

/ WORDS ROSSARA JAMIL

# A UNIQUE FAMILIARITY

To bolster the Spa Esprit Group's distinctive feel-good brand identity, design studio WY-TO brought a cross-pollination of ideas to several of its beauty and food and beverage outlets.



Yann Follain,  
Managing Director  
and Head of Design  
of WY-TO

Multi-disciplinary design studio WY-TO's primary scope entails exhibitions, installations and curatorial works. These include exhibitions at the National Gallery and the ArtScience Museum. Yann Follain, WY-TO's Managing Director and Head of Design, was also the Festival Director of Archifest 2018.

Speaking of his first encounter with the Spa Esprit Group's founder Cynthia Chua, he says, "She saw our exhibitions and how we could transform spaces to promote the arts, and said that she knew we could do the same for retail.

"She asked me what my vision was. Based on what she was explaining to me, I told her 'Alice in Wonderland', the idea of gazing through the looking glass."

In 2017 and 2018, the lifestyle company appointed WY-TO to conceptualise four Singapore outlets. These are Strip and Browhaus at ION Orchard, Spa Esprit at Wheelock Place, Strip at Paragon and Tiong Bahru Bakery at Chip Bee Gardens.

In line with the Spa Esprit Group's belief in an individualistic look for each outlet, WY-TO proposed diverse concepts. For instance, Spa Esprit at Wheelock Place

features soft curves and a farm-to-beauty concept.

Compared to the quirky vibe of the ION Orchard outlet, Strip at Paragon sports a deeper palette and brass surfaces. These produce an upscale look to cater to the clientele there.

"Each project was radically different, in textures and the look and feel, for the target customers and locations," Follain shares. "What's important is to ensure a sense of well-being with high customisation, uniqueness and familiarity."

Working with Chua and the Spa Esprit Group team entailed design thinking discussions on the role of design in the retail, beauty and food and beverage businesses. Though the outlets are wildly different, there is one common thread that gives the brands a shared identity.

Says Follain, "The Spa Esprit Group is not looking for trends, but experiences and uniqueness. Strip and Browhaus at ION Orchard is different from Strip at Paragon, yet the attention to detail is the same. It's the idea that it's something familiar, where you recognise it and you feel good. You would want to come back and share it with others. It's a very personal feeling."



## / ABOVE

With seating areas here, customers can explore and experience the various products at Spa Esprit, Wheelock Place comfortably.



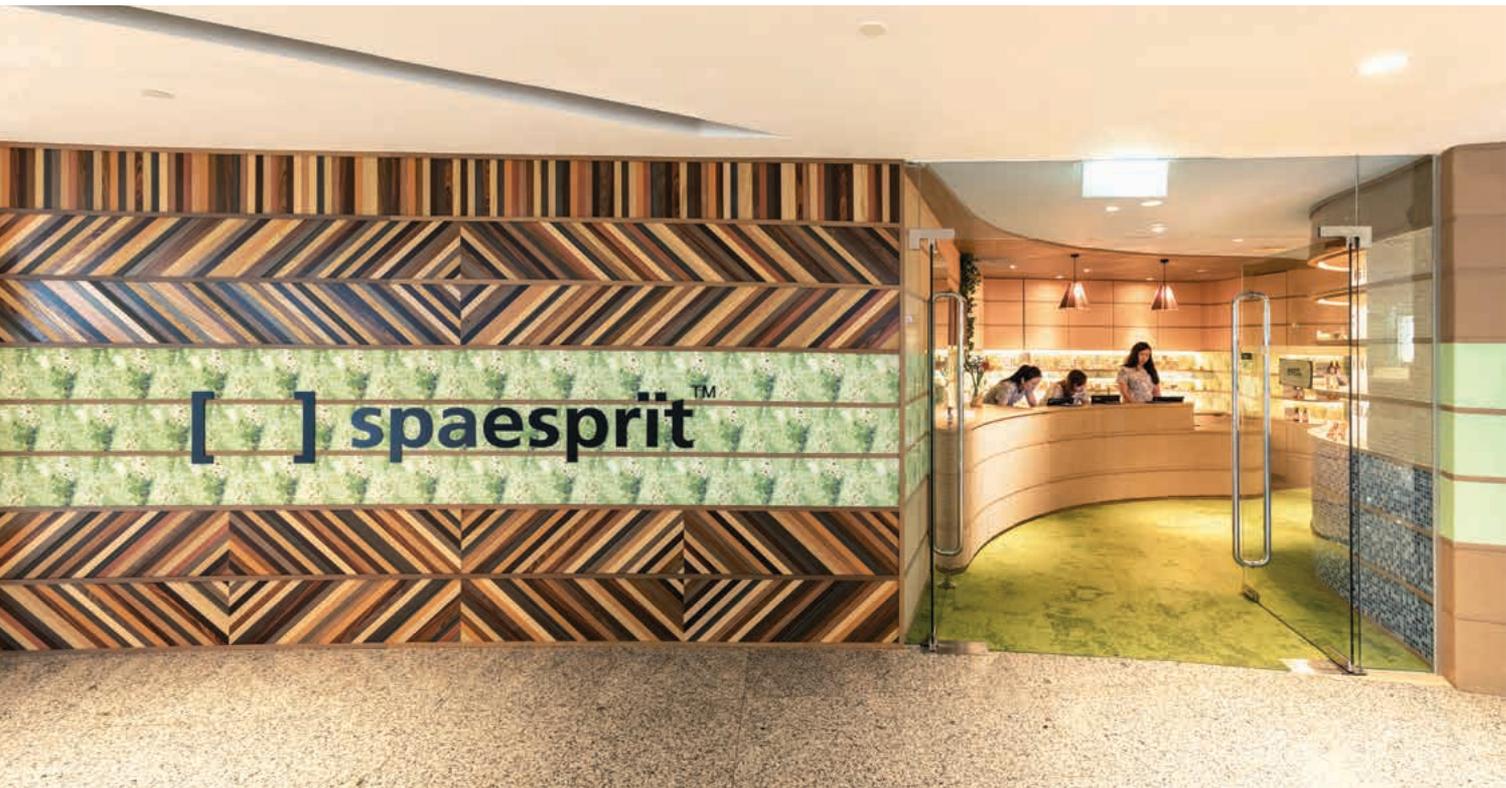
Scan the QR code for an interview with Cynthia Chua, Founder and Chairman of Spa Esprit Group and Wonderscape Holdings, on the importance of design in her projects.

