

## CAREER TIPS

### The ability to bring business, art and fashion together.

ENCATC talked with Ping Tao Lee, the founder of LIGHTWELL, a store in Taipei where fashion merges with an immersive art experience, presenting customers with an “entertaining shopping journey”. Having graduated in business administration, Ping Tao Lee shared with us some details of his experience as an entrepreneur with a taste and passion for art.



**ENCATC: What is the story behind LIGHTWELL? Why did you want to start this project?**

**Ping Tao Lee:** I always dream of owning a space where I can fulfill my ideal. A place where artistic creation can harmoniously join hands with business practices. A place where we can transform art into a profitable business. LIGHTWELL is the embodiment of my dream. I want to create a place in the same way we create art, finding the balance between commerce and art. I want to prove that art could help business and vice versa.

LIGHTWELL is the first concept store that combines fashion selected shops with an immersive art experience in Taiwan. On the first floor of LIGHTWELL, we present customers with selected fashion goods. On the second and third floors, customers can explore contemporary art exhibitions.

LIGHTWELL initiates a new imagination for contemporary retail industries when positioning their physical channels, and provides an amiable platform for contemporary art to explore new opportunities and new audiences.

**ENCATC: What differentiates you from other similar fashion retail channels?**

**Ping Tao Lee:** LIGHTWELL presents customers with an entertaining shopping journey.

When an online alternative can perfectly supplant a physical transaction, and when the meticulous service can no longer satisfy capricious consumers, corporate needs to find a unique shopping experience that can fit its brand's core value and please its customers. We choose to merge fashion retail with contemporary art exhibitions because of the high correlation between their nature and target audience.

This proposal adopts the concept of Retail Theater to design the entire consumer journey in our space. Retail Theater is a method to display a store in a theatrical, artistic, and creative way and is deliberately designed to make shopping entertaining. It is as if customers have watched an entire show during their shopping journey.

LIGHTWELL chooses the low chroma grey and white as the primary optical colors, establishing a stage that harmoniously presents both commodities and artworks. A lightwell that runs through the first and fifth floors ingeniously introduces the natural light into the indoor space, illuminating the seven-meter-high installation art designed by the artist, Kou Tak Leong. The view of panoramic greening trees outside the window serves as the interval break during the show,

