



Home Chic Home

Herm  s Maison Managing Director **H  L  NE DUBRULE** tells ZARA ZHUANG how the brand's *m  tiers* in furniture, decorative objects, tableware, wallpaper and textiles exemplify balance between rigour and fantasy, heritage and revolution

IF HOME WERE as stylish as Herm  s makes it out to be — filled with sleek seats, warm wools, flamboyant fabrics and charming curios — we'd never want to step outside for a second. The celebrated house gave Singapore a peek at its world last month with a *Through the Walls* exhibition, which took over the third and fourth floors of its Liat Towers Singapore flagship store with an immersive presentation of its home collection.

Styled to evoke a surreal sojourn in an Herm  s dreamscape, *Through the Walls* aptly revitalises the boutique, which underwent a 15-month renovation that was completed last May. Explaining why Liat Towers Singapore was selected as the site, Herm  s Maison Managing Director H  l  ne Dubrulle says: "You need to bring life into it, so we said to give it home spirit, like a home within a home."

A world first for Herm  s Maison — it was specially conceived and executed for the refurbished boutique — the installation peppered the space with cosy nooks and recordings of surreptitious whispers, abrupt door knocks and tinkling conversation. But more than just a witty, whimsical experience, the brand showed it was serious about highlighting the technical prowess and imaginative flair of its talents. "This was an opportunity to showcase our collections with an artistic look," Dubrulle says. "We like to play with objects, and at the same time, people can see how we care for each detail and how [comprehensive] our know-how, materials, techniques and collections are."

PORTRAIT: H  L  NE DUBRULE BY YANG; PHOTOS OF THROUGH THE WALLS: EDWARD HENDRICKS

Making objects of sense for the senses is how Dubrulle describes what Herm  s Maison does, and each item in the home universe stays loyal to the brand's patrimony while bringing the collections forward. "We never look at our heritage through a rear-view mirror," Dubrulle says. "So there is reflection going into each object, and we also want to provide pleasure, beauty and elegance [through our creations] and arouse the senses of our customers."

Describe the Herm  s Maison aesthetic.

Our aesthetic relies on the juxtaposition of rigour and fantasy — we're both and we reconcile the notions of pure architectural lines and precise designs with fantasy, imagination, humour and narrative. Our furniture is more on the rigorous side, whereas our tableware, textiles and wallpaper are more illustrative. Another important value in our aesthetic is the special relationship with time. We want to be in our time and also to stand the test of time, to be relevant and to think about how we can adapt to new usages and the way of life today. Even if we take inspiration from our patrimony, we're always looking towards the future.

What inspires an object's design, and how do you decide whether an object will be a good fit for Herm  s Maison?

The typology of the object must respond to a usage, a need or an idea, and the concept has to be relevant. Then there is the style of this understated elegance that's never ostentatious, and the power of the materials. Sometimes you have simple objects that don't need a logo or details or patterns, and it's the beauty of the materials that speaks. And in every Herm  s object you have to feel the human touch in it and the soul of the craftsman, and this makes it different from an industrially made product.

How have styles of home accessories and consumer tastes evolved since you became managing director in 2009?

Home objects have existed for a long time at Herm  s, since the 1920s, but we've extended the collections and updated them, and I think Herm  s has built an extraordinary legitimacy in this area. We've put the spotlight on more witty, symbolic objects. And with digitalisation of our world and our life, I think there'll be a need for more funny, poetic objects. Think of your desk, for example: You just need a computer or tablet or smartphone, and less of the stuff we had



Clockwise from left: Tie-set tableware; Groom Attel   hanger in brick, leather, palladium-finish brass and stainless steel. *Through the Walls* installation at Liat Towers

before. Maybe there's going to be this trend of vanishing objects, but I don't think so. On the contrary, we need objects to add warmth and bring out the human quality. So I think sensual objects will be the trend — Herm  s can bring warmth into a colder technological world, and we'll need that more and more.

Herm  s Maison has become known for immersive large-scale installations and presentations. How is this approach aligned with the brand's style and spirit?

Objects carry more than their essential qualities — they carry an experience. That's why we like to immerse people in an experience, a way of life, a way of being. I think events are like Herm  s objects, because the experience itself is also an Herm  s product.

Do you feel there's an increase in expectations for this style of presentation?

You have to strike the right balance between

authenticity of the objects — sometimes you can wow with an impressive and spectacular event, but in the end, the quality of the object is essential. Maybe there is increasing competition, but Herm  s tries to follow its path and be true to its identity and I think the fun part of it, the qualitative and elegant but witty, playful and joyful, is singular to Herm  s. We prefer to focus on the quality of the experience for our customers and guests and the quality of the relationship with our guests, which is meant to be human and intimate and we like it when people have fun.

What's next for Herm  s Maison?

I don't think we'll open new *m  tiers*, because we're already established in furniture, furnishing fabrics, wallpaper, decorative objects, textiles for the home, products for our baby line, games, accessories and tableware. I think we're all set, but the challenge is to reinvent ourselves, surprise our customers, be relevant and understand new usages.