



AAPIIDA executive board members Eric Chang, Alicia Cheung, Noz Nozawa, Jessica Davis, Will Nguyen and James Fung at the gala on May 6. Akashi Creative

## Events

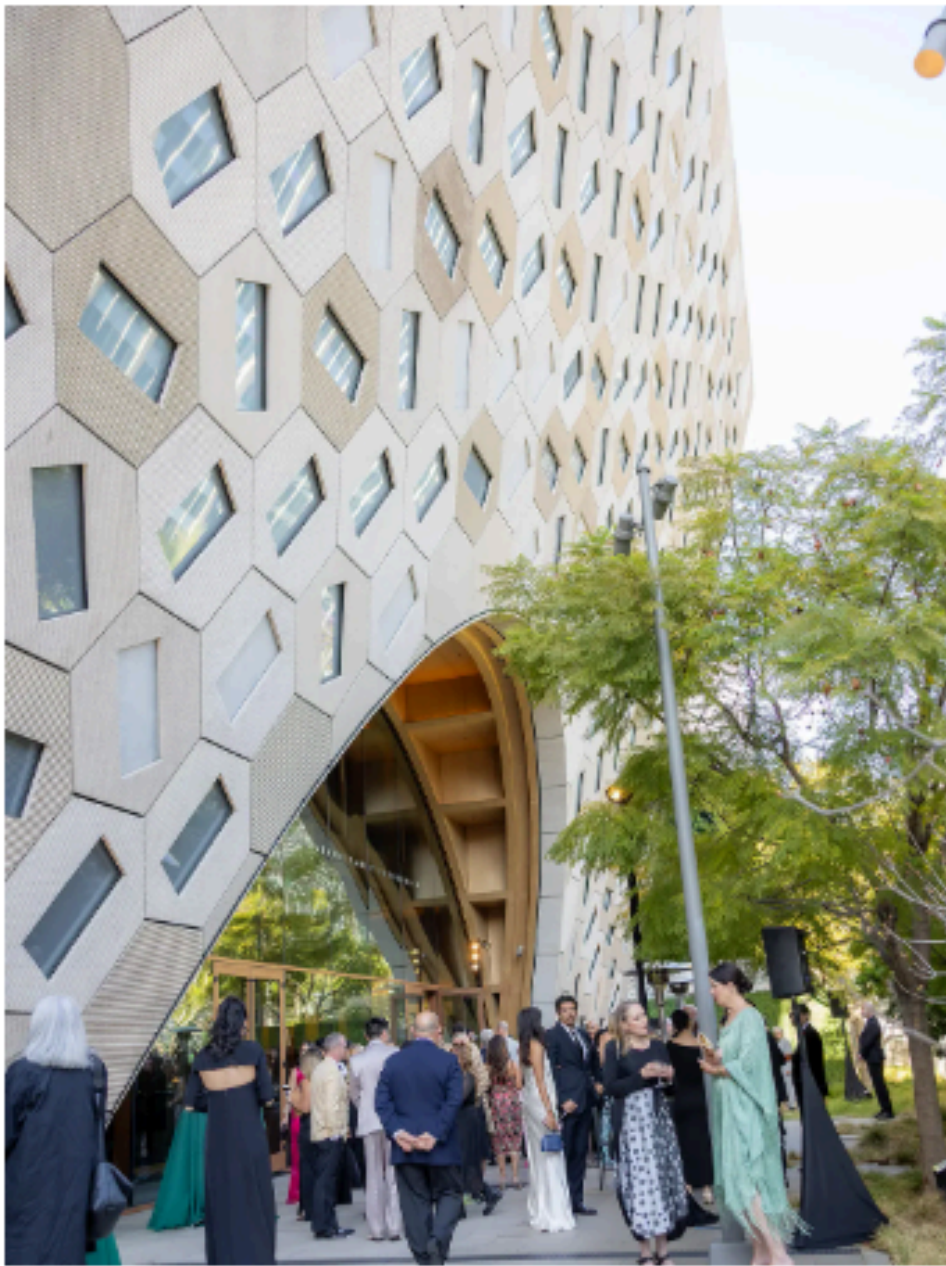
# Community, Cocktails, Karaoke! Inside the AAPIIDA Gala in LA

The fundraiser for the Asian American Pacific Islander Design Alliance, co-sponsored by AD PRO, was a celebration of creativity, collaboration and diversity

By Catherine Hong

May 13, 2026

“This my first time wearing an áo dài, what do you think?” asked Will Nguyen, founder of LA design gallery Collective Form, as he showed off his traditional gold silk Vietnamese formalwear to designers Eric Chang, Claudette McCarron, James Fung, and Noz Nozawa. “I ordered it three days ago from a tailor in Vietnam and it just arrived!” The group, all executive board members of the Asian American Pacific Islander Design Alliance, was helping to welcome the more than 300 guests—including designers, architects, and other industry members—who had arrived at the Audrey Irmas Pavilion in Los Angeles on May 6 for the inaugural AAPIIDA Gala.



