forms, and patterns to complete the designer's self transformation, moving from the physical level to the spiritual level, and finding symbiosis in the fields of craft, art and design balance¹. Finding one's higher self in design, establishing cultural self-confidence and aesthetic belief, and expressing it with the material is the core of my thesis project, 'Lanhai.'

As a Chinese furnituredesigner, I have always wanted to accurately represent my background, my story, and my life. I was deeply influenced by my father's Zen Buddhism. Sketching, making, and handcrafting can be a personal meditation because it is a process of self-reflection and entering into a flow-state² while interacting with natural aesthetic in the materials. One can also invoke a poetic sense of self through the presentation of asperity in design, where pleasure that can be found in cracks, textures, and roughness. This is an approach I highlight from Wabi-Sabi. Wabi-Sabi is both a lifestyle and an aesthetic language: the aesthetics of imperfection (Nash, 2022). This means I can see myself doing design in many ways. Imperfections can be embraced, rather than being something to correct. In this approach, I see repetitive, imperfect forms happening on the surfaces of my materials, and mirroring a variety of emotional values. This project began to help me find the balance between my own artistic pursuits, while establishing a nourishing relationship with furniture design.

I started my research journey with a passion for furniture-making. In this fast-paced era, we get less time to focus on the actual self and the development of the artistic self, and the higher self. The idea of poetic design aims to fully express the inner feelings, emotions, and intentional values through the practice of designing in the state of being *without thought* (Fukusawa, 2015). My works reflect the way I look at the world, and, as a Chinese designer, my cultural background has provided me with so much precious knowledge and a rich philosophical foundation. I would like to explore the balancing idea inherent in Oriental culture in my design practices. Not only through the representation of the materiality, but also between the harmony that can exist between the external and internal self.

This research asked the questions :

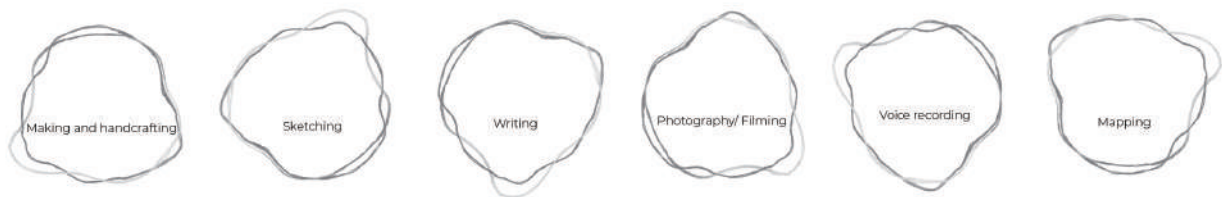
1. What are the critical and essential elements of practice, that clarify and give an authentic identity to my own design values?
2. What role does my culture play in my practice?
3. What roles do my spiritual affiliations play in my practice?

Balance¹ : The balancing idea here is about a stable mental state; not taking bias and taking care of all aspects, refers to a sense of harmonious and beautiful proportion and balance

Flow-state²: Flow is a state of mind in which a person becomes fully immersed in an activity. Positive psychologist Mihály Csikszentmihályi describes flow as a state of complete immersion in an activity. Being immersed can be defined as a state of focus in which a person is completely absorbed and engrossed in their work.

Methodology

This research journey is conducted through a practice-based methodology. I have been using design as a method to visualize spiritual change and self-reflection through physical practices and this is illustrated in the research. I am contemplating my own work and understanding based on the reflection on myself. I conducted my research through practice and through a series of experiments with the design materials. I am using a range of design methods, including making, handcrafting, sketching, writing, photography, filming, voice recording, and mapping.



Methods

Making and Handcrafting: Design through making is aimed at research through design, and the process of hands-on making fosters critical design developments. Moreover, to fully experience the natural harshness in tones in the materials, this comes out through handcrafting repetitive patterns and irregular forms. This connects with spirituality, the growth of the inner self, and phenomenology.

Sketching: Design ideas show up anytime, anywhere, and especially in dreams. The method of putting ideas down on paper is always an experience of an explosion of idea iterations. Sketching is a way to quickly visualize the design model in a 2D version. Then, you adjust the ideas based on how it should be presented.

Writing: Writing down my self-reflections and thoughts about life is a way to evoke poetic expressions. If I have the problem of lacking vocabulary, I try to describe your feelings in your first language, no matter how many words are needed.

Photograph/ filming: A way of documenting the whole journey. The documentation part shows another way of comprehending aesthetics. The composition, colour scheme, and shooting style all affect and inform the presentation of the final work.

Voice recording: A spiritual communication with nature and body movement just through audio recording. When I concentrate on a single sensory experience, it helps me to be more focused on the environment and provoke unique reflection. Every time I listen back to the recording, it provides a new form of understanding and reflection.

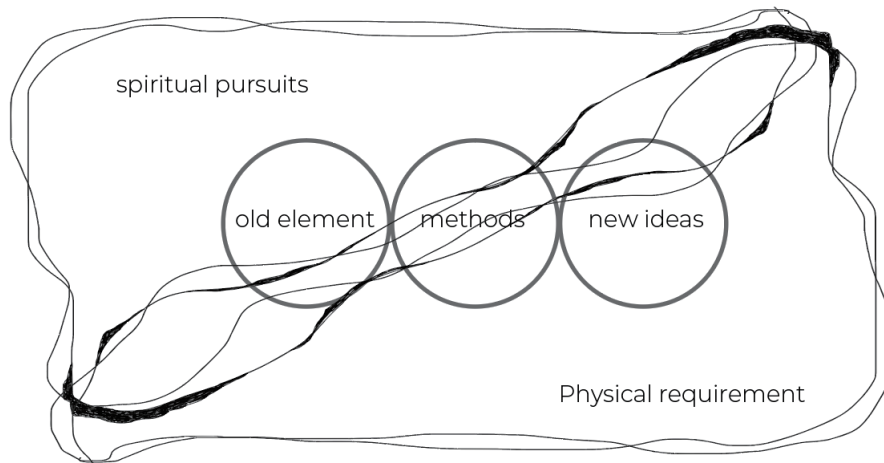
Mapping: A way to organize the research system and see the connections within each field of practice. Seeing the linear and spatial relations of each category.

