

THE 10 YEAR PLAN

# AUGUSTMAN

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*The blurred line  
between good and  
bad is what makes  
characters more  
interesting*

## Jeremy Renner

HE DALLIED IN THE WINGS FOR 10 YEARS.  
HIS MOMENT HAS FINALLY ARRIVED



# Actually Influential

THEY WERE INFLUENCERS EVEN BEFORE THE TERM WAS COINED IN THIS ERA OF OVERSHARING. MEET THE 10 SINGAPOREANS WHO ROCKED THEIR INDUSTRIES, AND IN THE PROCESS, THE COUNTRY

WORDS FARHAN SHAH PHOTOS IVANHO HARLIM + SHYSILIA NOVITA (COLOUR) + JOEL LOW (B&W) STYLING CHIA WEI CHOONG GROOMING FOR KIT CHAN CINDY GOH USING DIOR COSMETICS AND NIGEL WOO / PASSION HAIR SALON GROOMING FOR ALL OTHERS ZANN THIANG + CHRISTIAN M / 27A.CO CLOTHES FOR FANDI BY ADIDAS

## CHRIS LEE, THE MAN BEHIND *THAT* LOGO

The brickbats cascaded in like a torrential summer downpour. Prominent bloggers and online personalities criticised the new logo for its child-like simplicity. Others created their own comedic versions to mock it. However, the man responsible for the revamped logo stood nonchalantly in the eye of the storm. "I actually expected the criticism," says Chris Lee, the founder of renowned creative agency Asylum.

We are seated in the middle of his expansive office, which is a veritable designer's dream. Coffee table design books and mini figurines have conquered his desk, and knick-knacks of various sizes and unknown origins litter the room. This was where he had sat two years ago, looking at the two rectangular red blocks on his computer screen that make up the National Gallery Singapore logo and deciding that yes, this was the one.

Lee shares that even people in his own office had been divided over the logo. "We created more than 200 concepts before deciding on a shortlist of six. I really wanted to push the art gallery to another level and I was thinking, 'We can create a safe logo and nobody will say anything.' Or we could design something forward-looking and have the public discuss it. After all, art is about discourse," Lee says.

### DESIGN ICON

But there is a lot more to Lee than just the National Gallery Singapore logo, although he doesn't mind "resting his career" on that particular achievement. The President's Design Award winner has been around the block and back, and garnered tens of dozens of local and international awards along the way. You've probably interacted with his work without knowing it. He came up with the cheeky double entendres for the now defunct Frolick yoghurt shop. He designed the

research lab-interior for Chocolate Research Facility. He also designed Fusionopolis. Lee and his agency have done everything from branding campaigns to hotel interiors. He's reached such a level of fame (some would say notoriety) that he has the luxury to turn down jobs if he feels that his vision might be heavily compromised by the client. According to Lee, out of every 10 possible opportunities that come in through the swinging wooden doors of Asylum's shophouse office, he accepts only four on average.

### LEE'S JEDI MIND TRICK

Asylum's longevity in the field isn't only because it is the most creative agency in Singapore and Asia. Lee's overlooked talent is his ability to sell his ideas. Any creative in the field can tell you that often, the client is the main determinant between soaring success and crushing failure.

"Clashing is inevitable," he says, laughing. "Ultimately it's how you negotiate with the client while making him see your point of view. You can't immediately show your idea to the client. You have to lead him to it and make him think that the both of you are geniuses. The key is that at every point in the process, you have to get the client to agree with you."

"These aren't the droids you're looking for," I remark.

"Hah, exactly. Ask the client questions such as 'What is success in this project to you?' Eventually he will understand where you're coming from."

### THE BURGEONING CREATIVE SCENE

Lee has reached that point in his career where he can afford to retire and preserve his legacy. But putting his feet up has never been in his plans, not with the astronomical growth in the local design scene. "I always want to push forward."

