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The official magazine of the
Malaysian International Furniture Fair

JUNE 2015

GROWING WITH MIFF

Product showcase strategies for MIFF success

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LETTER TO READERS

Key Industry Players Support MIFF's International Platform Expansion at MIFF 2016

MIFF is 21 years old, but we have more than 101 reasons to be grateful.

We are grateful to our exhibitors for continuously believing that MIFF is the perfect platform that provides exposure to the global furniture market.

At the recent MIFF 2015, we hosted 508 exhibitors from 15 countries; 10% of which are first-time exhibitors—see **MIFF 2015 Post-show Report (page 3)**.

We also are thankful to our buyers. This year, as MIFF 2015 opened up the furniture buying season in Asia, we continue to attract quality global furniture buyers, and one-third of our event attendees this year are first-time buyers.

The presence of Japanese delegates at MIFF 2015 cannot be missed. Let's find out what they have to say about MIFF and the Malaysian furniture industry in this issue's **Special Report (page 5)**.

Behind the success of each winning design at MIFF FDC, there is a prototype maker behind it. For **In Focus (page 22)**, we put the Best Prototype Maker awardee Supreme Topical Furniture in the limelight.

Through the years, as MIFF grew into one of the most robust international furniture platforms in Southeast Asia, our exhibitors grew with us too. In **Cover Story (page 10)**, let's find out how these exhibitors succeeded and grew each year at MIFF.

As MIFF continues to expand, the eyes of the global media and key industry players are upon us. Let's hear what some key opinion leaders have to say about it in this issue's **Industry Report (page 30)**.

Buyers, exhibitors, designers, and all key industry players worldwide: You are the reason for our growth. Your trust is the reason we continue to evolve into Southeast Asia's biggest import-export platform for the global furniture market.

We look forward to seeing you all again at MIFF 2016.

Best wishes,
KAREN GOI
General Manager, Furniture and Interiors
UBM Malaysia

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MIFF 2015 Achieves New Positive Record



Designing with Malaysian Hardwood: Collection N°1 (a product showcase out of the collaboration between Philip Yap, MIFF and the Malaysian Timber Council) took centre stage at the recently held MIFF 2015

The five-day Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF) 2015 held last March 3-7 grossed US\$865 million in sales, concluding the event on a positive note.

MIFF 2015, Southeast Asia's biggest furniture event organised by UBM Malaysia, opened the furniture buying season in Asia and hosted 508 exhibitors from 15 countries. With 10% new exhibitors this year, furniture companies worldwide filled up a total of 80,000 square meters of exhibition space at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) and Malaysian Exhibition and Convention Centre (MECC).

This year, the collaboration between world-renowned designer Philip Yap, MIFF and the Malaysian Timber Council (MTC) – Designing with Malaysian Hardwood: Collection N°1 – was placed on centre stage. As the design brains behind the collection, Philip Yap combined rubberwood and Sepetir (a Malaysian hardwood) to produce a Scandinavian mid-century style furniture showcase. Believing in the philosophy that making sellable furniture goes beyond good design, Philip Yap utilised research, good design and available resources to come up with Collection N°1 – a furniture showcase that does not only exude aesthetic appeal but commercial appeal as well. Garnering huge attention from global furniture enthusiasts, Collection N°1, according to Philip Yap, sends out a strong message to furniture makers: "Aim higher in order to position your products to the market's higher value segment."

The halls of both PWTC and MECC buzzed with networking and trading activities as 18,000 attendees from 130 countries and regions searched the halls for the best deals of the season.

During its 21st year, quality buyers continued to flock to MIFF and the strong presence of first-time buyers, which made up one-third of total attendees, was truly evident.

According to the organiser, buyer traffic to MIFF 2015 was relatively steady from the following regions: North America, Middle East,



Australasia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia and Latin America. On the other hand, Europe and Africa showed significant drops in buyer traffic from Russia, Ukraine and the Ebola-stricken West African states.

"In fact, our sales were better than in 2014. We sold a lot to buyers from the US and smaller countries of Africa and South America. We have already booked our space for MIFF 2016."

- Tey Lay Hui, managing director, Home Best

Despite concerns over the surging US dollar and slump in oil prices, exhibitors remained in a positive business mood as high quality buyers continued to dictate bulk orders, and first-time attendees established new business relationships.

This year's sales gross of US\$865 million is the second-highest



sales ever, second to MIFF 2014's US\$892 million.

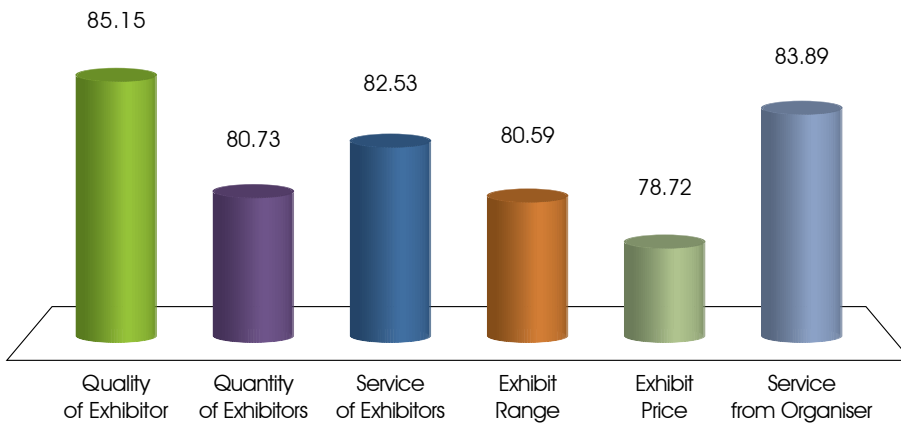
Despite tough market conditions, MIFF remains strong and robust as Southeast Asia's international furniture hub.

For Malaysian exhibitor Home Best, MIFF 2015 actually brought the company more sales compared to last year.

"Buyers from more than 50 countries visited our booth, and more than 80% were new customers," shared Tey Lay Hui, the company's managing director. "In fact, our sales were better than in 2014. We sold a lot to buyers from the US and smaller countries of Africa and South America. We have already booked our space for MIFF 2016."

China's Shunde Furniture Association brought more than 20 first-time exhibitors to MIFF 2015. These exhibitors sealed 50% of deals on the show's opening day alone. Delighted of their first MIFF experience, the group's representative shared: "All of them received great response and they definitely will come back again next year."

Visitor Satisfaction (%)



"You have to be outstanding to attract buyers to at least stop for one second to find out who you are and what you're doing." - Quek Kheng Long, director, Lencasa

The diversity of global buyers at MIFF is just one of the many factors that make show exhibitors come back with a bigger and better showcase each year.

