

# Leong Leong New York City

Two architect brothers sought different mentors, then opened their own firm. With budgets big and small, they are designing through the recession.

## FOUNDED 2009

## DESIGN STAFF 7

**PRINCIPALS** Christopher Leong, Dominic Leong

**EDUCATION** Christopher - Princeton University, M.Arch., 2006; University of California, Berkeley, B.A., 2000. Dominic - Columbia University, MSAAD, 2003; California Polytechnic State University, B.Arch., 2001

**WORK HISTORY** Christopher - SHoP Architects, 2006-09; Leong Architects, 2001-03; Gluckman Mayner Architects, 2000-01. Dominic - PARA-Project, 2006-09; Bernard Tschumi Architects, 2003-07

**KEY COMPLETED PROJECT** 3.1 Phillip Lim Flagship Store, Seoul, 2009

**KEY CURRENT PROJECT** ZD Winery, Napa, California, 2012

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## Siki Im Concept Store

In Siki Im's pop-up store, under the High Line in New York City, customers moved around a concave platform made from a soy-based spray foam. Clothes were tucked around the structure so "you had to really look for them," says Dominic.



**B**rothers Dominic Leong and Chris Leong became architects for the only reason that matters: They couldn't imagine doing anything else. Growing up in California's Napa Valley in a house designed by their father—a computer scientist-turned-architect—they saw the pitfalls

of the profession, as well as its possibilities, and vowed to someday start a firm together. In the meantime, they acquired different mentors: Dominic worked for Bernard Tschumi, while Chris apprenticed at SHoP Architects.

When Dominic (now 33) presented a scheme to Tschumi, the reaction was likely to be, "How does this advance the history of architecture?" (Tschumi was the longtime dean of Columbia's architecture school.) And when Chris (who's 34) presented a scheme to the SHoP partners, they were likely to ask, "How does this advance architectural practice?" (SHoP's founders are expanding their role beyond architecture and into development and construction.) When they left their employers to form Leong Leong, in 2009, the brothers combined approaches, showing they could be both formally inventive while devising new ways to make a project a reality.

Determined not to become paper architects while waiting out the recession, they have thrown themselves into small projects, even doing some of the construction work themselves. And at a time when ground-up commissions are elusive, they have avoided being typecast as interior architects by treating interiors as landscapes, with distinct "indoor" and "outdoor" spaces. That's true of their 4,000-square-foot store in Los Angeles for the Cambodian-American fashion designer Phillip Lim. There, they installed undulating walls that suggest a shopping street, under a ceiling—a light-diffusing PVC membrane—that could be a sky. While many fashion brands have trademark colors or logos, the Leongs are giving Lim a trademark texture, using custom concrete tiles, with bulbous profiles, on the facades of the two stores. The brothers are currently designing Lim's 13,000-square-foot office in Lower Manhattan.

Right now the Leong brothers are making a name for themselves even without big budgets. Recently, they designed the annual Beaux Arts Ball organized by the Architectural League of New York. The location was the Brooklyn Army Terminal, an intermodal transit hub in Brooklyn, designed by Cass Gilbert in 1918. With just \$15,000 to spend and acres of enclosed space to work with, they shrink-wrapped groups of plastic milk crates to create stations, which they call "mutant" objects, that encouraged gathering and socializing. All of it was easily recyclable, giving the architects a chance, Chris says, to make the project sustainable "while exploring aesthetic and cultural experiences rather than green clichés." *Fred A. Bernstein*



## Turning Pink

With graphic designer and officemate Jiminie Ha, the brothers opened a pop-up space on the Lower East Side called Turning Pink. They used slabs of rigid insulation (which will be reused) to create what, from the outside, seemed to be a 60-square-foot box, but, from the inside, dissolved into a kind of endless landscape.



## 3.1 Phillip Lim Stores

Dominic Leong, working with his previous firm, PARA-Project and Office Giancarlo Valle, turned a 5,000-square-foot warehouse-style building in Beverly Hills (above) into a boutique for the fashion designer Phillip Lim. For their second Phillip Lim store, in Seoul (at right and below), Leong Leong "cropped" the Los Angeles plan into a smaller footprint. Picking up on themes introduced in California, they covered interior walls with foam panels that erode into a constellation of brass stars. Exterior walls of custom-made concrete tiles form a gradient from bulbous to flat.

