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OPEN FOR ALL

International architects, designers and creatives flocked to Hong Kong at the turn of the century to work on the West Kowloon Cultural District. This visionary development initially opened to the public as an outdoor space, hosting events and exhibitions at temporary venues. Now its permanent landmarks are ready to wow global visitors.

— ARTS VENUE *Xiqu Centre*

The Grand Theatre at the Xiqu Centre, the first landmark performing arts venue to open, can accommodate more than 1,000 Chinese opera fans. But newcomers to this classical art form – known for its traditional costumes

and make-up – might feel more at home at the Tea House Theatre, an intimate 200-seater venue where a dedicated troupe performs an introduction to. It also provides a stage for young performers and new pieces, encouraging the development of the art as well as attracting a new audience.



— MUSEUM *M+*

M+ might have just opened but it is already a must-visit institution. It has been compared to the Tate Modern in London: both were designed by Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron and overlook waterways. Nonetheless, M+ is a firmly Asian institution. A bamboo effect on the building's façade introduces a sense of place that continues throughout the museum's permanent collection. Spanning the 1970s to the present day, the main draw will be the M+ Sigg Collection of Chinese contemporary art. Hong Kong artists will also be introduced to a wider audience

thanks to a donation from collectors William and Lavina Lim. And an architecture archive is set to be another curatorial highlight and a rare resource in the region. Practices from Japan to India have contributed drawings, models and more to M+, providing design fans with 40,000 reasons to visit. "The collection consists of thousands of design and architecture objects, such as posters, electronics, textiles, furniture, building models and even entire architectural interiors," says Doryun Chong, deputy director, curatorial and chief curator at M+ (see right).

SCREEN DREAM:

Kowloon is a popular spot for viewing Hong Kong's skyline but many might soon turn the other way: the harbour-facing façade of M+ is a giant LED screen, a huge canvas for digital exhibitions and programmes and a prime spot for a spectacular daily show.

— MUSEUM *Hong Kong Palace Museum*

The West Kowloon Cultural District might be built on reclaimed land but this new cultural quarter covers much historical ground. When it opens in 2022 the Hong Kong Palace Museum will display more than 800 ancient artefacts and national treasures loaned from the original Palace Museum in Beijing. This is the largest loan from the Beijing museum

to another cultural institution – and it has plenty to choose from. The Unesco World Heritage site, inside the Forbidden City, houses more than 1.8 million items left by Mainland China's last emperor. This imperial trove spans some of the country's earliest dynasties. Only a fraction of the jade, lacquerware, calligraphy, paintings, porcelain, ceremonial robes, literary works and antique furniture can be exhibited at once – and some items have never been on public display.



— Q&A

Doryun Chong

Deputy director, curatorial and chief curator, M+

Doryun Chong left New York and the Museum of Modern Art (Moma) in 2013 to become chief curator at M+. The Seoul-born curator describes the opening as a dream come true.

M+ has been called the Tate Modern of the East...

Not only that; it's also Moma, the Centre Pompidou, the V&A, Design Museum and BFI of the East; and a long-awaited collaborator for illustrious Asian museums such as the National Gallery Singapore and Tokyo's Mori Art Museum. We're large and multifaceted enough to be all of the above and more.

How significant is the M+ art collection?

People visit Moma for a definitive look at Western modern art. In a similar way, people must come to M+ to learn about the history of contemporary Chinese art – arguably the most significant art historical phenomena of the past half century. We have the world's best collection on that topic.

Can you give us a peek inside...

The public spaces are monumental, sublime and vibrant. But when you enter the galleries, they feel so calming, intimate and elegant. There's a constant shift with scales and proportions. That's a signature of brilliant architecture; I really think that this is Herzog & de Meuron's best museum building.



— EVENT SPACE *Freespace and the Lyric Theatre Complex*

Freespace is West Kowloon Cultural District's performing arts venue for contemporary performance: it's a flexible space for hosting experimental theatre, contemporary dance, live music, interactive exhibitions and multimedia shows. Since 2019 it has formed part of a trio of venues

supporting the performing arts, alongside the Xiqu Centre and the Lyric Theatre Complex, which is currently under construction. UNStudio and AD+RG designed the three-theatre waterfront venue next to M+. The Lyric Theatre Complex will showcase the best of Hong Kong and international dance and theatre. The building's glass exterior will also allow a glimpse of dancers and actors practising their craft.