Emphasising the importance of putting style and design elements into your exhibition space to attract buyers, Quek Kheng Long, director of Lencasa (Malaysia), shared: "You have to be outstanding to attract buyers to at least stop for one second to find out who you are and what you're doing. That is the key factor. But of course after that, it's all about the products you're showing."

Exhibiting at MIFF since 2013, Lencasa puts a lot of effort in showcasing its products. The company believes that it is not just about the booth, but also the product's suitability to the market and how it is being marketed. The formula is surely working; Lencasa's exhibition booth was one of the top head-turners at MIFF 2015.

After enjoying a very good debut at MIFF 2015, Deep Living, like all satisfied exhibitors, cannot wait to showcase its products once more at MIFF 2016.

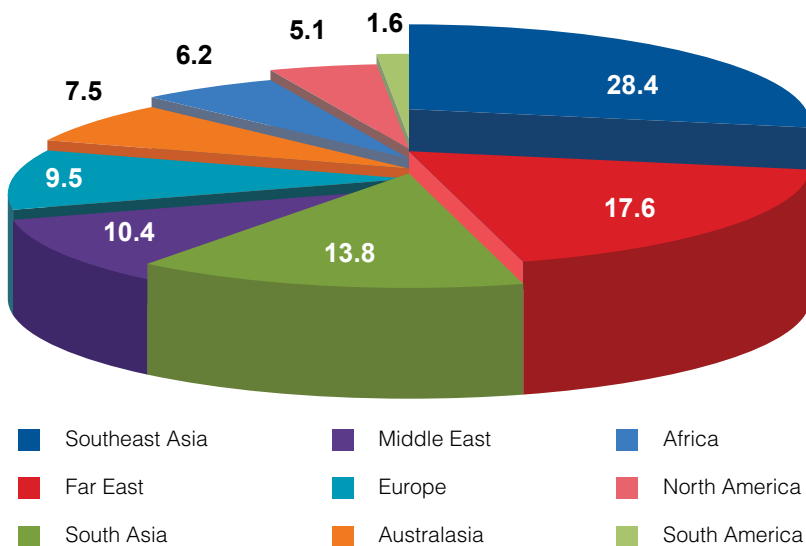
"There were a lot of foreign buyers and enquiries," said Eric Lee, managing director of Deep Living, a local soft furnishings and custom-designed furniture company. "MIFF is the most established Malaysian furniture export organiser with more than 20 years of history, so obviously, it is the first choice for us to get into the export market."

"MIFF is an amazing experience and the most important for me because it has been so easy to find the right buyers from Africa, Middle East, India and Southeast Asian countries," said Weon Ki Yun, representative of South Korea's Hansung School Furniture.

Indeed, MIFF is no longer just Malaysia's export platform for furniture.

Today, it has taken the world in by becoming Southeast Asia's import-export hub for the international furniture market.

Visitorship by Region (%)





From Japan to MIFF: Wisdom From The Land of The Rising Sun

by Gloria D. Gamat
Furnish Now editor*

**With valuable contributions from Furnish Now writers
Alexandra Wong and Chin Pei Ling*

Every year, the Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF) plays host to international exhibitors and delegates, and special attention has been paid to those from Japan. Why? This year, Furnish Now probed deeper into the wisdom that emanates from Japanese furniture makers, and finally found out what the big fuss over the Japanese delegation is all about.

Japan may have been deeply wounded when it was defeated during World War II, but since then the country has repositioned itself into the world as a new economic power. However, before that was achieved, Japan had to close its door to the rest of the world to become self-sustainable for many years.

Culturally, the Japanese are known for paying close attention to details and presentation as evident in their art designs. Their unique taste in furniture exemplifies not only practicality and supreme artistry, but also a high level of quality.

Known for not compromising quality despite the cost, Japan has deep insights into the furniture business that the rest of Asia [and the world] can learn from.

On furniture design that people dream about

Like Malaysia, Japan is a country of forests with a variety of good wood suitable for furniture manufacturing. That is one of the reasons why MIFF Furniture Design Competition (FDC) 2015 judge Eiri Iwakura loves to use wood in his furniture designs.

Invited by UBM to MIFF, Mr. Iwakura thought it was a good time to revisit Kuala Lumpur.

"Kuala Lumpur looks bigger and more modernised now, so I expect the furniture to be of the same stature," he said. "Also, I was interested in how Malaysian young design talents are faring. I have reached a



CITY sofa (white) by Eiri Iwakura

certain age, so my focus these days is on education and training."

A world-renowned designer, Mr. Iwakura credits being 'a crazy dreamer' as the reason for his success. Having witnessed the talents at MIFF FDC this year, he has a lot of insights to impart.

GREEN coffee table by Eiri Iwakura



"As the competition theme implies, the emphasis is on marketability and merchandisability of designs," he said. "This approach is appropriate for Malaysia if you look at where they are for the moment."

In developed nations like Japan, Europe and the United States, according to Mr. Iwakura, there are two types of design competitions: "One that looks for furniture designs that can sell right away, and another that emphasises on philosophy on furniture that people can dream about."

The economy all over Asia – Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and China – is rapidly growing. In that context, Mr. Iwakura noted, furniture design competitions such as MIFF FDC are in line with the economic status of these nations.

Speaking of 'furniture that people can dream about', Mr. Iwakura further said that this philosophy is more applicable to countries with 'mature' economic status.

"Countries like Malaysia still emphasise on manufacturing products," he said. "The manufacturing sector has to reach a certain stage whereby people are kind of fed up of making things."

When a certain development status is reached, he noted, consumers will look for something beyond. "Once they reach that stage and go beyond, they tend to lose interest in money and manufacturing things," explained Mr. Iwakura.

Japan, more than 40 years ago, went through the same stage that Malaysia and Thailand are going through right now: rapid economic growth, sprouting high-rise buildings, intensive manufacturing and modernisation of technology.

Such changes and developments are in parallel with the furniture business and its changing consumer behaviour. For example, in the last 40 years, Japanese furniture manufacturers have improved their technology and quality tremendously.

"But because of the consumer trends in Japan, manufacturers of low-cost furniture are not doing well or have gone out of business", shared Mr. Iwakura. "However, those who maintain their philosophy or create high quality furniture at higher price are thriving. In other words, the best of the best has survived."

According to Mr. Iwakura's observations, such a phenomenon is not only happening in Japan but also in other countries renowned for manufacturing high quality furniture like Italy, France and New York.

The extreme side of which, is that some consumers in developed countries like Europe and Japan don't want to live in a house surrounded by furniture anymore. "They want to live in a house where there is nothing and they are surrounded by nature," he said.

In effect, people are going to move in the direction of a minimalist state.

