

# OWU

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M A G A Z I N E



## An OWU Education Reimagined



## Evan Bai: Geneticist, designer, and OWU supporter

When asked what advice he would offer current Ohio Wesleyan students, computational biologist and genetics researcher **Hanwen “Evan” Bai ‘11** quickly responds, “Everyone’s OWU journey is different. There isn’t a specific roadmap; it’s more of a choose-your-own-adventure.”

From the start of his journey at OWU, Bai was intentional and energetic. As an international student from Chengdu, China, Evan felt it was important to find a substantial and vibrant international student community.

“I also was searching for a small, liberal arts college that offered a well-rounded education. OWU could provide me with that type of education, and at that time the international student population was around 10 percent, so it was a good fit for me,” Evan says.

At OWU, he chose an adventure full of hands-on research as a biochemistry and genetics double major. “I studied with Dr. Chris Wolverton all four years,” he says. “With him, I learned how to conduct experiments, present research, and publish papers. He was definitely my favorite professor; he taught me a lot and was always very approachable.”

Evan says his experiential learning, combined with the rigorous academics of his majors, prepared him well to complete his Ph.D. in genetics at Yale University. For Evan, the OWU adventure did not end after graduation.

“I remember reading in the *OWU Magazine* about John Milligan and his work with Gilead Sciences,” Evan recalls. “Later, I attended the OWU holiday party in New York City, and I mentioned to Rock that it would be great to connect with John. This was something I mentioned in passing to the university’s president, and he absolutely followed through on it.”

Evan did connect with **John Milligan ‘83**, and the result was an internship for Evan in bioinformatics at Gilead.

“The internship solidified my interest in biotechnology, and it bolstered my competitiveness in the field,” says Evan. “Plus, John is super nice, and it was wonderful to connect with him.”

With expertise in oncology and rare genetic diseases, Evan is a senior principal research scientist in computational genomics at Vertex Pharmaceuticals. He manages a team of computational biologists who work together to analyze large-scale genomic data to identify the genetic causes of human diseases in order to develop novel therapeutics.

He is the author of numerous articles, including articles in *Nature Genetics*, widely considered the most prestigious research journal in genetics.

Evan has continued to keep Ohio Wesleyan in mind and is grateful for his OWU experiences. “Ohio Wesleyan was a major part of my immigration journey,” he says. “In general, I want to give back to OWU because of that and because of how I’ve benefitted from my OWU connections.”

Since graduation, Evan has remained engaged with OWU by attending various events, and he demonstrates his dedication to Ohio Wesleyan through philanthropy.

“I started giving every year after I finished grad school,” says Evan. “It wasn’t a lot—like \$20.” But Evan has been steadily increasing his philanthropy as he is able. “I think the actual amount is secondary. It’s not about giving huge amounts. I



Photo provided by Vertex Pharmaceuticals

still can’t do that. The most important part about your gift is the sentiment about OWU and keeping OWU in your mind and showing support. Give what is comfortable to you.”

Evan keeps OWU in his mind by giving to international student initiatives. “Donors were very generous with my scholarship, and I want to make sure I pay it forward,” he says. “I want other international students to find their place at Ohio Wesleyan.”

Helping others inspires Evan, and he has been able to help other people with their home comfort by forming his interior decorating business, Hanwen Interiors, which specializes in modern, Asian-inspired homes. “I find joy in helping other people create spaces that make them happy,” he says.

Evan has always had an interest in decorating, and when he and his husband, Evan Fowler-Guzzardo, began furnishing their home, it reignited his passion for design. “My husband and I are not minimalists necessarily, but we do choose items that are meaningful and spark joy.”

Evan’s passion is catching attention—he was recently featured in *The Boston Globe*. “The article was very surreal and beyond my wildest expectations,” he says. “I am definitely grateful for the article, as it gives my business a lot more credibility and visibility.”

As a scientist by day and an interior decorator by night, Evan Bai follows the advice he offers to current students by also choosing his own adventure.

“You have to carve out your unique path,” he says.

—Ericka Kurtz

**“It’s not about giving huge amounts. I still can’t do that.... Give what is comfortable to you.”**