I wish to explore a visual language for poetic furniture and design in a more ideal spiritual, inspiring presentation. I relish working with physical materials, which has been enhanced through my schooling. Nevertheless, the impulsive passion of having visual communication documenting this journey leads me to use interactive methods to reflect on my research comprehensively.

Chapter 1: My practice as a furniture designer

Understanding my design language

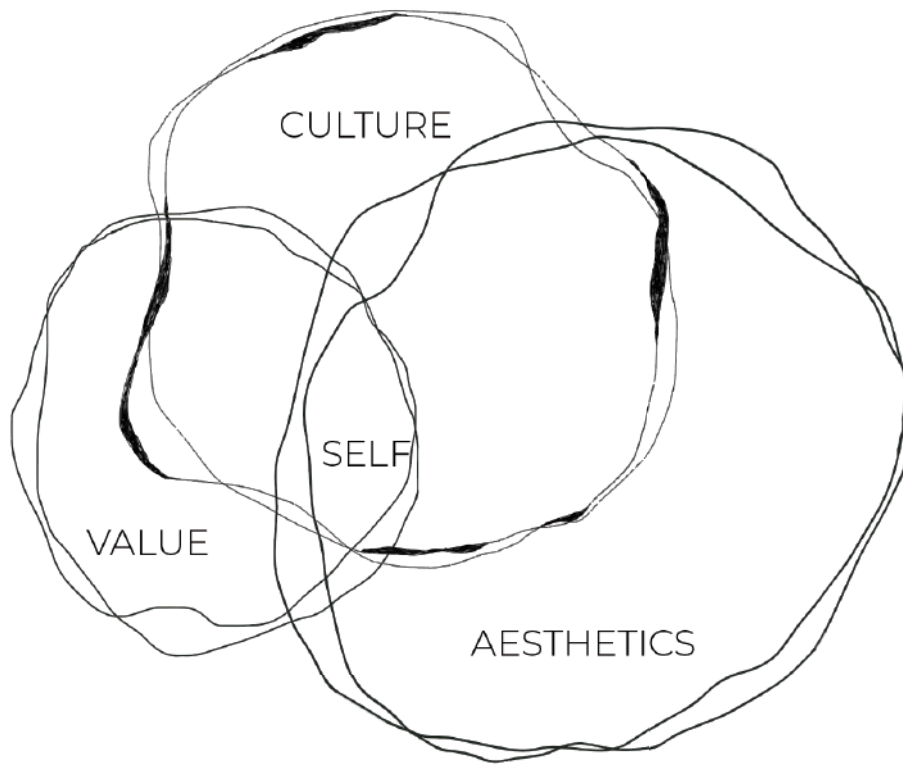
Design is present in every part of culture and society, enabling the interconnection of all of constitutive elements at all levels, reshaping forms of living through material objects (Adriana Ionascu, 2009).



Poetic design offers a lens through which to look at how to design—in addition, it also articulates something higher than life. It not only meets our physical requirements, but it can also additionally provide a vehicle for spiritual pursuits. For designers, the composition of each work is a reflection of ideas rooted in a specific time and place. Creativity entails finding the balance between the old elements, methods, and new ideas. The goal of this investigation is to develop this poetic design approach and find an aesthetic balance, as well as new design concepts across art, craft, and design. A further objective is to create furniture design that aptly combines both artistic pursuits and commercial realities.

Design is not only about designing form, but also exploring the fundamental elements of life, speaking to the relationships between people, the environment, and things. Our surroundings are all designed, but people and the environment can coexist harmoniously. This is where the beauty of consciousness in design emerges.

I value the words of Kenya Hara (2019, p.42), who said "the simple style in the design is not present at the beginning, but a simple style is developed when the craftsmanship has developed to a certain level".



“Thinking needs time, feeling doesn’t need time”
— Naoto Fukasawa 2015.

Design is clearly affected by market demand, yet it is indispensable to pursue a pure purpose with regards to design and let it also enhance self-value and spiritual enrichment. The overemphasis on materialism in our current time is leading people to denigrate or disregard what is actually valuable. The real enjoyable moments for a designer come from their emotional and spiritual responses and engagement with their work, which generates joy, fulfillment, health, and honest expression (Yanagi, 2013). This is similar to the idea of traditional Chinese “WangQi 望气.” To elaborate, one can assert that a piece of land, an object, or an artifact all have their own auras. Additionally, the person who makes the object, and the person who observes the object also have their own auras. These auras influence each other, and the person's aura is reflected on the object (and through it), whereby a nourishing relationship is established and an engaging experience is facilitated. The beauty of time which marks the object is much more beautiful than its original look (Fukasawa & Morrison, 2007). Design is tied to place and personal experience. Design is not limited to its principles. It can also be a receptacle for memories, conveying the personal style of the designer. Further, design represents a distinct moment and set of thoughts and ideas courtesy of the designer.

Discovering the value of the poetic

The word poetry “derives from the ancient word *poiētēs*...[*poiētēs* which has a different meaning from today.] It meant ‘to make’, and was simultaneously understood to mean both the ‘construction of beauty’, and the ‘beauty of construction’” (Rafael, 2018). The beauty of making is to construct a conversation between the maker and the materials. Then this conversation becomes *poiētēs*.

I first became interested in the spiritual engagement with furniture in my undergraduate design project called, *Cloud*. 行雲茶几 (figure 2.1–2.5) In this project, I have experienced the satisfaction of externalizing inner feelings through furniture design and the presentation and curation of the attendant materials. *Cloud* provides a tea-making surface for users to have a spiritual engagement with presence, while visualizing the beauty of water flow through a tea ceremony. The color scheme, material choices and form was inspired by the traditional Chinese Taoism landed in the idea of Yin and Yang (Embajada de la Republica Popular China en Venezuela, n.d.). I found myself constantly attracted to furniture design because of its intimate connection to our daily and personal lives. Subsequently, I decided to continue my design career within the field of furniture design.