Beyond cost: quality first

Quality furniture, despite the high cost, survives the business in the Japanese market. This very philosophy of putting quality first no matter the cost, is exactly



In developed countries like Europe and Japan, at the extreme side of consumer behaviour, people want to live in a house with no furniture and surrounded by nature

what MIFF Japanese delegates seek to bring into Malaysia and the whole of Southeast Asia.

An advocate of designs that are thought of and done differently, Eiri Iwakura attributes his success to being a 'little mad' about furniture design – a mantra that exemplifies putting artistic quality first.

Today in Asia, low cost doesn't necessarily translate to low quality. Some Japanese manufacturers like *Nitori* and *Muji* are selling low-cost furniture but with high quality, explained Mr. Iwakura.

"Ninety percent of Muji's products are manufactured outside of Japan [in other parts of Asia] to reduce cost," he said. "Their products (Nitori's and Muji's) are low cost but high quality."

The current trend in the fashion industry applies to the furniture industry as well.

"On one hand you have haute couture, which is high quality and high price and on the other you have high street fashion like *Uniqlo* and *H&M* which is low-cost but good quality," explained Mr. Iwakura.

In the past, paying a low price doesn't give the buyer quality product. Times have changed.

"These days, consumers in Japan don't mind wearing *Uniqlo* clothes with their *LV* bags," said Mr. Iwakura. "The same applies to furniture. A lot of people buy *IKEA* furniture and mix it up with one piece from a renowned Italian designer. This is why shops like *Muji* and *Uniqlo* are doing well – they offer good quality at low prices."

While collaborating outside of Japan to create high quality furniture at lower cost, Mr. Iwakura still maintains the old brands he has created, *Rockstone* and *Hida Takayama*. *Rockstone* was created 33 years ago, while *Hida Takayama* is a 20-year-old brand.

To date, Mr. Iwakura still holds the design rights of both brands. However, in order to give himself time to venture into new projects, he has granted sales and manufacturing rights to his business partners.

"I am still dreaming; I have a lot of dreams," he said. "Even now, I have a lot of new ideas and I want to create new brands."

At age 66, Mr. Iwakura shows no signs of slowing down in the furniture business. Currently, he is working on 16 projects simultaneously, including a venture in Vietnam, a furniture range called *Green*.

"I am providing my designs to a joint venture between a Vietnamese manufacturer and a Japanese company," he shared. "The furniture they are making is priced slightly higher than *Muji* furniture. It is selling like hot cakes."

The *Green* furniture range has shipped 350 40-ft containers since last year, noted Mr. Iwakura, because of its high quality, good design and low price. This successful collaboration has given birth to a new brand called *City*, a black and white furniture range.

Japanese design guru Eiri Iwakura was one of the judges at MIFF FDC 2015





Sofa set by Nagano Interior Industry



A signature wooden chair by Nagano Interior Industry

MIFF: A potential market for Japanese furniture

This year, Japanese delegates at MIFF are considering Malaysia's potential as an inbound-outbound marketplace for Japanese furniture.

"We are looking into some products produced in Asia that we can export to Japan," explained Nobuyuki Mawatari, General Manager, Solutions Promotion Department, MITSUI Designtec Co. Ltd. "Also, [regarding] some of the things we get from overseas to Japan currently, there are possibilities that we might be able to bring it to [the rest of] Asia as well."

Contemplating on the possibility of exhibiting at future MIFF shows, Mr. Mawatari is seeing great potential in the Malaysian furniture market through MIFF.

Being a highly structured and traditional society, Japan's business culture puts high importance in loyalty, politeness, personal responsibility and to every team member working hard for the good of everyone a culture truly evident on how the Japanese delegations are looking at MIFF and Malaysia.

A third generation furniture businessman in Japan, Takahiro Nagano, President of Nagano Interior Industry Co. Ltd., has already booked exhibition booth spaces for MIFF 2016. With established business ventures in Korea and China, Mr. Nagano is very interested in the Malaysian market through MIFF.

"[That is] because Malaysia is in the center of Southeast Asia, and I am very interested to market here," he said. "Also, we have a very good relationship with Dato' Tan. We respect the efforts he and his family have put into MIFF and the Malaysian furniture market."

In Japanese business culture, personal trust, hard work and perseverance are qualities that are also highly regarded. Throughout the years at MIFF, good business relationships between buyers, suppliers and manufacturers have been sealed, above all, by a culture of personal trust. At MIFF, the hearts of the Japanese delegation are truly in the right place.

Established in 1940, Nagano Interior Industry specialises in living furniture (chair, table, sofa, couch, living set, and dining set) made of solid wood that is customised for small-spaced, condominium-type city living.

With high-rise residential buildings sprouting in key cities in Southeast Asia, Mr. Nagano is seeing the potential of bringing in



The Japanese delegation at MIFF 2015

Japanese furniture to this market.

"The Japanese are almost the same size as other Asian people," he said. The other thing is, because all of the real estate prices are going up in other parts of Asia, living space is becoming more Japanese-style."

Bringing Japanese furniture to Malaysia [and Southeast Asia], noted Mr. Nagano, will alert consumers of its advantages and suitability for small-spaced city living style.

Shinichi Mitsuki, Section Manager, Design Management Section, MITSUI Designtec Co. Ltd., couldn't agree more. Like Mr. Nagano, Mr. Mitsuki is seeing a lot of potential for Japanese furniture in Southeast Asian markets.

With the very limited living space in Japan, manufacturers design furniture slightly smaller than their European counterparts.

"But the functionality and durability is very high, and the quality is also very high that's what the Japanese manufacturers are doing," Mr. Mitsuki shared. "So looking at the trends in Malaysia and the rest of Southeast Asia, they're getting much more similar to Japan."



Japanese delegates sourcing for furniture at MIFF

Don't miss MIFF 2016, where even more Japanese exhibitors and delegates will be present. Japan is truly coming to Malaysia!

SECRETS OF SUCCESS AT MIFF: Product Showcase Strategies

by Yeo Li Shian and Chin Pei Ling
Furnish Now writers

During the 20th century, Malaysian entrepreneurs started furniture businesses with little money, by finding a niche and by being smart to make that niche work. They were able to deliver better quality than regional competition at very competitive prices.

In the 21st century, everything has changed. Competing on a world stage, top Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF) exhibitors know that quality and price are two factors among many that make for successful business. Many now know that branding and image are equally important factors. Others find that their niche has changed, and they have adapted to new market demands.



Furnish Now has selected a handful of exhibitors that shine as models of good 21st century furniture business. Their pictures, tips and sage advice are worth a read, and quite possibly, much more.

LENCASA First Impressions Matter

Lencasa knew from the start that booth presentation can either make or break. With more than 500 exhibitors at MIFF each year, the heat is on to make your brand stand out from the rest.

First impressions matter, the way your booth is presented is the first crucial step to make buyers stop at your booth, according to Lencasa Director, Quek Kheng Long.

