

# INTERIOR DESIGN<sup>®</sup>

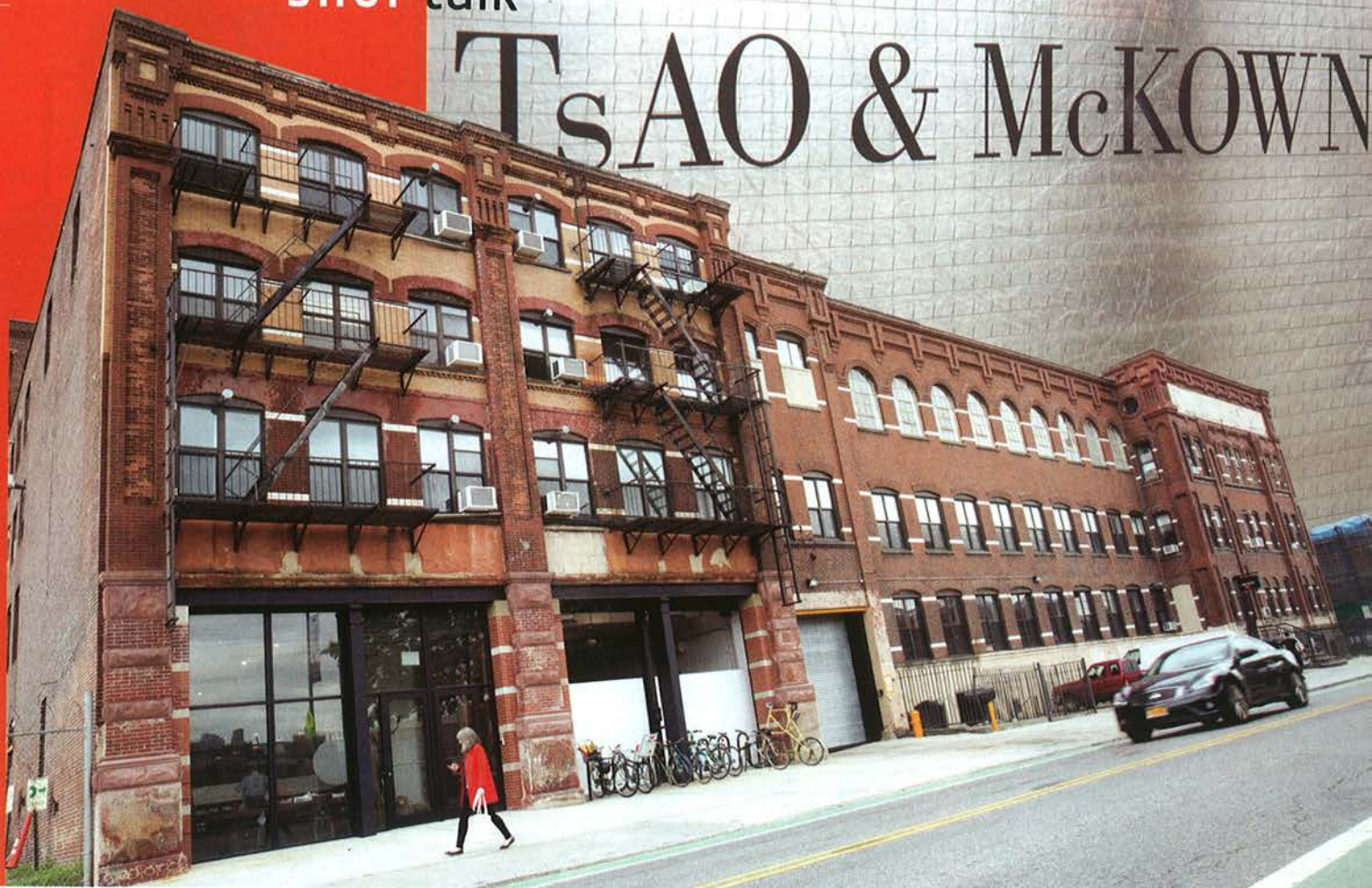
NOVEMBER  
2014

redesign a new view





## Tsao &amp; McKOWN



## a bold move

Calvin Tsao and Zack McKown relocate their firm to industrial Brooklyn, New York

**As usual**, Calvin Tsao is not sitting at his desk. Perhaps that's because the top is occupied by a giant printer? "It's there to underscore the fact that Calvin never is," Zack McKown says. "He works by roaming, whereas I need to sit and close the door to focus." Luckily for McKown, Tsao's partner in work and life, an office with a door is one of the perks afforded by Tsao & McKown's new studio, a 5,500-square-foot ground-level loft in an 1885 factory in Brooklyn, New York.

This definitely isn't gracious brownstone Brooklyn—the industrial Gowanus neighborhood boasts its very own Superfund cleanup site. That's quite a bit, well, *edgier* than the *Interior Design Hall of Fame* members' former location in Manhattan. "We no longer live in a pastoral, agrarian world, so get with the times!" Tsao says triumphantly, surveying the parking lot outside the window.

McKown adds, "I've always wanted to be street-front." Nighttime passersby often peek through the glass, thinking there might be a hip bar inside. Although the relocation was a forced issue, as the Manhattan building was being redeveloped, change was not unwelcome. "Moving offers a chance to reflect on how far we've come and where we're going. We feel we're maturing, not just as professionals but also in how we look at the world," Tsao continues. Whether designing a retirement home for Bhutanese monks or a wellness center in China, the partners are trying to expand the very definition of what an interior is. In McKown's words: "Design is not just about creating. It's also about making life better."