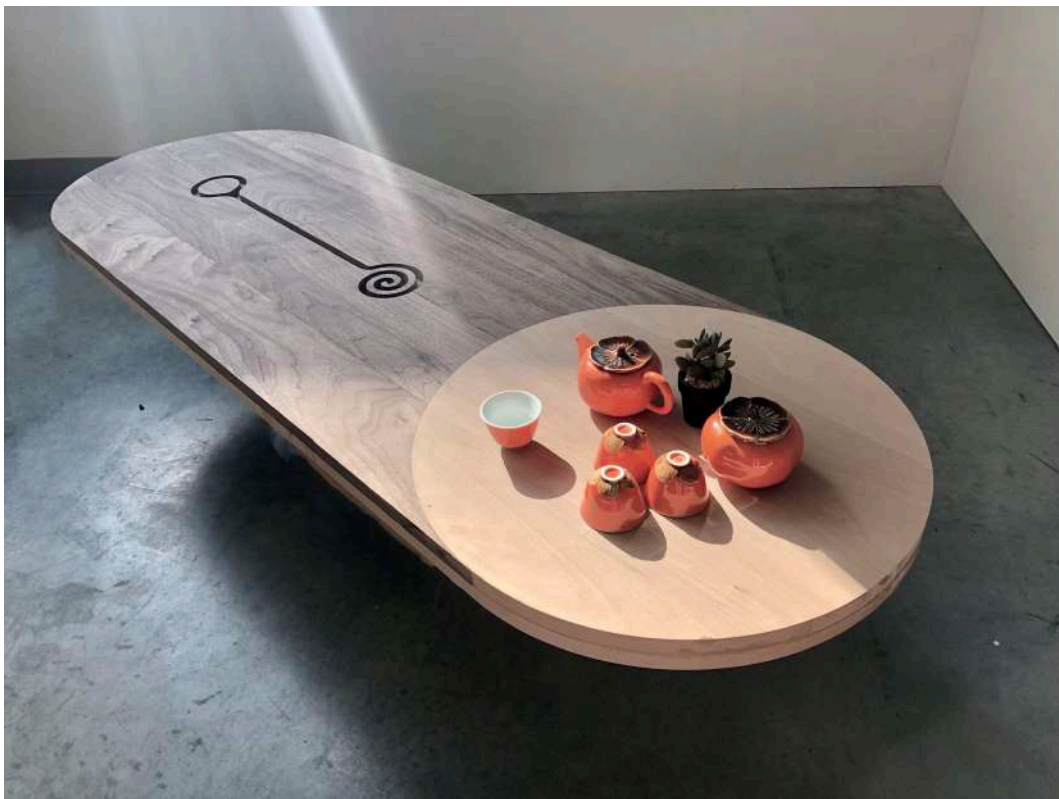


Figure 2.1 *Cloud*. Designed by A. Tian, Undergraduate work, Walnut-Beach-Steel, 2020



Figure 2.2 Operation of table Cloud. Undergraduate work, Shot by A. Tian, Walnut-Beach-Steel, 2020



Figure 2.3 Operation of table Cloud. Undergraduate work, Shot by A. Tian, Walnut-Beach-Steel, 2020



Figure 2.4 Details of table Cloud. Undergraduate work, Shot by A. Tian, Walnut-Beach-Steel, 2020



Figure 2.5 Cloud. Undergraduate work, Designed by A. Tian, Walnut-Beach-Steel, 2020

The exploration of concepts of the nature of existence, time and space is the main driving force of poetic design; expressing one's point of view through the inspiring arrangement of objects and interiors. To some, expressing the sublime in material may seem paradoxical, but I believe that, like Chinese Chan³ 禅, truth can be contained in paradoxes and ambiguities.

I have always enjoyed exploring my design ideas through lighting. Lighting not only shows the mysterious beauty of nature but also contains a rich spiritual world, which accommodates our thoughts and feelings and beautiful yearnings. Lighting up the light also creates a better and better healing environment. I am always curious to look for the balance between natural and artificial in light and shadow, and through it seek a poetic expression (figure 3.1–3.5).

Furniture design for me is not limited to tables, chairs or cabinets. It's about the environment designed for people to enjoy personal space, design for others, and design for ourselves. It shows what we want to express and how we see the world through our projects and tries to give an insight to the experiencers.

Chinese Chan³ : "literally means 'the practice of reflecting.' ... we use the expression 'the practice of looking deeply'"(Nhat Hanh, 2021)