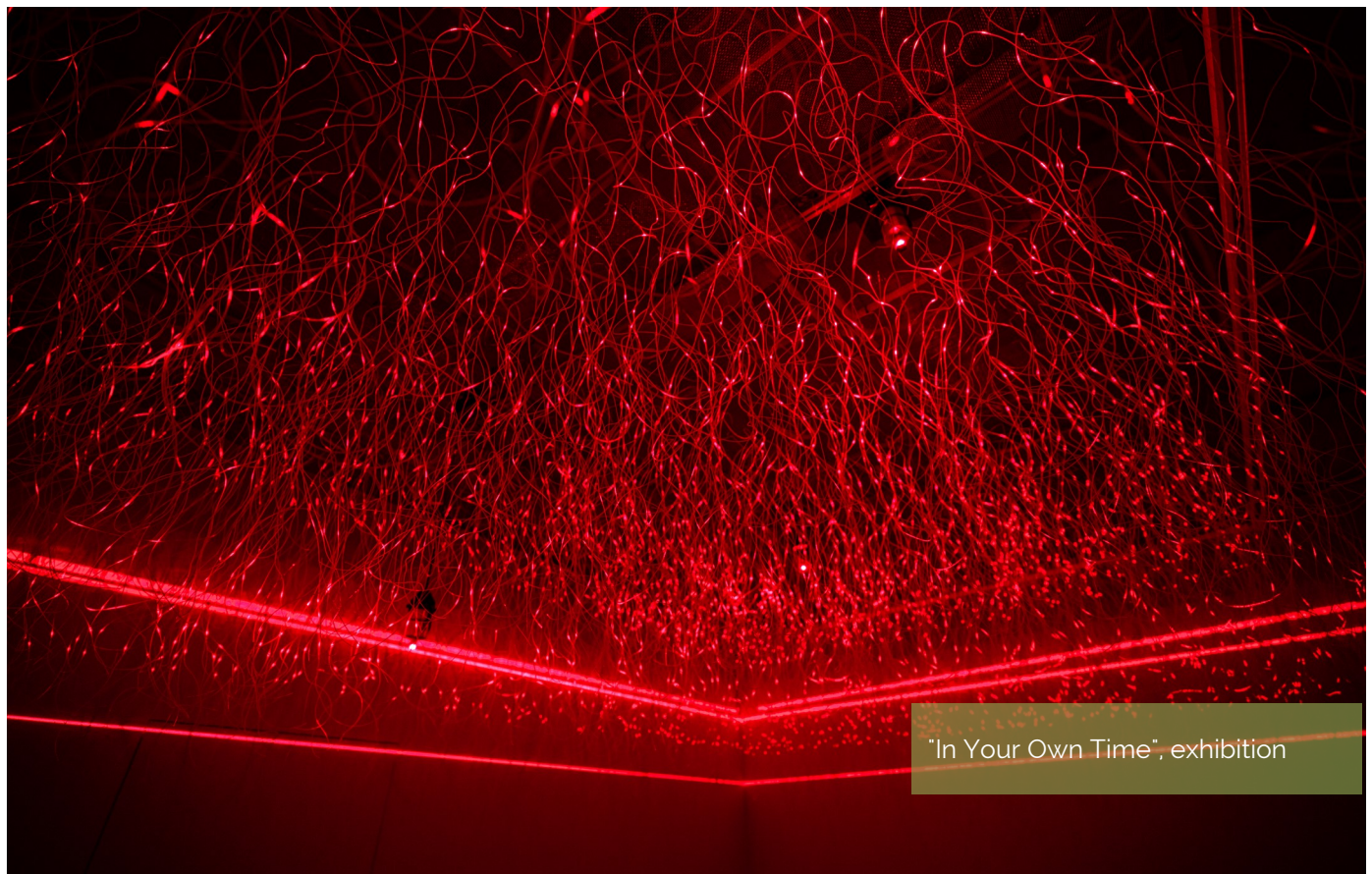
providing a mental and physical space for customers to stop and breathe. We hope customers visiting LIGHTWELL can swiftly and smoothly flow between fashion shopping and art exploring, enjoying this magnificent show that they are part of as the performers.

**ENCATC: What have been some recent innovative projects you have worked on that you are most proud of ?**

**Ping Tao Lee:** The first exhibition of LIGHTWELL, "In Your Own Time." "In Your Own Time" is the first solo exhibition of a Macanese artist, Kou Tak Leong. The installation artwork "Light Zone," which collaborated with the space design at the beginning of construction, has successfully incorporated the artwork into the interior light, creating a natural-like visual experience. This exhibition had received high praise and countless affirmations from architecture specialists, professionals in the art community, and fashion industries.

**ENCATC: Can you give us some background into your educational and professional experience that has led to where you are today leading the company?**

**Ping Tao Lee:** I majored in business administration for my bachelor's degree. After graduation, my first job was as a project manager in the classical music







industry, where I learned the concept of combining business with art. Then I also spent several years in the electronic commerce industry, sharpening my online sensitivity. These experiences provided the foundation for my current business. I currently run two companies. One is focusing on the fashion retail business, and the other is specialising in producing Mandarin musicals.

Looking back on my career, I realised that starting up a business, creating something from scratch is always what I wanted to do. It is the kind of lifestyle that I pursued. Art and music, on the other hand still play an essential part in my life. Therefore, in every key and decisive moment in my life, I somehow always decide to move towards these two dimensions. To me, small startups are more attractive than big corporations, and the classical music industry is much more desirable than high-tech business. I believe that if people can honestly face their preferences and bravely pursue their interests, they will eventually find a place where they can comfortably express their passion.

**ENCATC: What skills or personal attributes do you think you have that have helped you to run your company?**

**Ping Tao Lee:** I believe that integrity is the key. Integrity is not a skill that you can learn or a personal attribute you were born with; it is more like a promise you keep for yourself and others. Starting a business involves countless interactions with people, strategic partners,

employees, suppliers and investors, and clients. Among these interactions that involve the exchange of value, trust is the foundation. Without integrity, you would not be trustworthy.

During my startup career, I never took advantage of anyone but was always sincere and honest. Establishing a long-term and stable relationship with stakeholders is my top priority. As a result, the turnover rate is low, and the retention rate is high in my team. Most of the young talents have stayed and worked with me for more than three years.

