



ENTREPRENEUR

# THE KANDID

## HONG KONG



WORDS & IMAGES: JOE MORTIMER





## LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

### To eat like a local...

Go to Lin Heung for lunch or dinner. It's a traditional Cantonese teahouse that harks back to the '60s.

### My top photography tip is...

When you visit a place that has been photographed many times, think about how you can present it in a different way.

### The most photogenic part of Hong Kong is...

I grew up on the Southside so I'm very partial to the beaches. I like to go down to Stanley or Repulse Bay and shoot a few seascapes.

### The best advice is...

Always take a step back to see where your life is. Don't be afraid to travel; it's such a big world out there. One thing I really enjoy about this job is being able to travel the world and meet people.

Photographer Justin Lim is almost apologetic when we meet at The Kandid, his studio in the bustling Sheung Wan neighbourhood of Hong Kong. "I'm afraid as far as entrepreneurs go, I'm quite a small potato by Hong Kong standards," he says as we sit down beneath its large windows.

But I'm inclined to disagree. The son of a lawyer, Lim spent 10 years following in his father's footsteps, practising law in the UK and Hong Kong, before his passion for photography overruled his previous career plan. What began as a hobby – shooting landscapes in the Surrey countryside where he grew up – became much more than that when he returned to Hong Kong 10 years ago and started taking on weekend assignments in the fashion world.

Lim's penchant for candid shots aroused both suspicion and admiration among clients and peers in Hong Kong's conservative photography scene, where the style tended to be posed and rigid. This made him stand out in the crowded fashion market, but the idea of doing something different was always on his mind. And then one day he decided to take the leap.

"There was someone very special in my life who told me, 'You're a decent lawyer but you're a much better photographer.' I think that gave me the kick up the backside I needed in terms of realising I could do more with photography.

"I wanted to do something with a space, but not a traditional studio space. I wanted to do something that had a bit more of a social edge, where people could come and relax and feel at home and where we would do things like workshops."

And so, with the help of an interior designer friend and start-up capital from his own pocket, The Kandid was born.

The 550-square-foot space is a visual feast, with polished concrete walls, chipboard benches and bookshelves lined with vinyl sleeves, hardback books and arty magazines. An all-blue Stars And Stripes hangs from the back wall ("I just really like denim," he explains) and every surface is covered with novelty items: vintage cameras, lamps, empty bottles, fake moustaches and Polaroid prints, all of which are used during photo-jamming sessions, Instagram workshops or brand collaborations.

And this is what makes the venture so innovative. The Kandid is a project built around a new world of social media and collaboration; a business catering to a generation of people that have cameras built into the phones in their pockets, who take and share photos of everything from their breakfast and their pets to the places they visit.

"I felt that there was an opportunity in Hong Kong to do something a bit different, and I was very keen to leverage new applications like Instagram and Snapchat and see what the younger people are

doing with photography," says Lim, fiddling with an old Praktica as he speaks.

Workshops at The Kandid include Instagram clinics for individuals, start-ups and small businesses; creative street portraiture classes; and courses in DSLR photography. Moreover, groups can just hire out the space and spend time playing with the props and taking photos, or use it for creative product launches or social gatherings.

"I wanted The Kandid to be a very collaborative space for people to come in and throw a few ideas about or use the space for their own means. We've had people who've done little pop-ups, and we had one girl who rented it just to play Twister all day."

Space is very much the final frontier in Hong Kong, where both residential and commercial real estate tends to be shoeboxed, although Lim still manages to squeeze in groups of up to 20 in The Kandid. But his idea has been a hit, and both he and his space are in high demand in the city. Time for a bigger venue? "Watch this space," he grins.

[thekandid.com](http://thekandid.com); [justlimphoto.com](http://justlimphoto.com)



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