

Back to basics: Taiwan's industrial chic

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Jewellery and watchmaker Sean Yu creates watches made with a cement surface that are a huge hit with Taiwan's consumers

With watches made from cement, furniture fashioned from factory pipes, and accessories created from motorbike leather, Taiwanese designers are winning new fans at home and abroad with their own brand of industrial chic.

The style reflects the island's sprawling cities and aims to breathe new life into mundane [materials](#) more often found on building sites or in workshops.

Jewellery and watchmaker Sean Yu uses concrete for his products, starting out by making rings from the material.

After experimenting with different types of concrete, he now uses a mix similar to the formula used to construct buildings.

His latest top-selling item is a mechanical watch with a concrete surface in the shape of a spiral staircase. It launched last year and set a sales record on crowd-funding website Zeczec, raising over Tw\$12 million (\$400,000) in pre-orders.

Yu says his style is inspired by acclaimed Japanese architect Tadao Ando, known for his masterly use of concrete.

"I design for myself and for like-minded people who are avant-garde and rebellious, and who like novel things," Yu told AFP.

"What attracts me most about concrete is that when you treat an ordinary material well, you can deliver new values."

His products are also on sale in Britain, Japan and the United States.



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Plumber-turned-interior designer Daniel Cheng uses iron piping to create everything from lights to shelves and sofa frames.

Cheng branched out into furniture design when he was seeking to expand his business and also uses steel bars, tyres, truck wheel rims and car seats for his creations.

"My inspirations are simple. I was a plumber and it's something I worked

with everyday," he said.

"I want to use my imagination to make something interesting and meaningful."

Cheng says most of his clients order custom-made products, with local celebrities among his fans, as well as businesses that have hired him to decorate restaurants, cafes and clothes shops.

Ginger Chang of the Taiwan Design Centre, which promotes local designers and brands, said the industrial look featuring cement, brass, aluminium and granite is increasingly popular as an interior design trend on the island.

"The public like fresh things and they are looking for something special in terms of materials. They like the one-of-a-kind feel," Chang told AFP.



Balance Wu, who co-designs products with his wife, wants to prevent motorcycle seat-pads and scrap leather from ending up as garbage, so uses them to create wallets, bags and accessories

Consumers are also drawn by a green element to some of the industrial chic products.

Balance Wu says he wants to prevent motorcycle seat-pads and scrap leather from ending up as garbage, so uses them to create wallets, bags and accessories.

There's no shortage of material—Taiwan's cities are clogged with mopeds—and Wu's creations are now sold in design shops from Taipei to New York.

"Motorcycle leather is a humble and durable material that has to withstand wind, rain and sun every day," says Wu, who co-designs the products with his wife Chin Yang.

"We are turning this durable material into products that can be used for a long time."

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