## SPA ESPRIT AT WHEELLOCK PLACE

The first brand by Chua, Spa Esprit started out in Holland Village over 20 years ago. It has since gone through changes.

Comparing the current 200m<sup>2</sup> outlet to its former nature-surrounded space, Follain explains, "Customers went to the Dempsey outlet for a reason. How can we create something similar in a highly dense area in a shopping mall?"

"The vision I had was very soft, all rounded, curved and smooth like our body. We also used a vocabulary of leaves, plants, wallpaper and wooden materials that pay tribute to the old Spa Esprit in Dempsey."



The material palette supports the "farm to beauty" concept. Customers walk through a winding green-carpeted passageway that contrasts against the wood finishes and blue mosaic tiles. Private treatment rooms flank the passageway.

In addition to shelves showcasing skincare and apothecary products, ample

seating lines sections of the passageway. Here, customers can relax and explore the products, hidden away from the busy mall.

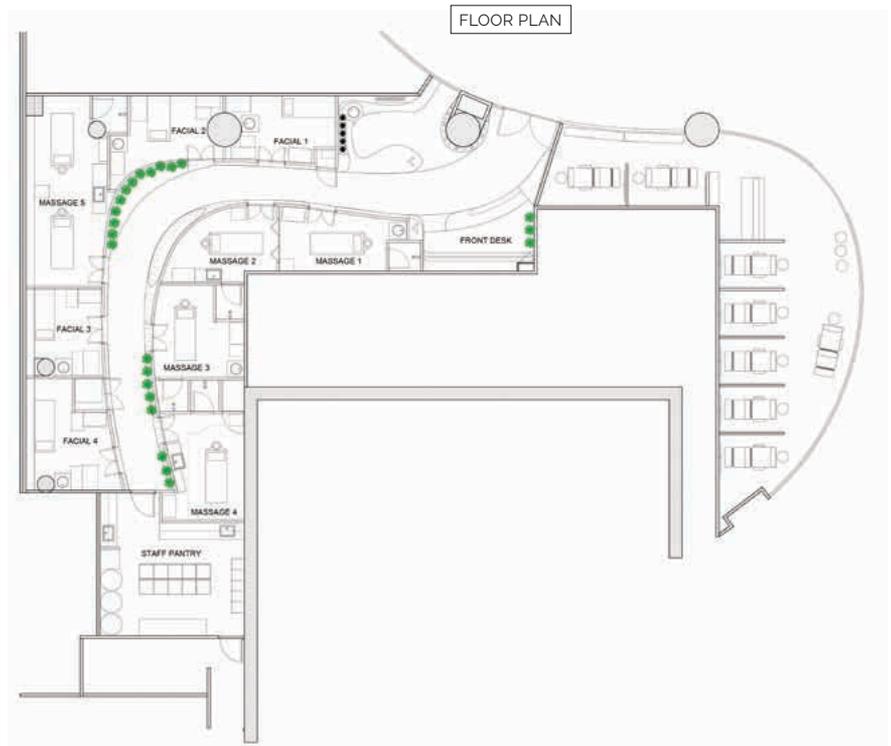
Inside the private treatment rooms, wallcoverings depict scenes of nature, yet the use of vibrant colours like purple, orange and green give each room a different vibe.





