

DESIGNS OF WONDER

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The influential interior designer Masamichi Katayama works in a light, bright, self-designed studio in residential Tokyo. Danielle Demetriou takes a tour

Masamichi Katayama, dressed in a stylishly casual and well-cut indigo jacket and jumper

Masamichi Katayama is a busy man. He has a string of live concerts to attend, theater performances to fit in, weekly university lectures to conduct, art exhibitions to visit. And last but not least? There are the 30 or so global projects that he is normally juggling at any one time as the famed founder of the Tokyo interior design firm Wonderwall.

Smiling as he reflects on his packed agenda, he says: "It's important for me to enjoy life. Being a designer is challenging, and I have to be inspired by different things on a daily basis in order to create. Fortunately, the things I love—music, theater, art—have turned out to be input in my creative process. For me, being both a consumer and a designer is essential. Even if it does cut into my sleeping time."

Katayama is emerging as something of a design legend in Tokyo. He founded Wonderwall in 2000, and it has quietly acquired a global following for its work, which mixes clean, modern lines with a quintessentially Japanese respect for timeless craftsmanship. Today, the studio has grown to around 20 staff dealing with dozens of international projects, from global flagship stores to intimate, upmarket boutiques.

Katayama's own office is as eye-catching as his social life is busy. Located on a quiet residential lane in Tokyo's Sendagaya neighborhood, the entrance is marked by a dramatically tall and minimal concrete passageway. Inside, the light-filled space is filled with contemporary art and design



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classics to rival a world-class gallery—a carefully curated selection of paintings, photography, abstract contemporary sculptures, and iconic furniture, by creatives ranging from Takashi Murakami to Jean Prouvé. And then there is his soft spot for life-size stuffed animals (a polar bear surveys the main meeting room from above).

Unique, airy, impeccably stylish, it is perhaps clear from his office why Katayama was selected to design one particularly innovative project: INTERSECT BY LEXUS, a genre-defying space that aims to embody the creative spirit of the carmaker. Clearly in tune with the brand, he represents its signature fusion of quality Japanese craftsmanship and a modern aesthetic.

The first INTERSECT BY LEXUS opened among the high-end fashion flagships of the Aoyama district of Tokyo in 2013, while the second was completed in Dubai in December of last year. (The next to open is in New York.) The concept is simple: the exquisitely designed spaces—complete with restaurants, galleries, libraries, and CRAFTED FOR LEXUS boutiques selling Lexus-commissioned design products—physically reflect the values of the brand through its timeless design, imaginative spirit, and quality craftsmanship.



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INTERSECT BY LEXUS DUBAI

INTERSECT BY LEXUS opened in Dubai in 2015. Located at the heart of the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), it is billed as a comfortable destination halfway between home and work—the sort of place in which you can settle in, have a coffee, and work from a laptop, or visit in the evening for a top-notch meal. The cuisine, by chef Tomas Reger, showcases raw and organic dishes divided into small and large plates. And pieces from the CRAFTED FOR LEXUS collection are available for purchase.

"INTERSECT BY LEXUS is a third space, based on the concept of a clubhouse," he explains. "It's about Lexus but in a very subtle way."

In the case of both of the INTERSECT BY LEXUS spaces, Katayama cites one key overriding challenge: creating a place where visitors can experience Lexus—through the spatial design, quality materials, and first-class craftsmanship—outside the conventional confines of a four-wheeled car.

Highlighting this intangible aspect, he explains: "Retail space is going through a new era. Today, you can buy everything through the Internet, which is good, it's convenient. But it means that what we can offer to customers in a physical space is becoming much more important. In terms of INTERSECT BY LEXUS, most people go in order to experience the space. My goal is to help them leave with a lot of good memories."

Centerstage in the new Dubai INTERSECT BY LEXUS is the cutout structure of the interior, with an angular central opening connecting the upper-level restaurant and library and the lower-level "garage" exhibition space. There are echoes of the Aoyama space: the same signature facade (intricate bamboo-laminated lattice with a motif inspired by Lexus' famed spindle grille), as well as warm teak herringbone flooring, bubble-like light sculptures by Lindsey Adelman, and a white-painted collage of car parts forming the exhibition floor in Dubai.

Yet the design is also cleverly rooted in its Middle East location, as reflected in perhaps the most eye-catching of features: the sand dune-inspired ceiling. Numerous white ripples fashioned from white-painted plastic fins float across the ceiling, unexpectedly evoking traditional Japanese wave motifs. "Dubai is famous for its desert, and when I visited and saw the sand dunes, I felt it was such a beautiful scene, and I felt there was some similarity to Japanese craftsmanship in terms of the shapes," he says. "It took numerous hours of design and technical drawing. The balance of the design was very delicate. If the space between the plates or the thickness was even slightly wrong, it would look cheap, or too much—it had to be perfectly measured and balanced." Such attention to detail is key to his success on a raft of projects. And the designer, who will turn 50 this year, apparently has no intention of slowing down, as reflected in his numerous design projects as well as his teaching commitments (he is a full-time professor at Tokyo's Musashino Art University).

Not to forget his extracurricular entertainment. Revealing that he saw Sakanaction, the Japanese band, perform the night before, Katayama excitedly reels off a list of other concerts he is attending in coming days, from the Jesus and Mary Chain to Bob Dylan. Smiling widely, he says: "I want to enjoy my life, and I want to make great design. But actually I know I'm very lucky. The biggest fun I have is with my work." ☺