

out of the box

Text Payal Uttam Images Courtesy of ArtisTree

‘It’s almost an alien object that resides in an office community,’ says Frank Leung, principal of *via. architecture* and the designer behind the sleek new ArtisTree performance space, which has just landed in Hong Kong’s Taikoo Place. Unlike the previous venue, which blended seamlessly into its corporate surroundings, Leung wanted to push the envelope with a bolder, more unconventional design. ‘We really wanted to make a statement that was sculptural and art-oriented from the outset.’

To catch the attention of busy professionals, Leung designed a dramatic entryway, setting the tone for the intimate 280-square-metre event space waiting to be discovered just inside. Flanked by elegant stone columns, the gateway is constructed of undulating aluminium strips encased in a timber veneer. ‘We explored images of sound as it travels through space and how it relates to clapping and resonance,’ says Leung, explaining the inspiration behind the wave-like pattern. When the gates open, the same undulating timber panels cocoon and guide guests across a bridge to the theatre hall’s entrance.

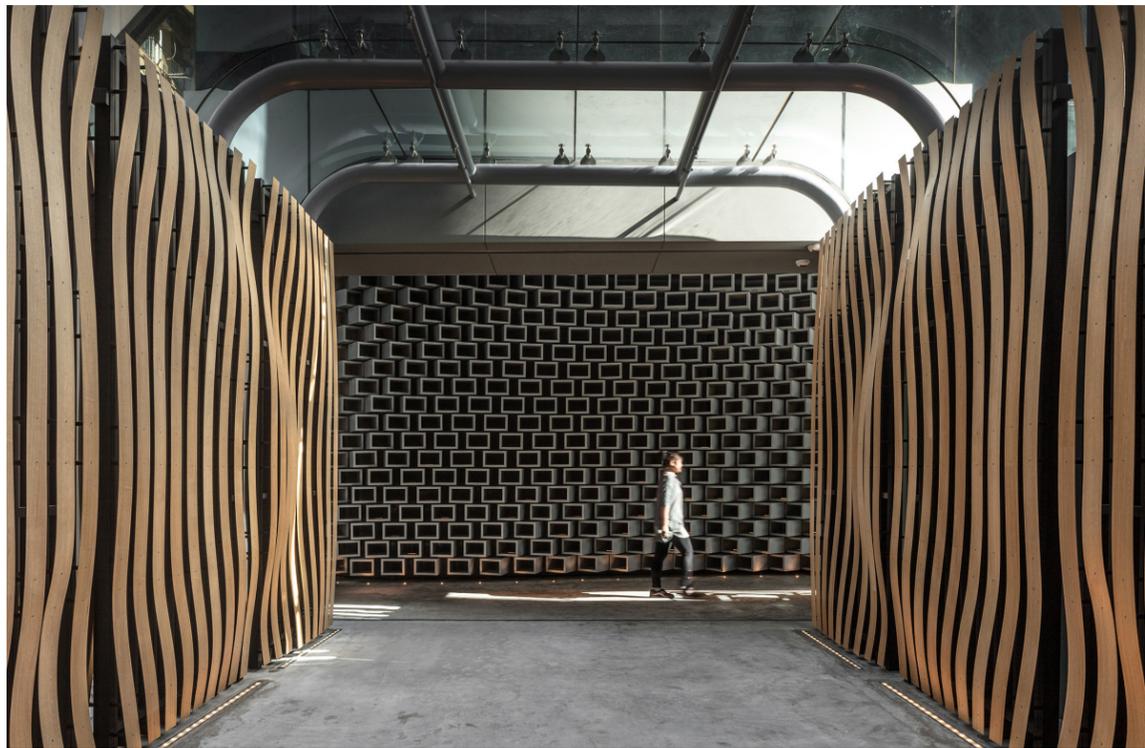
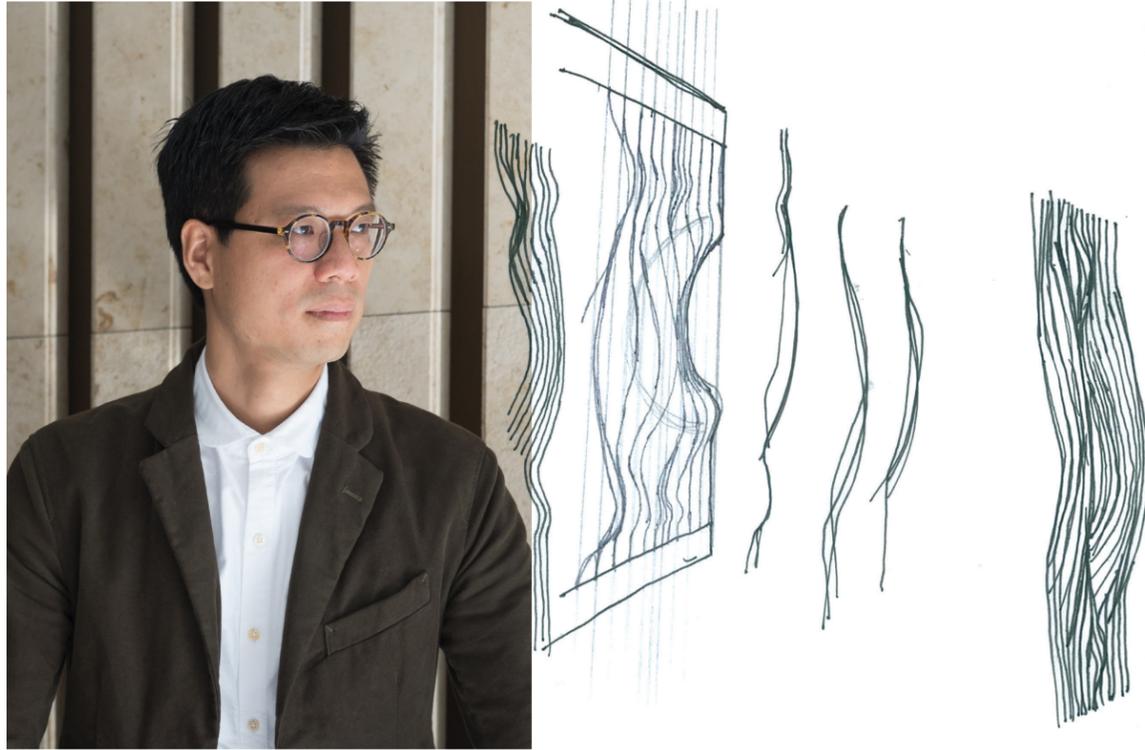
‘Everyone in Hong Kong already has this fixed idea of black boxes if they’re at all familiar with the Arts Centre and some of the government venues like Kwai Tsing Theatre, which are kind of dark, cramped basement spaces,’ says Leung. His design for ArtisTree makes a notable divergence with its sun-bathed entry.

