

{NEWYORK}

Wu's World

It's a rare designer who's equally adept at attiring people and their homes. But Jason Wu has bridged these creative spheres in harmonious, hands-on fashion. | By Michele Keith



"I'VE LOVED THE IDEA OF CREATING BEAUTIFUL OBJECTS since I was a child," says Jason Wu. "I think when you have a strong aesthetic it can translate across many platforms."

Wu has done exactly this, beginning with womenswear, adding eyewear, shoes and bags, candles, and now home furnishings, all to great acclaim and in record-breaking time. Even more importantly, while the categories are certainly quite different one from another, each product is unmistakably his. "My projects are constantly floating around in my head, and I know what I like," he says. "They do influence each other to some degree. First and foremost, however, they must be enjoyable, beautiful and well designed."

Reflecting on the trajectory his career has taken, Wu says, "Of course, it was always in my mind to establish a lifestyle brand. I just never planned for it to happen this quickly. But I believe in taking the right opportunities when they come along." And he has. Within months of the 2006 debut of his ready-to-wear collection, Delta Faucet's luxury division, Brizo, started sponsoring his shows. In 2011, Wu created bath fittings and accessories for the company, and this spring he launched his first-ever home furnishings line for Canvas Home.

Hot Seat

Enjoyable, beautiful and well designed—chairs from Jason Wu's Canvas Home collection are true to his aesthetic.

Each alliance was something of a fluke. "A close friend introduced me to Brizo, which was looking for people to help them bridge the gap between home and the fashion world," Wu says. "I thought home design was a far cry from clothing, especially bathroom fixtures that would require a new approach to add movement and personality to an otherwise static item."

Wu couldn't resist the challenge. So, as he does when contemplating the next season's runway looks, he thought first about his fans: "What would they want?" Pegging them as sophisticated women who understand quality, appreciate good construction, build their wardrobes with investment pieces and embrace beauty—knowledge he gained through personal appearances and extensive social media—he came up with Odin, "the little black dress of faucets." It doesn't scream "fashion designer," he says, but it does reflect his aesthetic, with a feminine silhouette, unorthodox colour choice (black) and excellent craftsmanship. It also illustrates his insatiable curiosity. Whether it's the electronic valve system, the application of feathers or any other component used for his label, Wu's first step is often to study the technology that will be involved in order to determine his creative strategy.

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Photography: Dilie Isager

Exploring new avenues for his talents brought Wu together with Canvas Home in 2011. He says their juxtaposition of contrasts makes them a perfect match.

Born in Taiwan, Wu has lived in Vancouver and Connecticut, and has studied in Paris, Tokyo and New York. "I'm a man of the times," he says. "I think more globally than regionally and am influenced by my life experiences." Case in point: the Chinese imagery in last fall's fashions. "I'd never thought about it before, but having been away from the culture for 20 years, suddenly tackling my own background seemed interesting."

He "went for the stereotype," choosing the Mao Zedong uniform, the 300-year-old Qing dynasty royal court and the 1940s Hollywood version of Asian glamour as his themes. He re-imagined the motifs, weaving them into what women would want to wear today—brocade pantsuits; a quilted vest trimmed with fox; and sexy, thigh-high-slit cheongsam dresses, among others.

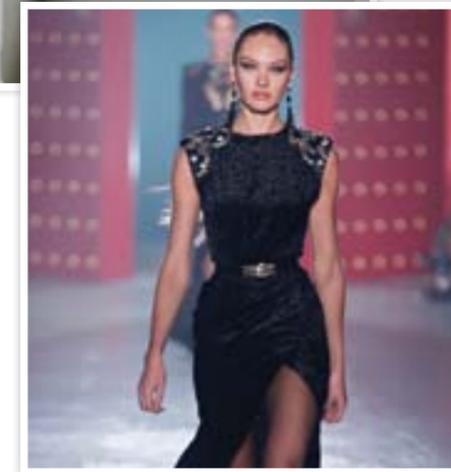
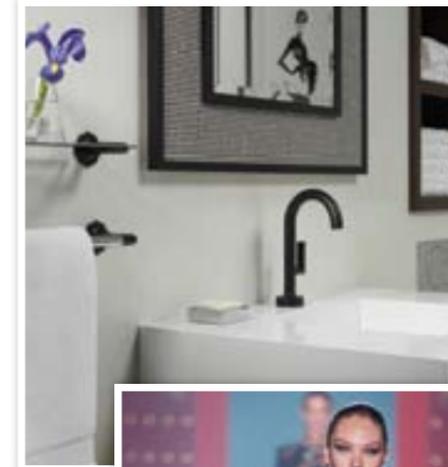
Wu's openness to exploring new avenues for his talents brought him together with Canvas Home in 2011.

Two years earlier, during the construction of his studio in the Garment District, he was introduced to Ochre, one of the hottest stores in Manhattan, by his interior decorator Jesse Carrier. "I fell in love with everything,"

From Wear to Ware
Wu's range runs the gamut: He's designed fixtures for Brizo, ready-to-wear clothing and a collection for Canvas Home.

recalls Wu, describing it as relaxed but chic, sophisticated and unpretentious. He started buying like mad. Canvas Home, which he chanced upon soon after, affected him in a similar manner, and bit by bit, the brand began to appear in both his showroom and his home. Unbeknownst to him at the time, both Ochre and Canvas Home are owned by Andrew Corrie, who, upon learning of Wu's affinity for his work, invited him for a coffee.

"It was like two friends coming up with a good idea, an



effortless collaboration based on many similarities," Wu says of their chat. Like Wu's operation, Canvas is not a huge corporation and imbues its merchandise with an artisanal feel. Corrie and Wu share a common ethos, the designer continues, although his is more polished and structured. This, he says, is what makes the pair a perfect match, a juxtaposition of contrasts.

The love seat, bench/ottoman, dining table and chair, cocktail table, pendant light fixture, glass vase, and handmade pillows he designed are finely tuned, a play on classics and elegantly simple. Wu's fashion followers will find the attention to detail they're accustomed to and some of the more distinctive elements of his clothing and accessories in the group. Most evident is the use of the circle as a design motif—integrated in the home furnishings collection as a metal disc with a custom gold finish. Evocative of the discs on his signature Daphne handbag, it's also seen in the contours of the faucets and ornaments on some of the shoes. Another Wu staple is the use of intricate French lace. Often enriching his apparel, lace also adds a touch of luxury to the pillows.

What does the future hold? "I'll take over the world one beautiful thing at a time," the designer says, only half in jest. But he'll do it cautiously. He began Jason Wu ready-to-wear with fewer than 20 pieces and slowly grew it into the four collections a year he does now. It will be the same with Canvas. "We'll see how it goes," he says, "and then decide the next step." **4S**

Michele Keith, based in New York, covers a range of lifestyle subjects with a special focus on interior design. Her work has appeared in The New York Times, Cottages and Gardens, and Luxe Interiors + Design.

Photography (from top): courtesy Brizo; © Dan & Corina Lecca; Dilie Isager