

LIVINGROOM by Dave Dal Molin

# northern soul

a new lifestyle concept retailer with plenty of verve

**t**aikang Lu's bustling little community of studios, teahouses and boutiques has added a new lifestyle concept retailer named Vervia. A purveyor of furniture, houseware, fashion and gift items, this shop aims to woo consumers with a product line that is designed entirely in-house.

"We created Vervia as a way to help make people's lives as beautiful as possible," says co-founder Iris Hreinsdottir. To achieve that lofty goal, the creative team, including Hreinsdottir from Iceland and her partner Marc Vincenz from Switzerland/UK, as well as Italian fashion designer Vivana Scala, Hangzhou artist Joyce Zhang and several locals, explores the design possibilities of cultural fusion.

The team's varied backgrounds express themselves in a product mix that includes Icelandic lava-stone necklaces and icicle-like perfume bottles, candles sculpted into qipao-clad figurines, and wooden chests, with drawers of varying heights and widths, in Alpine and contemporary styles. Another spectrum altogether is represented by whimsical Joe Phat' t-shirts, teddy bears in patterned silk jackets, and pot-bellied figurines with

springy legs. Playing cards, watches and pins imprinted with Mao Zedong images, and finely-crafted wooden airplanes and automobiles wait for their respective fetishists. A heavy injection of vitality, meanwhile, is delivered with vivid, kaleidoscopic patterns that stretch across cube seats, lamp shades, picture frames, flip flops and more.

If there is an underlying theme to this diverse collection of objects and inspirations, it has to be the verve. Every item is, to a greater and lesser extent, striking and vibrant. That said, by introducing so many original designs at once, some are bound to sell better than others; indeed, "that's already happening," says Vincenz. But a high level of customization should help shoppers find their individual level of verve. Customers can, for example, select from an extensive palette to create their own color combinations for any Vervia pattern. Better still, prices are reasonable considering all pieces are one-of-a-kind.

The shop itself is housed in a heritage building. Inside, the bare brick walls lend a sense of cohesion to the small, rather packed space, which includes a

cozy seating area and bar serving coffee, drinks and sandwiches for RMB 20-30.

But retail is just part of a grander scheme; Vervia plans myriad projects meant to boost the cultural richness of Shanghai residents. The group is transforming itself into a full-service graphic and interior design company, and intends to organize public classes on design-themed topics. A Vervia restaurant is also in the works, and Hreinsdottir is planning a wedding catalog. Meanwhile, a new office and second, larger Vervia outlet designed by celebrated Taiwanese architect Deng Kun Yan will open soon on Yangshupu Lu. And as if all this were not enough, Vervia shops are in the works for Beijing, Hong Kong, South Korea and Holland.

In short, Vervia has big, beautiful dreams. But to make extra sure our lives are filled with as much beauty as possible, we float the idea of using the Vervia restaurant as a discussion forum/venue for the city's writers, poets and journalists. To which Vincenz (who writes poetry and is about to publish a book) responds - "Let's do it." ■

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Vervia

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