**SPA ESPRIT, WHEELOCK PLACE**

**INTERIOR DESIGNER** / WY-TO  
**TEAM** / YANN FOLLAIN, NAUFAL KAMAL  
**PROJECT MANAGER AND COORDINATOR** / RAJU THARMARAJAN RAMACHANDRA  
 (SPA ESPRIT GROUP)  
**CONCEPT** / JUNGLE ESCAPE  
**FLOOR AREA** / 200M<sup>2</sup>  
**CONTRACTOR** / JTECH INTERIOR  
**COMPLETION** / 2018



## STRIP AND BROWHAUS AT ION ORCHARD

Strip and Browhaus, which specialise in Brazilian waxing and brow and lash grooming respectively, share one 165m<sup>2</sup> of space at ION Orchard. Aside from a list of technical requirements, the project began with no brief.

The design is a strict departure from the typical beauty salon layout, which consists of a counter and a corridor that leads to private rooms on both sides.

Instead, Follain's vision was to have the seven private treatment rooms grouped in the middle of the space. Together with the front counter, it forms a monolithic





**STRIP AND BROWHAUS, ION ORCHARD**

**INTERIOR DESIGNER** / WY-TO

**TEAM** / YANN FOLLAIN, FLORIANE BATAILLARD, JAMIE DING

**PROJECT MANAGER AND COORDINATOR** / RAJU THARMARAJAN RAMACHANDRA (SPA ESPRIT GROUP)

**CONCEPT** / THE JEWEL BOX

**FLOOR AREA** / 165M<sup>2</sup>

**CONTRACTOR** / BIO DESIGN

**COMPLETION** / 2017

FLOOR PLAN



structure. The beds for brow and lash grooming are at the back of retail space.

In line with the Jewel Box concept, the counter features a faceted design with white, grey, green and metallic surfaces – presenting a futuristic feel. A passageway circles the structure, leading to the private treatment rooms and the treatment beds at the back.

Borrowing from museum galleries, the Wall of Fame passageway holds the brand's memorable past advertising campaigns as well as a product display.

As a sharp contrast to the futuristic shell, the rooms interiors' don wallcoverings that depict Renaissance illustrations on the walls and ceilings.



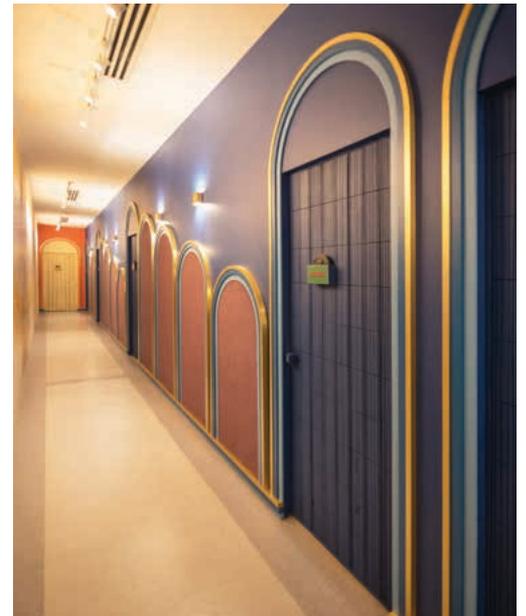
## STRIP AT PARAGON

To cater to a different set of demographics, the 130m<sup>2</sup> Strip outlet at Paragon took a different tack. "The interiors are a bit more *atas* [Malay for upscale] and, at the same time, fun," Follain says.

They veered from the colourful and young concepts. Instead, with the use of marble finishes, brass and deep colours like royal blue, the main thrust of the design was to achieve elegance.