Obviously, product quality, marketability, and price are all equally important—but the way you present your brand is first on the list. "When you don't put in effort to present your booth in the right and attractive way, it reflects your lack of seriousness in doing business," said Mr. Quek. "This is why we seek to present ourselves in this way."

Although just exhibiting at MIFF in the last three years, Lencasa is fixed on constant improvement. "Today, when the buyers look at our booth, they know this is Lencasa," said Mr. Quek. "We do that on purpose because we believe that the brand image and character are more important, to show who we are to the buyers. I believe that a good design can last for a 100 years."





OASIS FURNITURE INDUSTRIES

A Product Tells A Story

When Oasis Furniture Industries signed up as an exhibitor at MIFF about a decade ago, little did it expect to become the talk of

the industry today. From product design to booth décor, the company consistently excels in what it does best—creating innovation that goes beyond visual impact.

Bold and dynamic enough to embrace and adapt to changes in the industry in order to meet market demands through the years, Oasis Furniture has created some of the most original designs and executed technological innovations that are irresistibly interesting.

"There are no better branding strategies than sensitivity toward market changes," said Jane Lee, Marketing and Brand Executive of Oasis Furniture. "Each change offers us a room for improvement and to enter the market with a better solution."

Creativity for Oasis Furniture knows no bounds. Its booth presentations are packed with fun. Blending healthy working environment and a product that tells a story in its booth décor concepts, certainly maximises consumer experience. According to Ms. Lee, the company's excellent performance stems from the result of 'perfecting the skills of interaction by raising the right topics through its products'.





HOME BEST

Strength in Booth Presentation

When Home Best first exhibited at MIFF 18 years ago, it started with a simple shell scheme booth without any renovation. "In MIFF 1997, our first year, we just wanted to expose our company through MIFF," said Tey Lay Hui, General Manager of Home Best.

Despite the challenges, Home Best continues to learn from its experiences at MIFF and has improved in terms of its design and branding. "We established our Research and Development department to develop our own design, enhance our market survey, and learn from each other," said Mr. Tey.

Since 2010, Home Best decided to renovate its booth because they realised how a well-designed booth can make a company's products appear more valuable. Since then, Home Best has not looked back on booth renovation.

Having exhibited at MIFF for almost two decades, Mr. Tey knew the importance of strong booth presentation in the sea of more than 6,000 international buyers at MIFF. "Through strong booth presentation, branding and marketing, our customers can know our quality, service and reliability, as well as our professionalism and improvement every year," he said.





DECORTAGE

Building International Company Reputation

Because Decortage considers MIFF as the only platform for its furniture to reach the global market, naturally the company places a strong emphasis on its booth presentation at MIFF each year.

Exhibiting at MIFF since 2007, Decortage has always put emphasis on design and branding. "There were a lot of changes during the past few years," said Jeffery Choo, Managing Director of Decortage. "What we have learnt in the past few years of exhibiting at MIFF is, it is important to build up a strong, mutual business relationship and provide our clients with excellent after-sales services."

When they first exhibited at MIFF 2007, Mr. Choo fondly remembers that they were very excited to have a chance to penetrate the global market. He believes that working hard on booth presentation would resonate with his company's motto: 'A Place Where You Can Find Our Very Best'.

Having exhibited at MIFF for the last eight years, Mr. Choo thinks that exhibiting at MIFF is a prerequisite for international marketing. "MIFF is the only platform where we can present our furniture to the global market," he said. "All I have to say is that MIFF is essential for those who need international marketing (for their products)."

TIP: Accessories like paintings, lights, and even a dangling monkey can enhance a booth space.
Exhibitor: Hin Lim

TIP: Grass-like carpets and the use of natural materials for walls can bring nature right into your booth.
Exhibitor: Deep Furniture





BJ CABINET

Branding is Critical

BJ Cabinet's first booth at MIFF 2005 was unattractive, according to its Marketing Director, Steven Wong. Perhaps inexperienced, Mr. Wong recalled that they only wanted to pack as many items they could in the booth, thinking that it would maximise sale. "I just want to show clients the big range of products that I have," he said.

Obviously, Mr. Wong soon found that this was not the right way to do business. "For the past few years, the global economic downturn has affected our business," Mr. Wong shared. "In order to grow our business, I kept telling myself that I must do something to reverse the situation."

In the past, BJ Cabinet always focused on its competitive prices. Now realising that a strong brand concept is what makes clients stick with you, BJ Cabinet's booth evolved together with the company's reformation.

"MIFF is an important platform for our company to interact with existing and new clients," said Mr. Wong. "Therefore, an attractive booth is critical to leave a good impression for them, so that they will give us the chance to present our brand to them." Now, BJ Cabinet's booth is a long way compared to its past.



FELLA DESIGN

Let Your Booth Do the Talking

For Fella Design, booth presentation does "all the talking" at MIFF each year. "Most of the prospects at MIFF are always in quite a rush to go around," said Manivanan Madhavan, Chief Operating Officer of Fella Design. "Our booth presentation always helps us to get these prospects to spend some time at our booth."

According to Mr. Madhavan, without needing to explain much about your products, the booth display does the talking in terms of the product quality, finishing and other aspects. "With great branding and great booth presentation, we are actually indirectly telling our prospects that we are always ready to serve our best to fulfill their needs simply by giving them a very good first impression," he shared.

Fella Design's current booth design has definitely evolved from its early years when it began exhibiting at MIFF in 1998. "Over time, we also improved our product presentation by analysing what we lack the previous year and proper planning," added Mr. Madhavan.

Aside from that, noted Mr. Madhavan, the company also maintains the uniqueness of their products which up to today, still have very few direct competitors in the market.

In addition, buyers' perception of MIFF also plays a huge role in bringing them there year after year, Mr. Madhavan said. He appreciates how the show always bursts with new ideas, which is essential to helping his company's business.

"Being in MIFF itself gives us a good image, coming from international buyers," he said. "This is because MIFF is one of the main trade shows that they will visit to source Malaysian-made furniture."



TIP: The booth wall, accessories and shelving perfectly come together here with pink and yellow color matching.
Exhibitor: Eonmetall



TIP: Chong Soon Keat, managing director of Gamma Wood, designs his company chairs with special themes in mind. So remember, it's not just a chair. It's an experience.

GAMMA WOOD

A Cozy Transformation

In an industry where trade exhibitors aggressively strive to improve and learn new ways to stand out among the crowd, Gamma Wood does not have time to slow down. Every year, the company looks forward to the industry's most anticipated annual event—

MIFF—since it first participated in 2011.

"While booth size and location are predominantly important in helping boost traffic and attract new potential customers, the real trick still lies in doing it right—from both booth and trade knowledge to presentation aspects," pointed out Cindy Chua, Marketing Manager of Gamma Wood.