Figure 3.1 The poetic way of natural combination with lights. By A. Tian, 2021

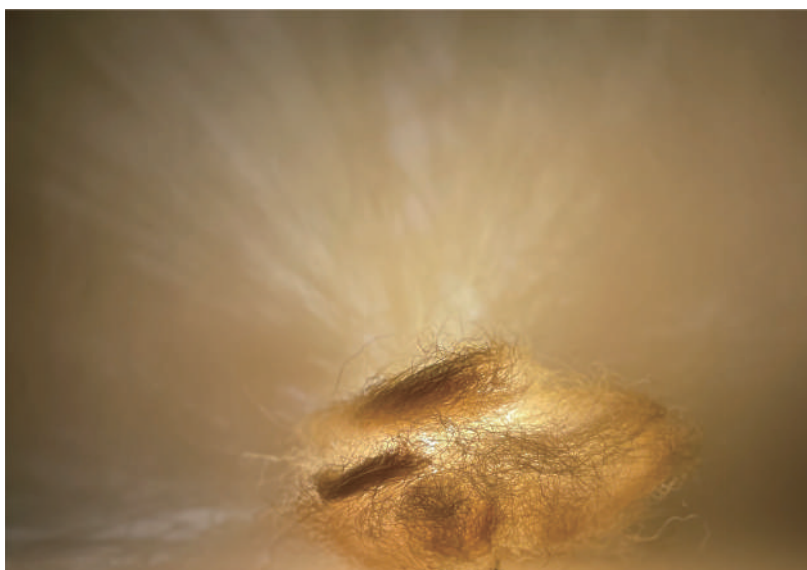


Figure 3.2 The poetic way of natural combination with lights. By A. Tian, 2021



Figure 3.3 The poetic way of natural combination with lights. By A. Tian, 2021

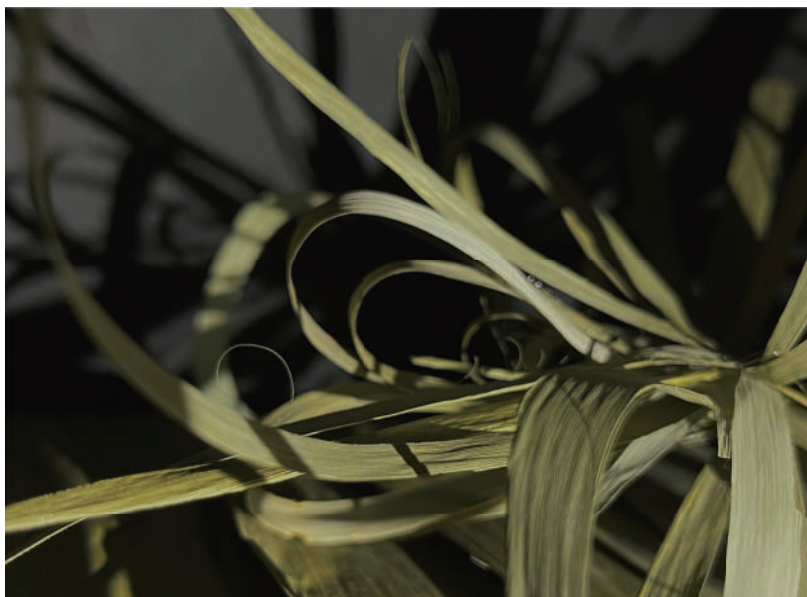


Figure 3.4 The poetic way of natural combination with lights. By A. Tian, 2021



Figure 3.5 A beam of light. Hand crafted by A. Tian, 2020

The role of furniture design in shaping the home environment

Furniture design is intimately close to people's everyday lives. It is possible to build up a suitable living environment and a comfortable resting place with furniture since people are roughly spending around 41 years at their homes (Beetown, 2018). To a large extent, the form, the arrangement, and the style of furniture is like icing on a cake in the material residence of home and enriches the intimate sense of home.

Taking Ming-style furniture as an example (figure 4), the shape, lines and aesthetics of Ming-style furniture are all reflecting the spirit of craftsmen. The aesthetics behind the screen carries the interpretation and expression of Chinese literati temperament, and also contain the spiritual concept of simplicity and elegance. The simple colour and texture, exquisite mortise and tenon technique add a layer of elegance and peacefulness to the environment; According to Zuo (2020), this also has certain significance in the current new Chinese furniture industry.



Figure 4 Zen Chair, padauk, Ming Dynasty 16-17 Century

In this fast-paced era, there are too many things that make us lose sight of the essence and disturb our minds. How do we keep a clear heart and get along with the world. In order to maintain the purity and focus of the heart, many people continue to seek a life that is pure and abandon material desires to achieve a soulful simplicity (Kempton, 2018). What exactly are people pursuing in their life? The Chinese Wise Zhuge Liang said in the "Jie Zi Shu" (128 AD): "you can't clarify your aspirations unless your heart is quiet with few desires; you can't define further goals unless you're free of external interference. (非淡泊无以明志, 非宁静无以致远)"

Designers design using their own cultural and formal language. Traditional idioms are then incorporated and re-imagined in contemporary ways. The Danish designer, Hans Wegner, took inspiration from the Chinese Suzhou chair to create the Wishbone Chair (figure 5). This has become his representative work. The wishbone chair takes inspiration from Ming furniture and re-imagines the back and changes the arch to a "Y" shape (Wegner, n.d.).



Figure 5 Hans J. Wegner, Wishbone chair, solid wood and the hand-woven paper cord seat, 1949

As a furniture designer, I wish to use my own cultural affiliations and ideas as integral to my design, in both formal and a referential way. At the moment when the demand for poetic designs continues to grow. In these times of identity definition, the Poetic design method offers a way to think about the merging of the traditional and the contemporary.

Chapter 2: Poetic design: an articulation – My poetic provenances

“A body of water itself is often seen as a calming and cleansing entity, with an ability to fulfil our senses and provoke emotions recalled from memory” (Ruby, 2015). Poetic design is proposed to awaken people's desire for cultural reality, and at the same time, it can awaken the original emotional expression in people's hearts.