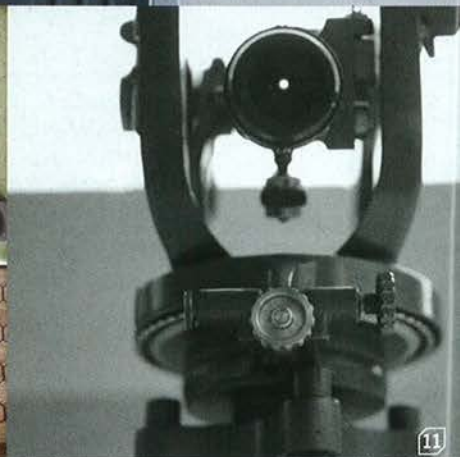
The partners love being connected to the thrum of Brooklyn, the epicenter of creative cool. "It's full of writers, makers, photographers, fabricators," Tsao notes. "It's energizing to be in this emerging mix. There's a real sense of community." Plus rooftop yoga. —Jen Renzi >

**From top:** Tsao & McKown occupies part of the ground level of the Old American Can Factory, built in 1885. The *Interior Design Hall of Fame* members in their private office, in front of bookshelves by Bruno Rainaldi.





1. The staff of 25 works in an open plan.
2. Rubber slides by Comme des Garçons serve as design inspiration.
3. A French 19th-century ophthalmic instrument and a 20th-century elevator sign share space on a wooden tray.
4. Painter's tape on the concrete floor represents the mud-treatment room for the spa at a hotel in Suzhou, China, that Calvin Tsao is developing with his brother's company, Octave.
5. The materials library occupies 700 square feet.
6. Existing gas meters were retained for their un-self-conscious beauty.
7. These mock-ups were part of the design process for a Shu Uemura lipstick case.
8. A cast-foam model represents a sink being custom-designed for a house in Massachusetts.
9. Painted plywood partitions divide the 5,500 square feet into three studios.



10. These materials are being considered for the Suzhou hotel spa project.
11. This apparatus is a David White universal 8300 surveying scope.
12. The designers' love for artisanal weaves is evident in this sample from Papilo Handmade Designer Rugs.
13. A fired-clay statue of Mao Zedong represents the firm's work in China. ➤





1



2

3



6



7

8



12



13

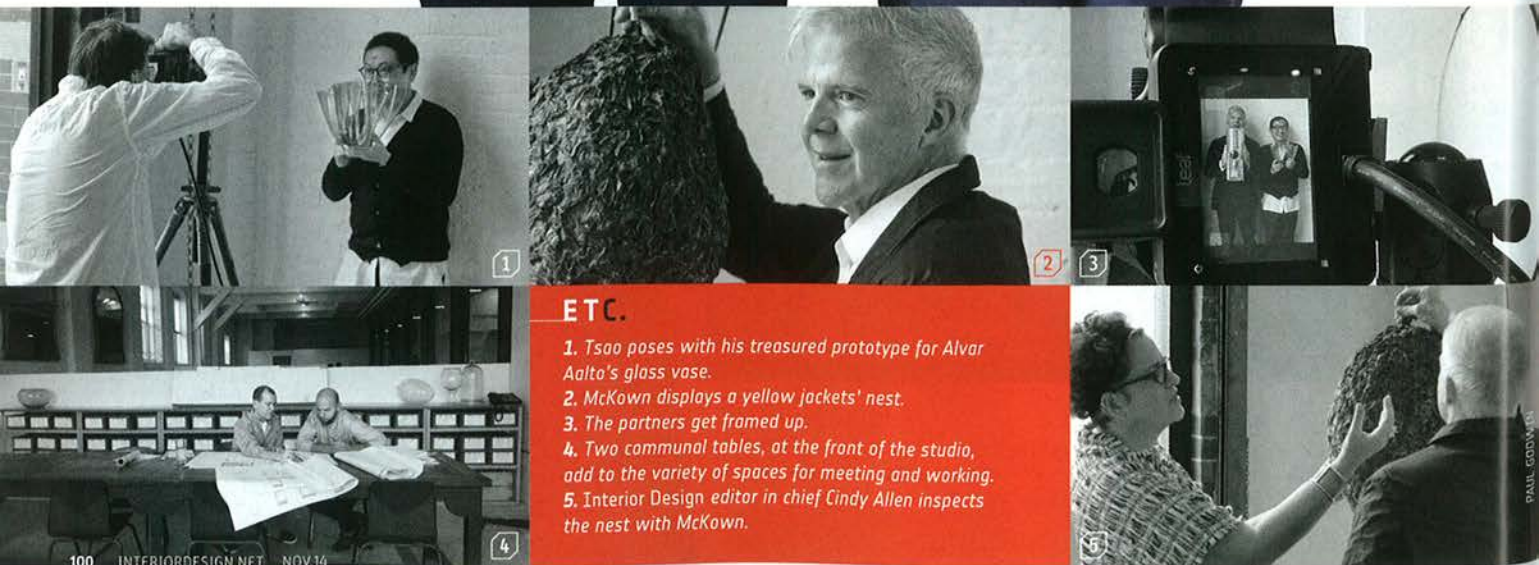
"We are one part tinkerers, one part critical thinkers" —Calvin Tsao





"This cast-aluminum peanut-vending machine, probably from the 1930's, effortlessly accommodates and celebrates its function" —Zack McKown

"I'm drawn to any materials that have a double reading, for example glass that looks like metal" —Calvin Tsao



**ETC.**

1. Tsao poses with his treasured prototype for Alvar Aalto's glass vase.
2. McKown displays a yellow jackets' nest.
3. The partners get framed up.
4. Two communal tables, at the front of the studio, add to the variety of spaces for meeting and working.
5. Interior Design editor in chief Cindy Allen inspects the nest with McKown.