Hidden treasures

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YAU MA TEI & JORDAN

Beneath the skyscrapers, Hong Kong is a city of street stalls, markets, temples and houses. A visit to the West Kowloon Cultural District wouldn't be complete without an amble around the neighbouring districts of Yau Ma Tei and Jordan. Home to traditional crafts and customs, they are attracting a fresh crowd and renewed appreciation.



1. **Tung Nam Lou Art Hotel**
Located in the heart of Yau Ma Tei on Portland Street, this unconventional hotel eschews gyms and swimming pools for art studios spread over three floors. Guests and day-pass holders can paint, create scents or squeeze into a vintage *qipao* (a traditional body-hugging dress). The hotel works closely with Hong Kong's artists; be sure to take the stairs instead of the lift to see wall art inspired by the area.

2. **Yau Ma Tei Theatre**
Take in a stirring evening performance at this pre-war cinema-turned-Cantonese opera theatre – a rare single-storey structure on Waterloo Road. Stick around after the show to watch the night-time drama unfold at the neighbouring fruit market, where lorries line up to unload fresh produce from all over the world.

3. **Kubrick**
Hong Kong's best independent cinema – the Broadway Cinematheque on Public

Square Street – is also home to one of the city's finest bookshops. Browse the shelves at Kubrick, where you'll find a globe-spanning selection of magazines, quarterlies and zines, then recharge with a coffee in its atmospheric café.

4. **Mido Café**
For a typical afternoon snack, order a milk tea and pineapple bun with butter at this quintessential *cha chaan teng* (Hong Kong-style café). Beloved by film directors and movie fans for its well-preserved 1950s interior, the café, which you'll find on Temple Street, offers a step back into a romantic past.

5. **Cheung Shing Fans Factory**
Your walk through Yau Ma Tei may leave you feeling a little hot under the collar. This shop and factory on Shanghai Street sells delicately crafted sandalwood hand fans, which are naturally scented and the next best thing to a real breeze.



6. **Tak Sang Pawn Shop**
As you make your way through the district, don't forget to look up. Across Yau Ma Tei you'll find examples of Hong Kong's traditional "walk-up" (or *tong lau*) architecture and there are plenty of sights above the ground floor, from clothes hanging out to dry to street signs for seafood restaurants. Some buildings are covered

in bamboo scaffolding or painted in bright colours. All of these features are part of Hong Kong's urban vernacular – none more so than neon signs. A good example hangs from the sides of the Tak Sang Pawn Shop on Shanghai Street, at the corner of Saigon Street: the shape of its luminous green and red neon signs represents a bat holding a gold coin.



7. **Biu Kee Mahjong**
Going out on the tiles means something different in Hong Kong, where late-night games of mahjong can continue well into the following morning. Biu Kee Mahjong's third-generation owner, Cheung Shun King, can be found at the front counter carving tiles, which his younger brother paints at the back. Custom designs can be made to order so come prepared with a line drawing or a Chinese character.

8. **Liu Ma Kee**
Head across to Min Street to visit Liu Ma Kee, the "fermented tofu king" (according to the sign outside). Add this distinctly Hong Kong ingredient to a favourite dish: there's a spaghetti carbonara recipe on the counter but you can ask the Liu family for a personal suggestion.



9. **Hong Kong West Kowloon Station Sky Corridor**
The roof of this rail terminus provides an ideal viewing point to take in the whole cultural quarter, from the Xiqu Centre to M+ . From here, you can decide either to jump on the mtr, carry on to Tsim Sha Tsui (see right) or head to the Art Park and grab some sundowners to enjoy while watching the sun setting beyond Victoria Harbour.