Everyday Aesthetic

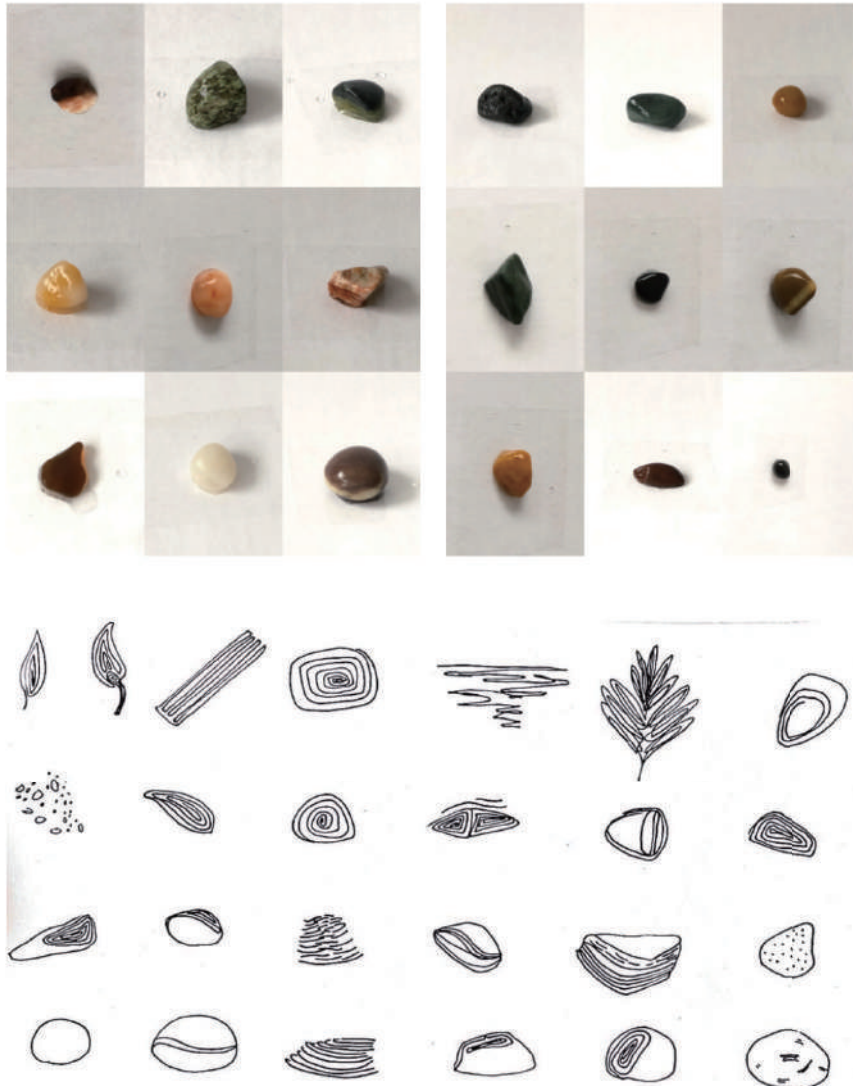


Figure 6 Everyday Aesthetics, discover from the nature and hand draw on paper by A. Tian, 2020

My own ideas of poetic thinking are informed in many ways by my cultural heritage. Part of this is the ways in which aesthetic principles like 'Da Dao Zhi Jian', which find many similarities with the Japanese principles of Wabi-Sabi, and modernist minimalism are integral to my daily life. Wabi Sabi is one way of celebrating the practice of everyday living. In oriental meditation culture, it suggests respecting nature, the principle of respecting reality, advocating a natural, elegant and simple lifestyle, and returning to the original state of aesthetic consciousness. To practice oneself through meditation and epiphany, to provide a kind of casual beauty and a kind of pure values. A wabi-sabi lens can inspire us to embrace soulful simplicity and treasure what we already have.

Wabi Sabi aesthetics suggests a cohesive moment. It is not just about reducing objects in a space. Empty is more deliberately removing some elements that attract people's attention so that people can put their attention in one place, this place is more cohesive, while other places are empty; this allows people to naturally open up their imagination and make up the remaining scenes (Hara, 2019).

There are countless ugly designs in the contemporary era. The main reason for this is that these creations and designs are produced without establishing proper aesthetics (Yanagi, 2013). Therefore, as we create design, the establishment of an authentic aesthetic framework should be the first priority. Aesthetics was born in different historical and geographical backgrounds. Each aesthetic has its own unique charm and reflects different cultural backgrounds. Moreover, everyday aesthetics can fit into and appeal to a great range of cultural backgrounds and touchstones.

To me, in design (and in other realms) relationships are always two-way streets; some are nourishing, some are damaging, and they travel in more than one direction. In building a furniture design project, the trick is to find a nourishing relationship between you as a designer and your project. A healthy relationship should be the object nourishing its user, just like a jade product that becomes shinier through time and people respond to that. This suggests conceptualizing design practices like Yin and Yang relationships, keeping balance but also constantly upgrading and evolving, which leads subsequently to the next chapter: Design as XIUXING.



Figure 7.1 The feeling Shot by A. Tian, 2022



Figure 7.2 The feeling Shot by A. Tian, 2021

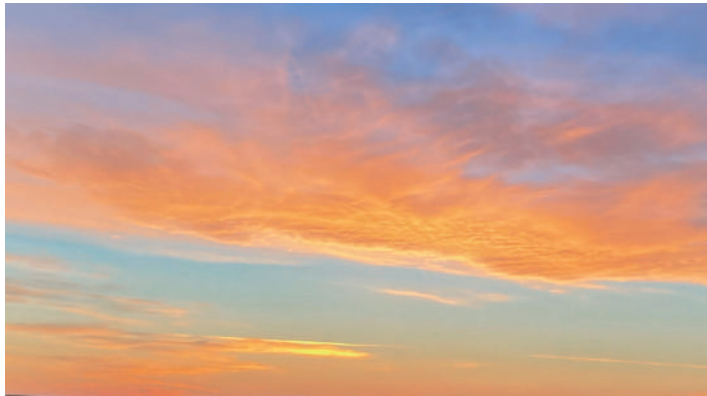


Figure 7.3 The feeling Shot by A. Tian, 2021



Figure 7.4 The feeling Shot by A. Tian, 2021



Figure 7.5 The feeling Shot by A. Tian, 2021

Cultural paradigms – Xiuxing

Life is a process of continuous practice. The word "XIUXING (修行)" comes from Chuang Tsu. The practice of life is the cultivation of the mind. The success of a practice is to have the ability to face all kinds of situations in life with a clear heart. With the integration of Buddhism and Taoism, the meaning of practice has become more abundant. At present, our way of life is rapidly changed by technological products such as artificial intelligence, and the practice in life has evolved into how we face various situations in life with our purest intention. Looking at the profession of a designer from this perspective, the idea and output of every product design is a precious and interesting practice in our lives.

In 2012, architectural designer Yue Meng and others directly put forward the practical concept of "praising life with design and perfecting life with practice". It can be seen that in the past, many designers in the industry have linked design and practice as a parallel connection. Under today's increasingly impetuous society, it has provided a reference for many design practitioners.

A piece of design is actually a reflection of one's personality, and at the same time, the process of each design is also the tempering and polishing of the designers themselves. XIUXING is an inclusive attitude towards beings. For people themselves, it is to achieve reconciliation with themselves and to bring themselves into a state of peace and joy. Therefore, it is necessary for every designer to find their own way of design expressions or in other words, design pursuit. What the person needs to do is to focus, be attentive, explore the engaging moment in each design process, keep themselves with the original intention of the self-purity design, and finally build up their own design concept. Zen is the abbreviation of Dhyana in Sanskrit, which is translated as concentration. The meditation process suggests thinking quietly, to me, it's a self-reflecting process that requires a deeper connection of one's spirit and the universe. This involves a state of mind, which requires one's own experience and comprehension. (Zhang, Xiao & Li, n.d.)