A large brass wall with the story of Strip welcomes customers, along with customised glass shelves with seating in green.

Here, WY-TO took inspiration from grand European swimming pools and the Art Deco era. Arches outlined in slim,



elegant lines make a consistent motif throughout the outlet, from the marble-clad counter to the private treatment rooms.

To work with the long and narrow space, a layout with a passageway down the middle allows the optimum number of

treatment rooms.

The arches appear in the treatment rooms, too. However, oversized images of synchronised swimmers serve as a surprising antithesis to the refined feel of the outlet.

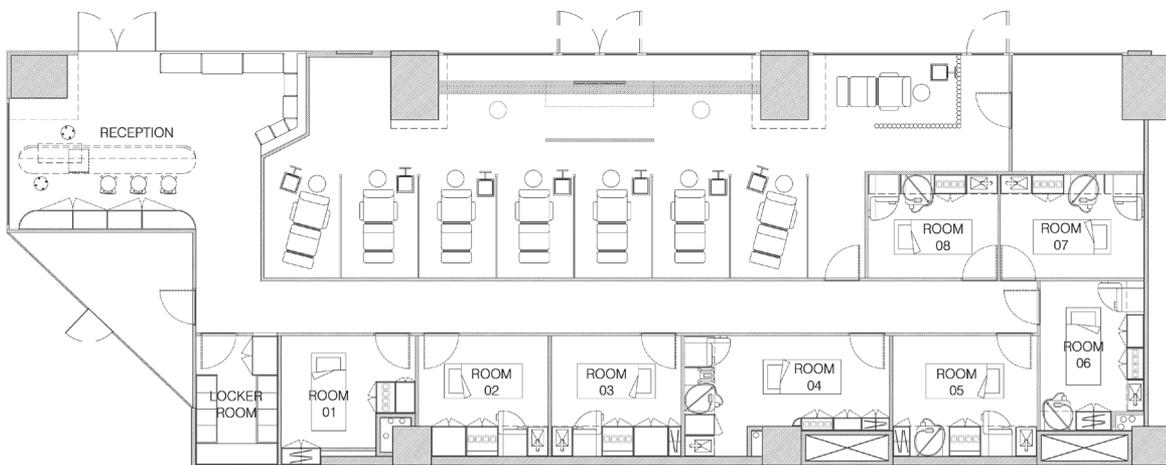


**STRIP, PARAGON**

**INTERIOR DESIGNER** / WY-TO  
**TEAM** / YANN FOLLAIN, AMIRUL NAZREE  
**PROJECT MANAGER AND COORDINATOR** / RAJU THARMARAJAN RAMACHANDRA  
 (SPA ESPRIT GROUP)  
**CONCEPT** / ART DECO SPLASH  
**FLOOR AREA** / 130M<sup>2</sup>  
**CONTRACTOR** / JTECH INTERIOR  
**COMPLETION** / 2018



FLOOR PLAN



## TIONG BAHRU BAKERY AT CHIP BEE GARDENS

With the first outlet at Tiong Bahru in 2012, the brand has expanded quickly with five outlets now. The outlet at Chip Bee Gardens opened in mid-2018.

The design went through a few iterations to achieve a concept that would make it look as if it has always been there. The aim was to create a sense of neighbourliness and sincerity.

The team transformed the 130m<sup>2</sup> space by using concrete flooring, glossy wall tiles, a bold wall mural by artist Koon Beng and wood finishes. The generous facade is fitted with a mix of square glass panes, glass doors and an oversized signage.



A key feature of this outlet is the takeaway express lane. "As an air-conditioned outlet, we could lose the connection with the outside world. When you have an express lane outside, there's a queue and sense of proximity and connection," Follain explains.

Long tables are placed outside for those who love to watch the world go by, as well as a cove, in vibrant red and green, that seats two to three persons. WY-TO worked closely with the Group's project manager and coordinator, Raju Tharmarajan Ramachandra.



Follain adds, "Raju was the key person between everyone, helping to find creative solutions and materials, such as the handcrafted wooden display showcase and customised tiles featuring the bakery's signature croissant."

**TIONG BAHRU BAKERY,  
CHIP BEE GARDENS**

**INTERIOR DESIGNER** / WY-TO  
**TEAM** / YANN FOLLAIN, CLARE TAN,  
FLORIANE BATAILLARD  
**FLOOR AREA** / 130M<sup>2</sup>  
**CONTRACTOR** / JTECH INTERIOR  
**COMPLETION** / 2018



FLOOR PLAN