But as the 18-year-old dining, occasional and barstool product expert continues to partake yearly at MIFF, the company has gained valuable experience on how to attain different levels of creativity to keep its clients—old and new—impressed.

Today, Gamma Wood is ready to put those experiences to good use. As seen in recent MIFF shows, the company's design team has successfully transformed a dull typical booth into a combination of coziness and comfort accentuated by its modern products' unit display.

There's more: the company's brand and capabilities are also further strengthened through MIFF Furniture Design Competition (FDC). Ms. Chua readily admits that the opportunity given by MIFF to be part of FDC for three years in a row is indeed a game changer.

TIP: Without the purple flower and green grass wall background, this exhibition space would have looked dull. Instead, it pops out. Exhibitor: Artmatrix





TIP: How do you make a great office concept meet the great outdoors? Here's how.
Exhibitor: Euro Chairs Manufacturer

SPRING ART INDUSTRIES

Transforming Generic Furniture into A Breakthrough

For seasoned exhibitors like Spring Art Industries, exhibiting at MIFF isn't just about competing against each other in terms of booth décor. Jack Lim, Managing Director of Spring Art feels that the annual trade show allows exhibitors to find their own space to transform generic furniture pieces into a new breakthrough in terms of furniture design, using non-conventional materials.

"Frankly, booth décor is not very important to us," said Mr. Lim. "Although we improve our booth design every year, we'd like to keep it simple but still attractive." But the company later realised the importance of letting its product be the centre of attraction. In recent

years, Spring Art's products have made heads turned at the annual furniture trade show.

"When we first started exhibiting, we mostly showcased generic pieces or placed greater importance on modern designs," he added. "However since last year, our attention has shifted to classics as we noticed that product of this range is very popular and is making a comeback."

Now, in its 15th year of participating at MIFF, Mr. Lim spoke about how his team went on to achieve out-of-the-box product execution, which was highly admired.

TIP: Who says a roof has to be solid? Consider non-traditional materials—like sheets—in booth construction.

Exhibitor:
ELK Furniture Industries





TIP: The kids bedroom as international race track? It can work.
Exhibitor: Kids House Factory

C.K. BAN SOON LEE

Growth In Multiple Aspects

MIFF holds a very special place in this manufacturer's heart. For C.K. Ban Soon Lee (CKBSL), returning to the fair as a regular exhibitor annually for the past 17 years is like watching a child grow referring to its booth décor performance and other aspects of business operations.

Each year, the company strives to present a booth design that tells a story. But over the years, according to Irene Chew, Marketing Manager of CKBSL, the company's booth

design has predominantly remained simple yet elegant with the same colour palette green, which is also the company's colour theme.

"Yes, it is very challenging to construct booth designs that tell stories of our furniture range," said Ms. Chew, referring to the company's effort of providing buyers a glimpse into the brand's value.

CKBSL strives each year to make its booth a crowd-pulling attraction. Since its maiden participation at MIFF in 1998, CKBSL is now inspired to add more colour to its booth design for one simple reason—to suit its product lines, which are targeted to younger members of the consumer population. While young people may be more responsive toward new colours, the company has also improved substantially in terms of how its products are produced and designed.

TIP: Signage is important; Paper airplanes, clouds, and a great logo all make this one stand out.
Exhibitor: VistaWood Industries



Exhibitors at MIFF, newbies and veterans alike, use different formulas and strategies at the show to attract potential buyers. Here are some outstanding examples and more suggestions on how to do what they do...



TIP: Use your booth wall as functional design, providing information that also enhances your furniture vision.
Exhibitor: Simewood



TIP: What makes a wall stand out? Is it colour, shape, the ability to blend with its surroundings, or just being different? How about all of the above?
Exhibitor: Benzoni



TIP: A plain white booth can look stunning with the right architecture, products and product layout.
Exhibitor: SJY Furniture



TIP: The contrasting colours of black and white can make a booth stand out.
Exhibitor: Gaoya Furniture Industries

TIP: If it's anything like art, why not put your piece on a pedestal? Exhibitor: TMH





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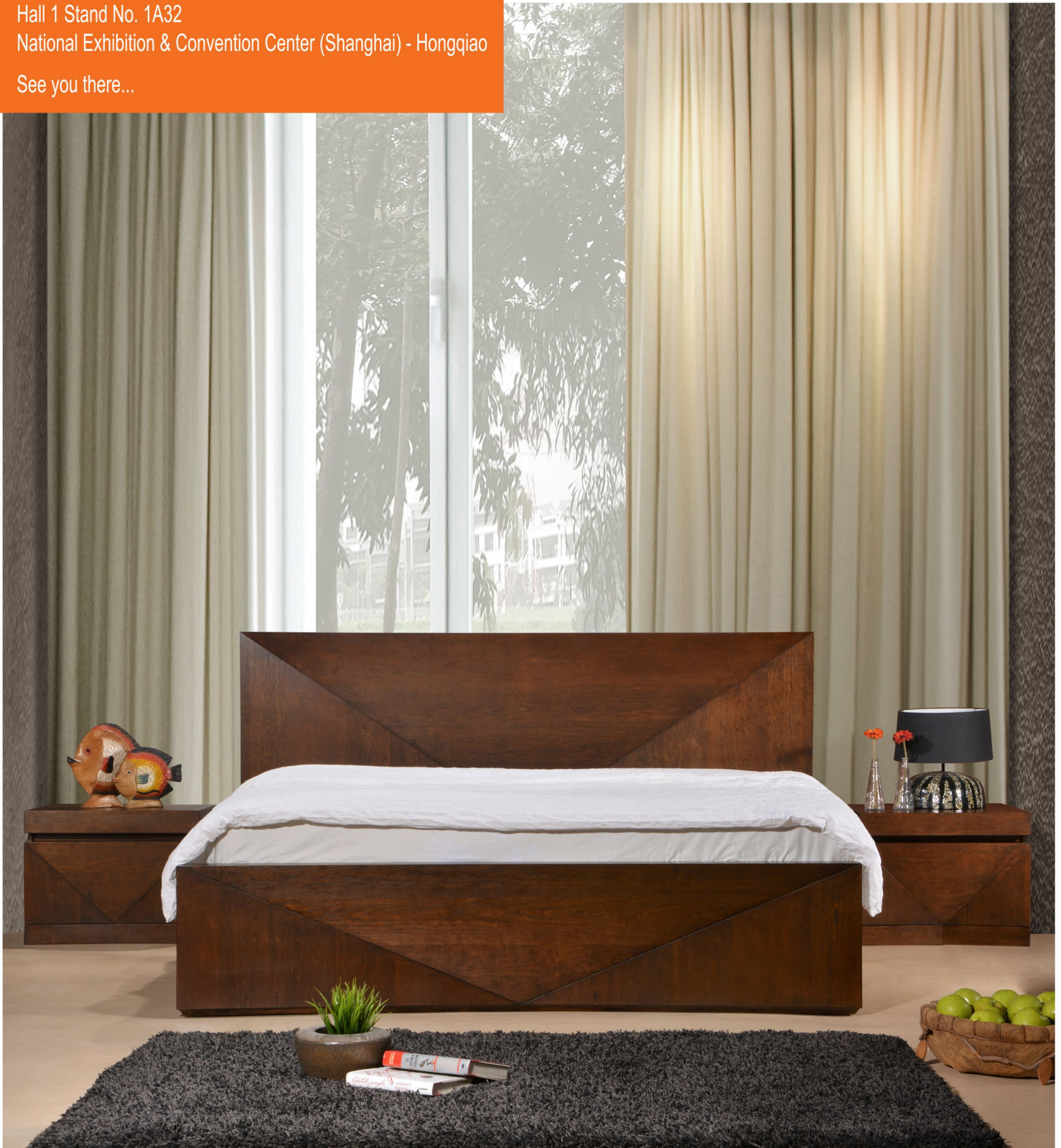
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On the Cusp of Design Greatness in Malaysia