Everyday life is XIUXING—it offers me the understanding of my own growth as a designer—and my development from a practiced skill to a technical capacity, to finally a more authentic way of integrating my personhood into my design in an intentional and conscious way. It has been very interesting to see the hidden connections emerging through this journey.

修
行

壬寅年

Figure 8 Chinese calligraphy of XIUXING, hand wrote by A. Tian, 2022

My personal Manifesto: a poetic approach

The visual presentation level of design is responsible for the transmission of beauty and meaning. For a specific type of design, drawing inspiration from poetic expression, the creation of forms for design should be one of the very interesting creative methods. For design works to convey poetic flavour,

I think there should be three cores:

1. Unique meaning creation (thus stimulating and touching people's emotions and hearts)
2. Beautiful formal language and (beyond daily) highly refined expressions.
3. Poetic design respects asperity, irregularity, and imperfections that happen during the process.



Figure 9 Poetic Approach, hand carved by A. Tian, 2020

I yearn for a poetic life, where I can have relatively free space to express my aesthetic ideas and lifestyle. What I define as poetic is an ethereal state of mind that can rely on material expression. Although it can rely on material manifestations, it is essentially a kind of looking-up pursuit when a person finds their own values and comfortable way of showing their aesthetic opinions. Combining poetry and design to create the lifestyle we want, while expressing our inner aspirations, should be the meaning of poetic design.

Furniture design is an art form. Furniture is not merely utilitarian or based on functionality. The artistry of furniture is articulated through the process of using it. Humans give life to furniture, and the soul of furniture is provided and imbued by designers. Furniture plays a pivotal role in the indoor environment. Furniture can organize and divide the space, construct the indoor space environment, strengthen the overall style of the interior design, and create a good atmosphere for the indoor space. It is a fundamental feature of living environments.

Before designing a work, we need to clarify our design pursuit, which is also the core of this element – poetry. Poetry should be more of an aesthetic pursuit. The poetic methods convert the designer's sensory understanding through material into an object form. Poetry in every individual's heart is different, and this makes for the poetic diversity seeing in design. It is often a challenge for designers to present this inner desire through specific design objects (materials, forms, textures, patterns), but when it is done, it is a kind of breakthrough (figure 9.1–9.2).

The beauty of the texture of furniture products is mainly reflected in technology, nature, social, and human factors. Therefore, the texture in furniture design will directly affect the style of the furniture and the consumer's feelings about it. A good article of furniture cannot be separated from the aesthetic theory behind it. In summary, the beauty of furniture design comes from the unity of form, colour, texture, material, and style.



Figure 9.1 The texture test crafted by A. Tian, 2021



Figure 9.2 Authentic presentation, ceramic craft by A. Tian, 2021

Chapter 3: The Poetic Practice: Evidencing the expression of the practice

Project 1: Guqin Table

Keith Richards once said, “the greatest thing about song writing, it’s not an intellectual experience” (Rafael, 2018). The same as designing, releasing the freedom to make and communicating with materials, free from intellectual procedures.

This research journey has been designed intentionally to experience the purification and substantial aesthetic presentation of furniture design, which can show the deeper meanings of furniture pieces through a simple and functional exterior (Wegner, n.d.). The process of making is a way that the designer conveys the concept within the product itself. Designing without thought in the poetic design theory is meant to fully transcribe intentional feelings, giving everyday objects their value and character, which is textured and imprinted by the influence of temporality. The body of work can demonstrate these singular representations through the materials, like what I have explored in the studio practices (figure 10). Lastly, handcrafting gives great flexibility to the surface or form and can draw out these aforementioned feelings.

