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# Q&A: Five minutes with Maria Cheung, director and head of interior design at Squire & Partners

Fri 11 December 2020



Maria Cheung, director and head of interior design at Squire & Partners, on how she got started in property, the project she's proudest of, her advice for young people and her cultural recommendations.



Maria Cheung

### What do you value in people?

Honesty and enthusiasm. To do any job well, you must have a strong desire to do it, and to work well with other people, you must have their trust. That's everything.

### What do you like most about yourself?

I'm hard-working, determined and have a flexibility in my thinking and approach to work.

### What does your job entail?

I run the interior design department at Squire & Partners. We have a team of great designers and I review with them the full range of our work, from concept to details, and projects that are onsite as well as what is new and developing in the interiors market. I also meet and work closely with all our clients and consultants, and I keep an ear to the ground for any new opportunities to show off our talents!

### How did you join the property industry?

Originally, I trained as an architect and started out by setting up my own practice. It was good experience, and set me up for joining Squire & Partners in 2007. From the off, I worked across a range of projects, where I found a love for interiors that became the foundation for setting up our in-house interiors department.

### What do you like most about the property industry?

It's always evolving. We are about to enter a period that will be looked back on as a time of enormous change. There's a wealth of opportunity coming too, in adaptations that will inevitably come from the changes we're seeing on our high streets as former retail spaces are put to other uses, which may be sad for some right now but will lead to exciting times and potential.

### What are you most proud of in your career?

I've been lucky enough to work on a variety of projects, from large-scale, mixed-use developments to one-off houses, workspaces, co-living schemes and installations, and even product designs such as bags and door levers. Through these projects, we've gained a breadth of experience that enables us

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days and door levers. Through these projects, we've gained a breadth of experience that enables us to turn our skills to any project or challenge.

The project I'm most proud of is, of course, The Department Store. It's not only Squire & Partners' HQ here in the heart of Brixton, it also has a making studio for a community of makers and hosts a restaurant and events spaces that serve our staff and members. It was a fantastic opportunity that really pushed our ideas. Now, we're adding workspaces for the local community at The Department Store Studios, which will launch in early 2021.

### What advice would you give someone starting a career in the property industry?

Build experience. Work hard. Learn from people.

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We can't go to the cinema, restaurants, pubs or clubs, the theatre or the shops. What can we do? We can read, watch TV and listen to music, that's what. But where to start? See recommendations from the *Property Week* team and our readers below:



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### This week:

Maria Cheung, director and head of interior design at Squire & Partners shares some of her cultural recommendations:

### Something to watch:

Christopher Nolan's film *The Prestige* has magic, drama, brilliant styling, a flawless plot and a fabulous cast that features local Brixton hero, David Bowie.

### Something to read:

*Tuesdays With Morrie* by Mitch Albom is truly life-affirming. It is the one book I reread every five years or so, and each time I see something different in it as my perspective changes and I get older. It is just wonderful.

### Something to listen to:

The Killers are a favourite band of mine and *Sam's Town* is the album I always go back to. Their live

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set is a great list of arena-sized anthems that beg to be belted out.

Sometimes delightful, sometimes intriguing and tragic, the whole archive of *Desert Island Discs* is an incredible insight into a huge and wonderful range of people's lives and their work, dating back to the 1950s.

## Last week's recommendations:

Arya Taware, managing director and founder of FutureBricks shares some of her cultural recommendations:

### Something to watch:

*Secretariat*, directed by Randall Wallace, is a film drama about grit in the horse-racing industry, with a lead female character who was able to overcome the challenges of a male-dominated world.

### Something to read:

I recommend *Let It Go: My Extraordinary Story* by Dame Stephanie Shirley for its amazing life journey of an inspiring character who came to England as a Jewish refugee and started her own software company in the 1960s as a computer engineer. The concept of shared ownership – with many female CEOs having found their place at her multinational corporation – is admirable.

### Something to listen to:

*The Ikonns* podcast uncovers inspiring life journeys through guest interviews. They are uplifting and eye-opening. I particularly liked the episode 'Overcoming All Odds to Success with Susie Ma of Tropic Skincare'.

I love the song 'Endless' by Mark Eliyahu for its blending of instruments and futuristic electronics.

## Previous recommendations:

Phumzile Mbatha, senior quantity surveyor at Colliers International shares some of her cultural recommendations:

### Something to watch:

*Skyfall* (and all other James Bond movies), because I like to be kept on the edge of my seat, and *Black Panther*, for its depiction of numerous black women in powerful and engaging roles.

### Something to read:

*The Power of Habit* by Charles Duhigg – I believe no one is born great. Our daily habits make us great, and the book has some intriguing examples of how the right habits were crucial to the success of former Starbucks chief executive Howard Schultz and civil rights hero Martin Luther King Jr.

### Something to listen to:

*Promises* (feat. Joe L Barnes & Naomi Raine) by Maverick City Music – "Great is Your faithfulness to me. From the rising sun to the setting same, I will praise Your name. Great is Your faithfulness to me."

The Woman Evolve podcast, hosted by Sarah Jakes Roberts, focuses on redefining what it means to be a modern woman of faith.

*Founder of The Land Collective and Sqft Digital, Sarah Hayford, shares some of her cultural recommendations:*

### Something to watch:

Everyone needs to watch the US TV drama *Scandal* at some point in their lives. It is a brilliant show full of drama, darkness and, of course, scandal! I always love political dramas and really get into them.

### Something to read:



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