by Gloria D. Gamat
Furnish Now editor

What makes furniture manufacturers such as Supreme Tropical Furniture "gamble" on young designers who are practically amateurs in the field? What is the principle behind such an outstanding effort?

An effort that was initially to help Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF) make Furniture Design Competition (FDC) successful turned into an advocacy for Supreme Tropical Furniture. The company truly assisted MIFF in providing a platform for young designers to deliver their ideas into real products.



*The Infinity Lounge Chair by
Wan Nurhanis Farisa Binti Aziman (MIFF FDC 2015's third prize winner) is prototyped by Supreme
Tropical Furniture together with ELK Furniture Industries*



Mfivio showcase at MIFF 2015

"At the same time, we wanted to find out whether there is a market for the designed products," shared Choo Ghee Kien, director of Supreme Tropical Furniture (Malaysia). "Hopefully, by pursuing such efforts we could catch the international market's attention that there are good designed furniture coming out of Malaysia," he said.

Since 2013, Supreme Tropical Furniture has been a consistent participant at the MIFF FDC.

In the last three years, the company has continuously assisted in the prototype making of two designs each year at FDC.

At MIFF FDC 2014, the company was awarded *Best Prototype Maker* for a furniture piece called *Motion7*.

This year at MIFF, Supreme Tropical Furniture was the prototype maker of not one, but two winning designs: *Mick's Deck Chair* by Stephanie Ng Hui Sien, MIFF FDC 2015's first prize winner; and together with ELK Furniture Industries, the *Infinity Lounge Chair* by Wan Nurhanis Farisa Binti Aziman, MIFF FDC 2015's third prize winner.

At MIFF FDC 2015, Supreme Tropical Furniture shared the *Best Prototype Maker* award with ELK Furniture Industries.

Why designed furniture is important

After the first year of becoming a prototype maker at MIFF FDC, Supreme Tropical Furniture realised that in order to compete well in the market, it is important to also own designed products rather than focusing on just original equipment manufacturer (OEM) products.

Today, Supreme Tropical Furniture's efforts in supporting young designers are certainly paying off, at least in terms of new projects and business ventures.

What is the company's main deciding factor in the creation of a design prototype?

"It is not just the design's potential in the market; it should also bring out our company's strength in solid wood products," explained Mr. Choo.

Wood is the primary material in the designs that the company has prototyped: *XSR*, *Mick's Deck Chair* and *Infinity Lounge Chair*.

According to Supreme Tropical Furniture, venturing into designed furniture will attract the international market's attention of Malaysia's capability in this area. Also, there are benefits that might be intangible

now but would reward the company's business in the future.

"Based on a lot of positive feedback we got from the enquiries, it shows that there is true value in design," said Mr. Choo.

"Also, during the process of solving the problems of the prototyped products, we are learning new ways of product making," he said.

Perhaps the best result out of the company's prototyping efforts is the birth of Mfivio, the start-up company out of Mr. Choo's collaboration with Francis Lye, MIFF FDC 2014's top prize winner and the design brain behind *XSR*.

Seeking to promote Malaysian timber to the international market, Mfivio is a brand dedicated to designed living furniture, while Supreme Tropical Furniture is its contracted manufacturer.

As long time producer and exporter of affordable outdoor furniture,



Supreme Tropical Furniture was awarded the *Best Prototype Maker* at MIFF FDC 2014 for this winning piece: *Motion7*



XSR by Francis Lye, the top prize winner at MIFF FDC 2014, is prototyped by Supreme Tropical Furniture

Supreme Tropical has witnessed the highs and lows of the global furniture market. The tremendous increase in competition in recent years led to the company's search for solutions to remain a key player.

Mfivio, according to Mr. Choo, was created to provide designed mid-range living furniture that is popular to the younger generation. Its outdoor series will target the European market, while the indoor series will focus more on the Asian market.

Since its inception in early 2014, Mfivio's designs are attracting huge interest from potential clients in different parts of the world. With its catalogue of designed living furniture, the company also is open to design collaboration with clients worldwide.

A furniture's long journey begins with a single prototype

Supreme Tropical is not stopping here. The job is not done. The work doesn't end at creating a prototype. Creation of a prototype is just the beginning of a furniture's long journey.

As an outdoor furniture manufacturer, Supreme Tropical Furniture together with the young designers they work with, are learning to produce indoor furniture too.

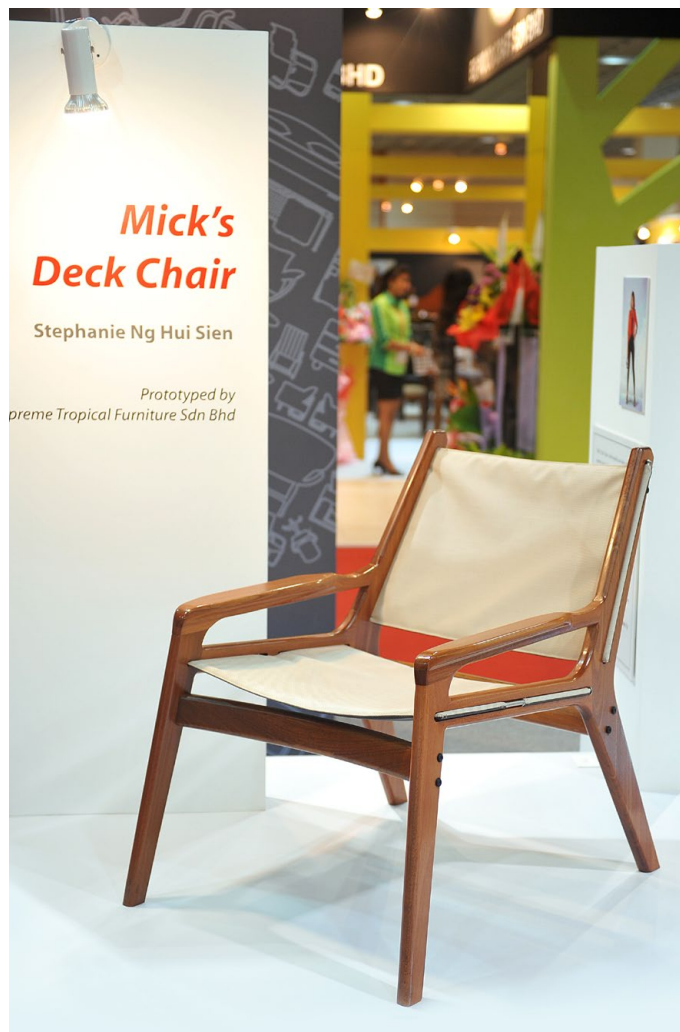
By starting to create prototypes of indoor designed furniture as in *XSR*, *Mick's Deck Chair* and *Infinity Lounge Chair*, the company hopes to conquer the international market in the indoor furniture business as well.