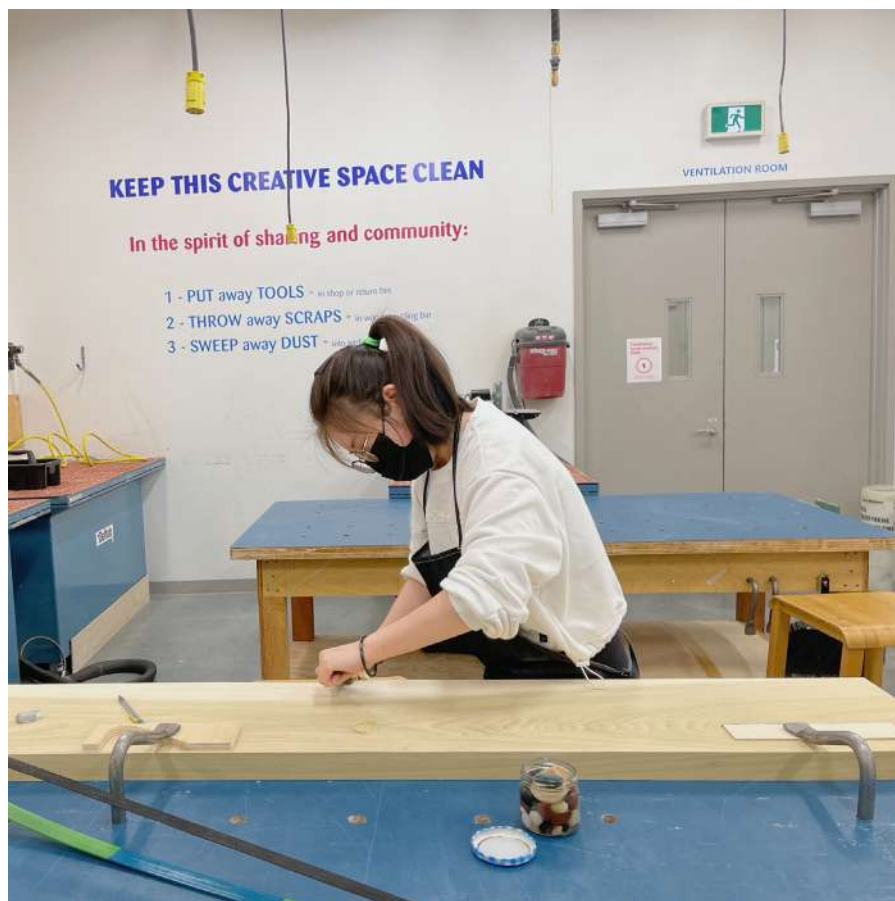


Figure 10 crafting the bench surface on poplar by A. Tian, 2021

I appreciate the surprises that the materials bring to me. The pattern that each piece of wood shows after passing through the jointer planer affects my thinking, similar to opening a wrapped present or gift. I truly enjoy providing a display platform for every piece of the beautiful wood panels. Poplar has this aesthetic sense of beauty in its softness and multi-colour integration. I enjoy the change in the shop that happens on my design decision as each material has a special conversation with me. I respect the nature of the materials and the language written on their body through time. Also, the conversation happens between me and a piece of poplar. I named it “river with shore”. It is like a hard disk of my memory that recorded my thoughts and experiences of that time and place.

Making furniture is the way I would like to explore and build my design philosophy. Additionally, other kinds of design can also fit in parallel personal contexts. The design of this table follows the slender characteristics of the traditional Chinese stringed instrument, a guqin (figure 11.1), and provides two different mentalities. The two mentalities refer to the rotation of the table surface; on one side it is a normal flat surface, while, on the other side, there is a large fillet on the surface which provides a more relaxing, smoothing surface. This prototype was designed to shift between the working surface and the meditative surface (figure 11.2–11.3).

“Objects are more than mere material possessions and tools because of the meaning users bestow on them: every object is designed, but some objects challenge ordinary perceptions about the way users experience the environment, and involve a different kind of ‘consumption’... they communicate the values they bear and involve the user in their interpretation” (Adriana Ionascu, 2009, p.18). The time and experience that is engendered between the design and its user is a two-way relationship that moves beyond material values, which is phenomenology in action.



Figure 11.1 Picture of Chinese GuQin in traditional art, 2012



Figure 11.2 Pictures of the table by A. Tian, 2021



Figure 11.3 Pictures of Weiwei Li operating of the table by A. Tian, 2021

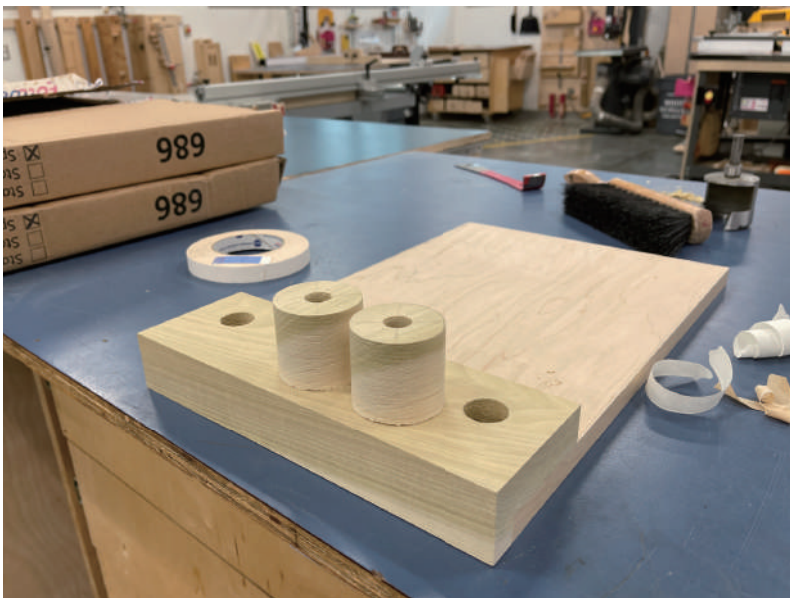


Figure 11.4 Pictures of manufacturing table and model Yun Xiao by A. Tian, 2021

Project 2: Lanhai 澜海

*“Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes.
Art is knowing which ones to keep.”*

– Scott Adams (n.d.)



Figure 12.1 Project Lanhai close look, photo by Yun Xiao, 2022

It is also believed that life should be an art form, and it can be viewed in artistic dimensions. I do believe aesthetics are grounded in the various rituals of everyday life, which resonates with Frank Gehry's idea: "expression is essential in architecture; buildings cannot be faceless, like in modernism. Thus, he approaches each building as a sculptural object, each piece of architecture as a painting" (Poursani, 2018, p.80).

Furniture represents a wave of lifestyles and shows the different stories of the designers. I do believe furniture's function is not only limited to the material; it can also speak to the spiritual in our everyday lives. I believe people will be seeing the rich cultural and spiritual connotations of furniture as I keep developing in the poetic design practices.

The project, *Lanhai*, transcribes the ideas and beliefs of poetic design in an intentional material way. It voices a bridge between past and future, utilitarian and crafty furniture integration, and the inner and outer self of design understandings. It was inspired by a walk at the Whiterock Beach, where natural aesthetics bloom in everyday life and in natural environs. There are a few vague figures scattered on the beach, some chasing each other, some whispering, and some lying on the beach, all enjoying this wonderful moment. The sea rippled, turning up the waves one by one, caressing the soft sand like a mother. I like to walk along the seaside like this, to appreciate the breath of the sea, the deep affection of the sea, and the heart of the sea. Finally, the rolling tide of the sea washes the surface of the land back and forth, leaving her with a natural texture.

The *Makai* light is fully using the leftover material of the project *lanhai*. They come from the same inspiration but creates under different state of mind. The impression of the ocean is transcribed in a poetic and meditative process through making.