— THE WATER MARGIN Tsim Sha Tsui

Visitors used to go to Tsim Sha Tsui just for the view of Hong Kong Island but the Kowloon side of Victoria Harbour has become a cultural destination in its own right. A new-look **Hong Kong Museum of Art** reopened in 2019, following an extensive renovation and the donation of more than 350 works of Chinese painting and calligraphy from the Chih Lo Lou Collection. Ink works are the main draw; the collection spans 15th-century scrolls and modern landscapes by Hong Kong painters Lui Shou-Kwan and Huang Bore, whose works record the city's development in the 20th century. The museum's new façade, interactive exhibitions and harbour views provide a contrast to these dimly lit masterpieces.

Few shopping malls require a docent, which is one of the reasons why **K11 Musea** calls itself a museum and runs art, architecture and furniture tours. Opened in 2019, the lavish emporium displays about 50 art pieces across its 10 themed floors. Street artists such as Ron English and Katol helped to decorate the third-floor streetwear zone, while other commissions include works by Zhang Enli and Mary Weatherford. Most pieces are displayed on rotation, including an outdoor sculpture on the waterfront.

By far the best way to walk between these two cultural addresses is along the **Avenue of Stars**. James Corner Field Operations, the architects of New York's High Line, transformed an ageing tourist attraction modelled on the Hollywood Walk of Fame into a horizontal park and promenade. Bronze-cast handprints, belonging to Cantonese film stars, have been subtly incorporated into the undulating balustrade – but Victoria Harbour remains the biggest star.



Home truths

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VIEWS FROM THE GROUND

West Kowloon has made a lasting impression on the city's community of artists, designers, writers and performers. We asked four creatives who are super fans of Hong Kong to tell us what makes it so special.

— WEST KOWLOON NEIGHBOURHOOD

Lindsay Varty
Author, 'Sunset Survivors'

The Hong Kong-born writer's second book documents her hometown's traditional trades and crafts.

"Biu Kee Mahjong is in my book. The owner, 'Uncle King,' has dedicated his entire life to engraving and painting these mahjong tiles by hand and he hasn't changed a thing from the way his father and grandfather taught him; it's extremely traditional. I respect him because he isn't just accepting that his industry is dying and his skills are going to be lost; he's actually doing something to prevent it. He runs workshops all over the city so that people can learn the craft of mahjong tile-making. But the funniest thing is that he doesn't even know how to play mahjong; his whole family plays but he has no interest."

Michael Kistler
Photographer

The American street photographer regularly shoots around Yau Ma Tei and Jordan after dark.

"Jordan and Yau Ma Tei are unique; I wouldn't compare them to anywhere else. You have historical vignettes in this cinematic, almost overwhelmingly colourful scene. The look of Hong Kong really transforms from day to night; it's far more pronounced than in other cities."



— WEST KOWLOON CULTURAL DISTRICT

James Acuna
Creative director,
JJ Acuna/Bespoke Studio

The Manila-born designer opened his studio in 2015 after working for a decade at several architecture firms in Hong Kong.

"I've been here for 16 years and I'm so excited to see the architecture and design collection at M+. Hong Kong informs my work a lot. I can't wait to see all of the drawings on display, covering most of the major 20th-century movements in this city. It will be great for designers, artists and creatives to visit a space that frames Hong Kong's unique urbanism and aesthetic. Before M+ existed, we had to look to films like Blade Runner and Ghost in the Shell. Now we have a Hong Kong institution to preserve that kind of visual information. It will be a library for us all to reference."

Jessica Burrows
Soloist,
Hong Kong Ballet

The Canadian dancer first joined the Hong Kong Ballet in 2010 and has performed multiple times at wkcd.

"The Hong Kong Ballet has a great partnership with West Kowloon. My favourite performance was when we did part of The Great Gatsby on an outdoor stage at sunset; the setting was so beautiful with the city in the background. The Art Park is a wonderful place to have a picnic, especially when I'm performing at wkcd. We usually have a two-hour break between rehearsals and the show so I like to go and look out at the water and relax. Now that I know the city better I'm able to go a bit deeper beneath the surface. I love Hong Kong more now than I did before, if that's possible."