Beyond just a brighter disposition, Leung and his team wanted to convey ArtisTree’s mission of introducing theatre and art to a broader audience. ‘We took the idea of the black box, open at the top, but then we tipped the box so it actually welcomes you in — that was our analogy for the space.’ Inspired by this image of an open box, Leung decided to install just under 1,000 small hollow boxes, which have been carefully stacked and ever-so-slightly rotated to form a six-metre wall spanning 18 metres in length. ‘It bows out a little bit and slightly flows over the space so you’re enveloped in this sculptural gesture,’ says Leung. ‘It’s actually twisting and turning.’ Located just outside the theatre, the wall also serves as a clever device, signalling show times as each individual box illuminates from within when a performance is in progress.

Behind the stacked box installation is a flexible seating concept, which can accommodate up to 200 visitors. When the space isn’t being used to stage theatre, operas or a whole array of musical performances, hidden doors and retractable walls can be opened up to transform the space into an exhibition venue.

Long known for its prominent contemporary art exhibitions, ArtisTree is now pivoting in a direction with a distinctive focus on the performing arts — filling a critical void for culture-hungry Hongkongers. ‘It’s catching a new flow in the community,’ says Leung. ‘The programme is very exciting. I know my team is already asking whether they can get tickets to the first few shows!’

taikooplace.com/ArtisTree



Frank Leung, principal of *via. architecture*, oversaw the concept-driven transformation of the new ArtisTree performance space in Hong Kong. Flanked by undulating aluminium strips encased in a timber veneer and leading to a striking wall installation of almost 1,000 stacked boxes, the entryway is a sculptural gesture of what lies in store. Images courtesy of *via. architecture*