Recognising the business potential of indoor living furniture in the market, the company is confident that designed products could be the key to succeeding in this new venture.

At the moment, Supreme Tropical Furniture's prototypes are not yet mass produced for the consumer market.

To turn a prototype into a complete and marketable product, a lot of further development is needed. "Thus, after the FDC competition, we would bring the designers to other international furniture fairs to expose them to current trends in furniture design," said Mr. Choo.

Believing that a great design's journey doesn't end with its art and beauty, Supreme Tropical Furniture is on the right track with its prototyping adventures. Ultimately, the company knows it has to manufacture and sell a lot.



Mick's Deck Chair, top prize winner at MIFF FDC 2015, is also prototyped by Supreme Tropical Furniture

Why MIFF Continues to Attract Global Furniture Enthusiasts

by Gloria D. Gamat
Furnish Now editor*

**With valuable contributions from Furnish now writers
Alexandra Wong, Chin Pei Ling and Yeo Li Shian*



The value of Malaysian wooden furniture is undoubtedly attractive. The solid reputation of Malaysian furniture manufacturers is unquestionable, as they have forged lasting business relationships worldwide.

The versatility of Malaysian manufacturers in creating furniture not only made of wood but with a fusion of other materials as well has stood the test of time.

Indeed, the Malaysian furniture industry is mature and ready, more than ever, to take the world in.

Today, foreign furniture companies are not just exhibiting at MIFF but are also starting to bring their businesses to Malaysia to fully penetrate the market from this burgeoning part of the globe, truly making Malaysia and MIFF an import-export hub for the international furniture industry.

The attraction of Malaysia and made-in-Malaysia furniture

Visitors come to MIFF not just because of MIFF per se, but also because of Malaysia in general.

"I always come back to MIFF because I love Kuala Lumpur," admitted Michelle Olley, Bedding Product Manager of Harvey Norman Stores, New Zealand.

Always looking for items such as lamps and bedroom furniture, Ms. Olley has been coming to MIFF for the last five years.

While she has been to other furniture fairs, MIFF has a special attraction to her: wooden furniture.

"Each [furniture fair] offers its own attraction," she said. "In Malaysia, I can find more wooden furniture. Thus, I do get new suppliers each year."

MIFF first-timer Francois Aoun, CEO of Al Babtain Furniture & Interior Decoration, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, took the opportunity to source for some wood or metal-based office furniture.

"In Saudi Arabia, consumers generally have good perception of Malaysian furniture," he said. "Made-in-Malaysia furniture always triumph in terms of quality and originality of designs."

Mr. Aoun did not go back to his home country empty-handed. At MIFF, he made contact with reliable suppliers of Malaysian furniture.

When she first came to MIFF last year, Marianna Stiglitz, Manager of Avanti Furniture Company, Russia, successfully shipped some 30 containers of furniture worth US\$300,000 from both Malaysian and Chinese manufacturers.

Avanti Furniture Company is sourcing home furniture products such as dining sets, bedroom sets and seating furniture for its clients in Russia.

Present again at the recently held MIFF 2105, Ms. Stiglitz had a blast sourcing for more Malaysian furniture.

"I look forward to explore more at MIFF in all future visits," she said.

When Spanish furniture company Resol started exhibiting at MIFF in 2013, the company was able to expand their network of clients to a lot of different countries where they – until then – hadn't sold anything yet.

One of Malaysia's attractions for Resol has a lot to do with geographic location.

"It is a very well-located country between China and Australia, and gives us the chance to have a proper presentation and meeting point with all our customers and contacts from this large and prospering area," explained Albert Llorens, Brand Manager of Resol, Spain.

Even if Malaysia was not Resol's core sales market in the area, the company realised that its growing economy and good infrastructure makes the country a good starting point to expand business networks in



Marianna Stiglitz of Russia



Francois Aoun of Saudi Arabia

other parts of Asia.

Today, Resol is keen of bringing its business to the heart of Malaysia.

"We have thought of finding partnerships not only to distribute our products here and have a commercial subsidiary, but also to manufacture some parts or some of our products under our quality standards," said Mr. Llorens.

MIFF's move to become the import-export hub for international furniture in Southeast Asia, according to Mr. Llorens, is the best way to diversify.

"Asia is becoming more and more the place to be for sales, across all industries, especially for furniture," he concluded.

Oshi Furniture introduced the company and its products to the global market for the first time when it joined MIFF 2014 as an exhibitor.

"We were planting the seeds to give MIFF visitors an inkling of our capabilities," said Jy Aow Yong, Managing Director of Oshi Furniture, Malaysia.

In addition, joining MIFF served as a huge learning ground for the growing furniture company.

"Using what we'd learned, we fine-tuned our display this year," said Mr. Yong.

Noting from last year's experience that MIFF buyers want to see more options, Oshi Furniture doubled the beds displayed in its exhibition space this year and made a concerted effort to demonstrate the value of their products, instead of selling on price alone.

"As a result, we were able to sell at a higher price for some key products," shared Mr. Yong. "We believe that this year, we are raking in a US\$200,000 sales figure from Europe, USA and Canada – temperate

Exhibiting at MIFF opens door to global market





Crystal Ng of Yiew Wai, Malaysia



Aw Boon Leong of Deesse Furniture, Malaysia

countries where our bedroom sets are tailored for." Regular MIFF exhibitor Yiew Wai has also seen the show evolve and mature through the years into something truly global.

"The buyers who come here are not looking at price alone but seeking products with unique designs – this is what we have observed over the years," said Crystal Ng, Head of Marketing Division, Yiew Wai, Malaysia.

