



X+LIVING

Despite the pleasure-seeking spaces, it's not all fun and games for this successful Shanghai studio, although the founder clearly has business acumen when it comes to enjoyment.

"Playful" is used so often to describe the more exuberant works of architects and designers that the word is in very serious danger of losing its significance. With that in mind, referring to the prolific portfolio of Shanghai-based studio X+Living, which includes giant pastel flowers and M.C. Escher-like staircases, the word "playful" is somewhat redundant. And although this interior architecture practice's founder and director Li Xiang is known to enjoy watching her beloved cat attempting to type on her computer keyboard, and most of her projects have a fantasy-land quality, an air of complete professionalism abounds.

"Building a studio was not a sudden decision that flashed through my mind," says Li, looking back at life before she established the practice in 2011. She recalls that the projects she was working on at a government-run construction institute were based on conventional concepts and lacked creativity. Li was hankering for more innovation, and the chance to build something she felt was more connected to her values and spirit. "So I quit the job and founded my own studio," she says. X+Living has drawn much attention both at home and abroad thanks to what seems to be a shrewd commitment to the pursuit of architectural adventure and interior pleasure-seeking, and, it has to be said, for the exceptionally visual, photogenic quality of their output.

It is something of a paradox that the projects most demonstrably devoted to user experience, those that are built for children to play in, are X+Living's most articulate and arguably the most →