**ENCATC: What do you wish you had known before starting the company?**

**Ping Tao Lee:** No, there is nothing I wish I had known before. You do not honestly “know” anything before you finally experience those things. So, if I have a chance to travel through time and give advice to myself, I will tell this young idiot to be healthy both physically and mentally. I will also ask him to embrace the failures. Starting a business is never easy, and losses are ordinary. But you always need to be prepared and plan for your next move. Please think before you make any decision and once you make it, never hesitate. You will never know when your company will be good enough, but you need to believe that you and your company will be good enough.



**ENCATC:** What have been the most difficult challenges you have encountered? How have you been able to overcome them?

**Ping Tao Lee:** I believe that difficulties never go away, but it just changes its appearance at different times. And I also think that different stages of the startup will face other challenges. But the most difficult challenge to me is the uncertainty in the initial phase of my startup journey. I did not know whether my decision was right or wrong, and I was unsure whether my company was on the right track under my leadership. I was anxious, especially knowing that I had limited resources, and there was no room for making any mistakes.

What I can do is continuously examine my decisions and focus on the things that I can control. I try my best on things that I can control and learn from the result of things that I cannot control. Through practices, I eventually conquer this uncertainty.

**ENCATC:** . How did you go about getting startup funds, and how did you use them to get your company up and running?

**Ping Tao Lee:** I got my first funding from my deposit and the investment of my family. After that, I spent much time studying the failure cases of most startup

companies. Based on my observations, most startups fail in the initial stage because they are lacking a steady and stable cash flow. As a result, my initial plan focused on building a business model that can generate cash flow. I spent my first month striving for the exclusive right of authorization for a fashion brand from an American company, and I managed to break even for the next two years. Having a stable cash flow is crucial for running a business. You can make long-term decisions without being interrupted by short-term lack of cash flow, and you will have more substantial bargaining power when negotiating a loan with banks or financing with external investors.

**ENCATC:** What advice would you give to students or early-career professionals looking to start their creative projects?

**Ping Tao Lee:** Overall, I would say that the market is cruel. There is no such thing as a brilliant and million-dollar-worth idea. Even ideas are worthy if you conduct them correctly. And "always" be honest with yourself. Here is my specific advice: First, you must know the reason why you want to be an entrepreneur. Never start a business for the sake of starting a business. Suppose there are some companies already doing what you want to do. Joining them might be a good option as well. Second, you need to evaluate your risk tolerance and be prepared for failures because things do not usually happen according to your plan. It would help if you first imagined the worst scenario. If the worst thing happens and you can still bear it, then perhaps you can try.

Lastly, it would be best if you found a partner. This person must possess different professional skills and share the same beliefs with you. If you are talented in creating content, you need to find someone who appreciates your talent and knows how to run a business, or vice versa. Starting a business is very challenging; it is essential to have a passion and have a partner.

**ENCATC:** What keeps you motivated and going?

**Ping Tao Lee:** *Excelsior* and responsibility. *Excelsior* is my expectation toward myself, and responsibility is my promise to others. I have had a curious mind since my childhood. I always want to know more and want to progress. I believe that perfection is not a static result but a dynamic process. Humankind can never be perfect, but we can pursue perfection. The incremental approach of understanding more and doing better for my business brings authentic happiness to me. The other motivation is the





LIGHTWELL's Team

responsibility to others. What I have achieved and what I will achieve are based on tremendous and innumerable help from other people. I am always in debt to those people, and I have responsibilities to them. Therefore, I cannot give up. Take my employees as an example. Most of them are young talents and they spent the best moment in their life on my company to believe in what we are doing and trust in me. I am responsible for making these beliefs and trust worthy and making their work meaningful for their lives.

As a result, both *excelsior* and responsibility are the main motivations that force me to take and enjoy everyday challenges.



### About LIGHTWELL

Located in the Zhongshan commercial district in Nanxixin, Taipei City, LIGHTWELL aims to create a place where culture can communicate naturally. The three-story space, with fashion and art as the starting point, selects fashion brands from the United States, Australia, Europe and Asia, and joins the contemporary art exhibition planning, looking forward to creating a unique shopping experience.



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