Guests arriving at the Audrey Irmas Pavilion in Koreatown  
sakanashi



AAPIDA co-founders and AD PRO Directory members  
Jessica Davis and Young Huh Akashi Creative

Founded five years ago by designers Jessica Davis and Young Huh, AAPIDA, as the national nonprofit organization is known, is dedicated to engaging and promoting Asian Americans working across the home and design industries. The group has sponsored workshops, tours, educational seminars, and mentorship programs, but this was its first gala. “We needed a reason to gather and see each others’ faces in one room,” said AD100 designer Huh. The Shohei Shigematsu-designed venue in Koreatown drew guests from across the industry, including AD100 talents Jamie Bush and Leo Marmol, *Queer Eye* star Bobby Berk, designer Mikel Welch, and *Mind Your Manners* star Sarah Jane Ho.



A view of AAPIDA's "An Evening of Light" Vinh Pham

Emceed by comedian Dylan Adler, the evening had the feeling of a far-flung family reunion, with guests flying in from New York, Atlanta, Chicago, Seattle, Texas and Hawaii. Leah Alexander, Peti Lau, Alicia Cheung, Edel Legaspi, Linette Dai, Maria Wu, Jon de la Cruz, Huma Sulaiman, Sabah Mansoor, Catherine Kwong, Mimi Shin, Meshee Fahmy, and Whitney Maehara were among the many AD PRO Directory members in attendance.

The program featured several award presentations: Master artisan and designer Robert Kuo, known for his reinterpretation of Chinese decorative traditions, received a Lifetime Achievement Award. Two Student Scholarship Awards were awarded, to Calvin Ma and Loren Brittany Cruz, and Benjamin Moore was honored with the Industry Ally Award in recognition of the company's support of AAPI designers and efforts towards diversity and equity within the industry. All the awards were created by furniture and lighting designer John Pomp, known for his artisanal glasswork.



Yoshi

**AD PRO's Catherine Hong and designer Laura Cheung Wolf of Lala Curio in front of Wolf's hand-embroidered backdrop**



Akashi Creative

**AD100 designer Jamie Bush, AD PRO Directory designer Edel Lagaspi, and Nguyen**



Yoshi

**Designer Mikel Welch**



Akashi Creative

**Designer Justina Blakeney**



Akashi Creative

**Leo Marmol of AD100 firm Marmol Radziner**



Yoshi

**Mili Suleman, Rupal Dalal, Matthew Tsang, Thu Trinh and Angela Matter of AAPIDA's Texas chapter**



Vinh Pham

**Sara Jane Ho, Jean Luo, Mark Feng, and Kelvin Man**

The gala's performances featured singer Milck, who performed her hit "Quiet" (fun fact: she and Nozawa have been friends since kindergarten), and Kishin Daiko, a taiko drumming group.

"Tonight is a testament to the strength of community, the power of creativity, and the importance of representation across our industries," said Davis. Huh's only regret was that she hadn't been able to show up in traditional Korean costume. "I was going to wear my hanbok," she said with a laugh, "but I lent it to a relative and she accidentally ripped it!"



Yoshi

**Robert Kuo, winner of the Lifetime Achievement Award**



Yoshi

Lauren Corbin of Benjamin Moore accepted the Industry Ally Award on behalf of the brand



Vinh Pham

Performer Milck



Vinh Pham

Guests at the gala



Vinh Pham

Guests at the gala

Chang, who delivered the closing remarks, left the crowd a bit teary-eyed with his words about struggle and identity. But the night ended, as all good parties do, with a karaoke afterparty that went until 2am. As Nguyen put it, "It's not an Asian party without karaoke."



John Pomp, Peti Lau, Jessica Davis, Linette Dai, Noz Nozawa, Rob Perri, Amy Williams, Young Huh, Eric Chang, Simona Ramey, Scott Galey, and Alicia Cheung Akashi Creative



Akashi Creative

Matt Nguyen, Bobby Yung, Tuan Nguyen, Shea Soucie and Jen Bassi



Akashi Creative  
**Dewey Do and Bobby Berk**



Akashi Creative  
**Takashi Yanai and Keiko Harada**



Akashi Creative  
**Julie Benniardi, Debbie Ouyang, and Oscar Wong**



Akashi Creative

**Gail Davis, Talia Laconi, Tina Ramchandani, Rhobin Delacruz, Young Huh, Lynn Juang,  
Paul Morimoto and Rosie Li**



Akashi Creative

**Ryan Jackson, Thomas Lavin, Lisa Adams, and Destin Bass**



Akashi Creative

**Chinmaya Misra, Will Nguyen, Justina Blakeney, Dabito, Sarah Wahl, and Yael Wulfhart**



Akashi Creative

**Jason Lim, Timothy Truong, Linette Dai, Edel Legaspi, Will Nguyen, Brooke Gardner, Peti Lau, Joseph Billings, Janice Barta, Risa Wadhams, Debbie Ouyang and Julie Benniardi**