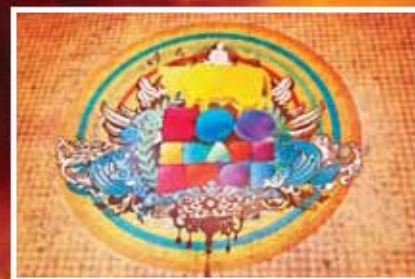


LIMELIGHT



# OVER THE MOON AT BOO SKATESHOP

Text by Lolita Guevarra Photographers Kerry Manning and Christian Carroll



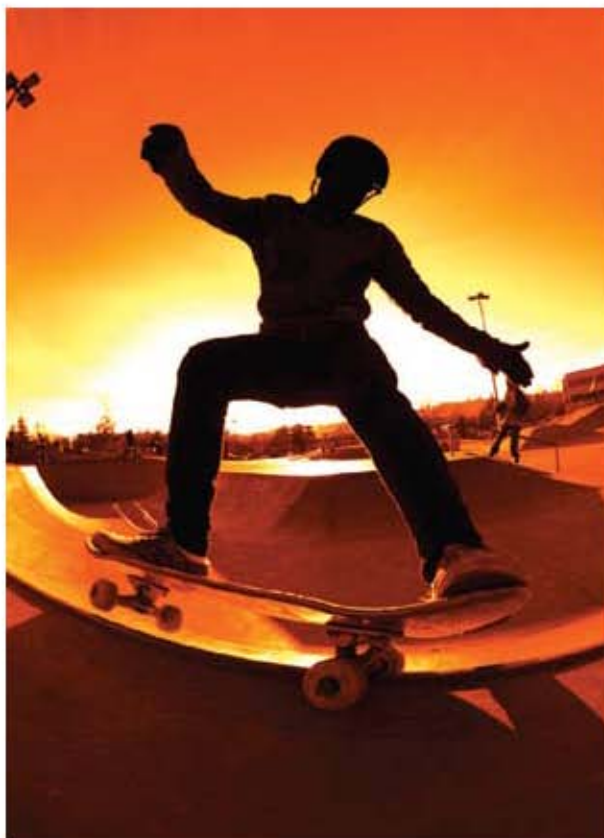
Skate wear is making headway in Ha Noi and you can thank Do Viet Anh for that. Since his return to Viet Nam more than ten years ago, he's not only introduced Lenin Park to its concrete grinding dwellers but also clothing the park's part-time residents not in typical DC and Billabong brands but well, with cows. Tapping into Viet Nam's agricultural background, Viet Anh has branded this farm animal for his stores Boo Skateshop and Bo Sua—and you can bet that he's milking it for all that its worth. Born Vietnamese but raised in the Czech Republic until age twenty, this entrepreneur remains deeply connected to his past but transforms his roots to fit the present. Svelte with features likened to Bruce Lee, Viet Anh at 29 exudes a laid back aura but with a determined expression.

Stepping into what could easily have been an office at Pixar Animations, I'm curiously entertained with a miniature easel alongside figurines from Over the Hedge and anime characters next to a toy car with a skateboard perched on top. My eyes fall on a yellow sign with a picture of a skateboarder and a slash through it prohibiting its act with rebellious words beneath stating "Proudly annoying pedestrians since 1972." "I didn't start skateboarding until my last year in the Czech Republic," recalls Viet Anh. "When my [twin] brother and I started skateboarding here, we were just beginners." Being the more gregarious twin, Viet Anh is the only one present for the interview while Hung busily manages the printing factory for the fashion line. Together, they noticed Viet Nam lacked the gear wear for skaters granting an open field for them to stake their claim.

A college dropout turned skateboarder turned franchise owner, Viet Anh followed a road less travelled from the start. The initial shop started from his home with sporadic calls from buyers. "I'd get a call and have to stop skateboarding to open up my house for friends who wanted to buy," laughs Viet Anh regarding the early days in the fashion biz. Noticing that more time was spent herding customers at home, the twins decided to open up a store. Drawing from their national pride, they chose a cow and settled on "boo" because in Czech that is the sound a cow makes. Landing a prime location across the Hanoi Amsterdam School in the Ba Dinh District, Boo Skateshop opened in 2001 and sales from that location helped open four additional stores.

After four years in business and learning the import trade, Viet Anh realized that the company could create its own product. In 2006,

hosting Ha Noi's first annual skateboarding competition, he asked his longtime skater friend to design a t-shirt for organizers to wear thus indirectly launching the first apparel for Bo Sua. But it was not until July 2009 that the in-house label came to fruition. "I wanted Bo Sua to be a recognizable brand to Vietnamese people," says Viet Anh, "It translates as cow milk—it's a product of a cow." Bo Sua is comprised of two labels: Boo and Milk. Boo uses iconic Vietnamese images in its collection such as bunched morning glory and the infamous yellow sandals. Milk, on the other hand, is an interpretation of world trends.



When Viet Anh's not answering numerous calls or listening to Good Charlotte on his iPod, he's managing operations and discussing new designs for the company. In between running the show in Ha Noi and launching the first Boo Skateshop in HCMC at Vincom Center this May, Viet Anh makes time for one of his favorite causes, the environment.

Flanking the walls of both Bo Sua and Boo Skateshop are purchasable canvas bags to decrease the usage of plastic bags. Promoting his re-use mission are postcards picturing a red plastic bag posed as the devil and a white canvas bag as the opposing angel. In the past, Boo sponsored a competition for Education for Nature Vietnam (ENV), a Vietnamese non-profit supporting the conservation of nature and the environment. Viet Anh approached students at Ha Noi's design school to compete for the top five designs on t-shirts for sale at Bo Sua. At the end of

the campaign Bo Sua raised VND80 million.

Grounded and street smart, Viet Anh places a lot of credit to his on the job training rather than in academia. Having never finishing college but running a successful franchise, Viet Anh states, "Experience is more valuable, it deals with the real world. The old system in Vietnam is not complementary to how Vietnam is today. Families push children to go to university and study only theories." Although, he supports students attending university Viet Anh tips the scale on experience over theory any given day. In an era of touch-pad phones and universal WiFi accessibility, Viet Anh and Hung have put their stock on cows and are over the moon at their success. ■

For more information please visit [www.bosua.vn](http://www.bosua.vn) and [www.booskateshop.com](http://www.booskateshop.com)