Figure 12.2 White Rock Beach, shot by A. Tian 2021



Figure 12.3 The Lanhai chair, walnut, photo by Yun Xiao, 2022

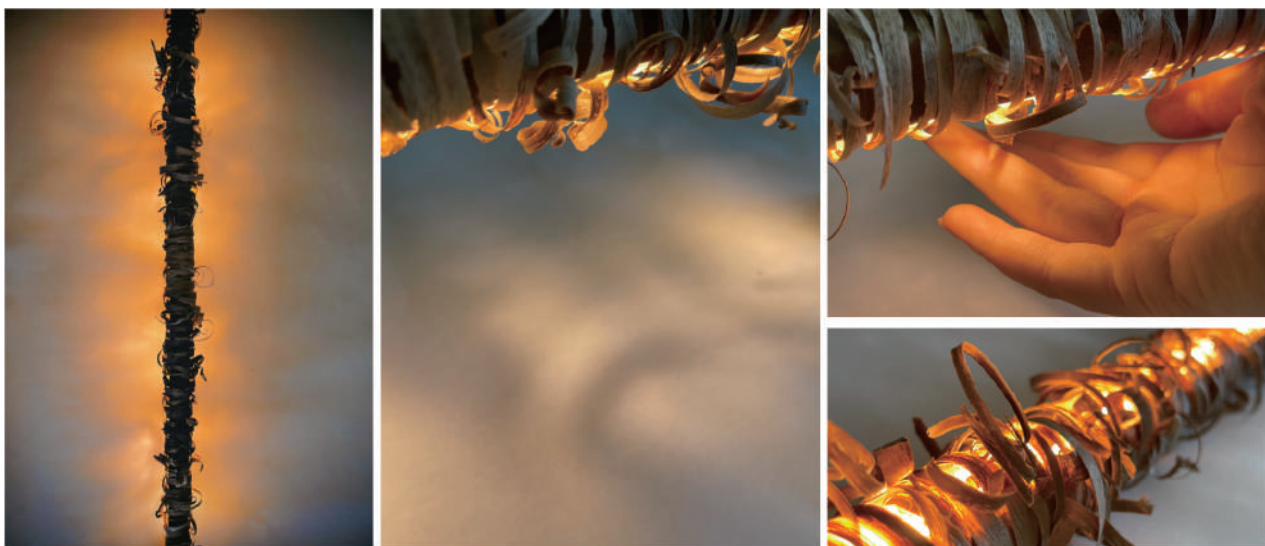


Figure 12.4 The Makai light, walnut and LED light, photo by A. Tian, 2022

The design changes again based on the material properties and aesthetical effects. I respect the conversations between me and each parts of the wood panels. Maintaining the natural beauty and applying my stories with it. It is an aesthetic model based on nature. Through the artistry and aesthetic ideal of space, it reflects the perceptual atmosphere of the art of life. In such an environment, return to the original heart and awaken the original emotional expression in the heart.

The poetry in everyone's heart is not the same, and this difference constitutes another kind of poetry. Chinese historian and poet Wang Guowei said: "Those who can write the scenery and true feelings are said to have a realm. Both the physical state and the state of mind belong to the state" (n.d.). Poetry is the resonance of the human heart and the realm of the world, and it is the emotion that fluids the mouth, eyes, ears and heart. It arises from objects and thrives with thoughts. Once these memories and emotions in the heart are just like in front of us even if they're not, it becomes poetic.



Figure 12.5 The Lanhai chair, walnut, photo by Yun Xiao, 2022



Figure 12.6 The Lanhai chair with side stool, walnut, photo by A. Tian, 2022

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to define my understanding of design poetics as a way to appreciate everyday aesthetics and to explore the concept of Xiuxing. Poetic design is a kind of attitude that leads us to a healthy lifestyle. It is a perspective that states the most transparent part of our design approach. This study aimed to analyze the position of poetic design within everyday design practices and experiment with its form, theories, and characteristics, which set it apart from other disciplines of contemporary design.

This research has shown a series of design research in various areas, including lighting, material testing, handcrafting, texture and form explorations, etc., to show how I use this poetic design theory to express the understandings and feelings in the presentation of material reality. The emotional value added to the designs created in the poetic design theory is bridging the connections between the designer, user and the object. As such, I envisaged that poetic objects support a different category of living practices and develop experiences that diversify the practice of everyday life.

As our demand for material culture increases, our way of life has undergone tremendous changes due to technological development and the influence of ideas. I believe that people's choice of products will gradually change from satisfying practical functions to more spiritual in the future. There are four types of value in objects as Dant's (1999) research determined: the use-value, the exchange-value, the symbolic value and the sign value, each influenced by what is signified by them in a culture (p.51). Drawing inspiration from daily life, paying attention to the connotation of things, pursuing the design concept of spiritual simplicity allow us to advocate combining poetry and design – poetic design.

In this design process, the conception and output of a product design are precious and Xiuxing in the designer's life. Each designer explores their own style in the design, practices with design, and finally forms a design concept. During this process, the designer constantly reaches reconciliation with themselves, which most designers will go through Xiuxing or "sedimentation." Any mature design needs to go through a period of precipitation and review; on this path, designers need to constantly reflect on themselves, infuse with aesthetics and materials, see the poetic sense brought by the authenticity of material expression, and constantly reflect on themselves.

Especially for furniture designers, furniture is not only an important tool in human life but also a figurative expression of family culture. In order to design a product that satisfies ourselves and consumers maybe, we need to integrate the aesthetical design philosophies into life and continue to innovate on it, to continuously summarize and obtain more experience, to express furniture design poetically, to design a special furniture style presents us and meet the aesthetic of contemporary era and promote the continuous progress of the industry.

As an oriental product designer, I have always wanted to seek a special design platform to reflect my story and my life, find a balance between my artistic pursuit and commercial reality, and establish a nourishing relationship with furniture design, which is the main pursuit of my research.

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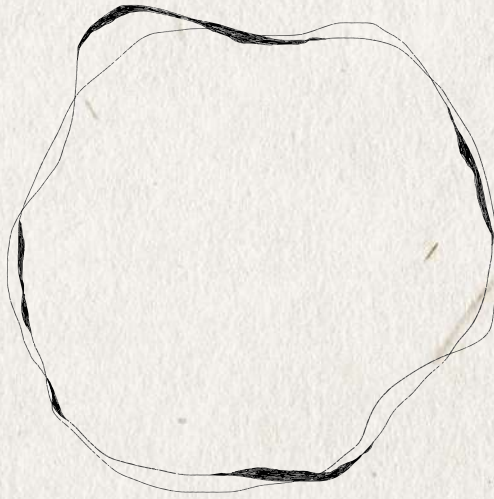
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