Parallel to MIFF's evolution, Yiew Wai too has transformed itself to meet the current needs of the furniture marketplace.

Traditionally, the company would display only its core products of bedroom sets. But at MIFF 2015, it showcased something different.

"We thought that MIFF was a great place to gauge current consumer tastes and so,

we decided to focus on our colourful storage products," shared Ms. Ng.

The bold move paid off, and Yiew Wai's showcase at MIFF 2015 drew a lot of attention from retail outlets and wholesalers.

"It's good to diversify and do something different to keep your customers excited," said Ms. Ng.

Sharing how MIFF 2015 turned out to be an outstanding year for the company, Deesse Furniture couldn't agree more with Yiew Wai's exhibition experience at MIFF.

"Last year, we displayed the same kind of products but we hardly drew any attention, then we re-strategised and invested a lot more effort and resources to make our booth attractive," said Aw Boon Leong, Director of Deesse Furniture, Malaysia.

Confident of its revamped exhibition booth, Deesse Furniture joined the *Best Presentation Award* (BPA) for best booth creativity and product display at the recently held MIFF 2015.

Although the company didn't win the BPA this year, its booth design played an important role in impressing the judges.

"It prompted them [the judges] to recommend our Fabiano table for an award in the *Furniture Excellence Award* category," shared Mr. Leong.

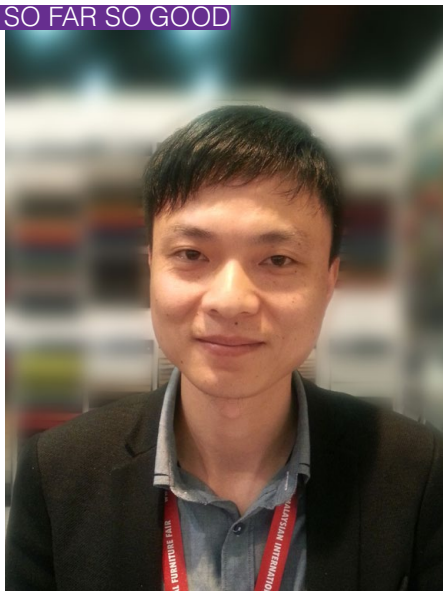
Deesse Furniture's stylish exhibition booth at MIFF 2015 also drew some of the highest traffic in the fair. As a result, the inquiries that the company received from potential clients have been very encouraging.

As an MIFF old-timer, Deesse has reaped the fruits of its labours as an exhibitor for many years and has big words of wisdom to share with other exhibitors.

"From our experiences, to benefit fully from MIFF, exhibitors should look beyond sales and treat MIFF as a learning ground on how to compete on an international level," said Mr. Leong.

Malaysia's neighbours get a window to the global marketplace through MIFF





Nick Shen of N&K Textile, China

Representatives of PT. Wahana Lentera Raya at MIFF have been visiting the show alternately as buyers and visitors since 2005.

Thus, the company has witnessed MIFF's growth and evolution from the delegates' perspective.

"Through the years, we have witnessed the expansion of the fair in terms of exhibitors and products offered; we finally decided it is high time that we become part of the show this year," said Donny Djarat Kusdarmanto, R&D Manager of PT. Wahana Lentera Raya, Indonesia.

Before exhibiting at MIFF, PT. Wahana Lentera Raya built the company to become the second leading panel manufacturer in Indonesia, out of 60 brands in the country.

But for many years, the company only focused on the local market.

By joining MIFF as exhibitor solely for the experience and exposure, PT. Wahana Lentera Raya immediately felt the rewards of showcasing on an international platform.

"We are certainly delighted to have

garnered a substantial amount of interest and very good inquiries from new contacts from Japan, New Zealand, Germany and India," shared Mr. Kusdarmanto.

As a first-time exhibitor, joining MIFF 2015 has indeed been a fruitful and worthwhile trip for PT. Wahana Lentera Raya.

Nick Shen, Sales Manager of N&K Textile, China, has a similar story to tell.

With mid-range level furniture products targeted at buyers for hotels and the wholesale sector, N&K Textile's MIFF showcase resulted in promising leads.

"So far, we have managed to secure lots of potential contacts for our products; a new client from Panama has even placed an order of a container of goods from us," said Mr. Shen.

Truly, MIFF is becoming a worthwhile and fruitful trip even for companies from neighbouring Southeast Asian countries.

Every year, the government of Anji Province in China provides furniture business operators with a suggestion list of worldwide fairs and expos worthwhile to participate in.

MIFF has long been part of that list, according to Wang San Xian, Sales Manager of Zhejiang Longdin Furniture, China.

Another first-timer at MIFF, the company has very niche furniture products under its umbrella such as fixed and reclining kids' sofas, whose main target market is actually the United States.

Because of MIFF's solid network in the global furniture market, Zhejiang Longdin Furniture took a chance by exhibiting at the fair, with surprising outcomes.

"Throughout the fair, we have secured some unexpected deals from new Middle Eastern clients and this is certainly a good news for us," said Ms. Wang.

Guangdong Heye Time Spinning is another MIFF first-time exhibitor from China and is raving about results that have exceeded the company's expectations.

As China's biggest supplier of sofa fabrics, Guangdong Heye Time Spinning exhibits at quite a number of fairs and exhibitions around the world to gain exposure and marketing presence.

The company never thought it could expand its network more at MIFF. But it did.



Wang San Xian of Zhejiang Longdin Furniture, China

"It was an eye-opener for us to find that MIFF can stand tall among all these exhibitions," said Ivan Zheng, Overseas Sales Manager for Guangdong Heye Time Spinning, China.

Visitors and buyers at MIFF, observed Mr. Zheng, come to the show for very concrete and specific reasons.

"They are objective-minded – a common trait among the visitors who came to our booth, which is quite different from other fairs where you usually get a mixture of interested and random visitors," shared Mr. Zheng.

Commonly, companies that exhibit at MIFF are manufacturers. On the other hand, Guangdong Heye Time Spinning is a supplier for furniture companies.

So, MIFF does not only include manufacturers anymore, but also supply companies supporting the furniture makers with materials and accessories. After all, collaboration between key players of the industry is what makes this import-export furniture hub really tick.



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MIFF in The Eye of The Global Industry Beholder

*What's next for MIFF and the Malaysian furniture industry?
Let's hear it from global industry experts...*

by Gloria D. Gamat
Furnish Now editor

By its 21st edition, the Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF) re-affirmed its place as Southeast Asia's import-export hub for the international furniture market.

Occupying 80,000 square meters of exhibition space, MIFF 2015 hosted 508 exhibitors from 15 countries including Malaysia, China, Taiwan, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, United States, India, Spain, Bulgaria, Italy, Japan, Finland and France.

MIFF to expand international exhibition space in 2016

In 2016, the organiser plans to further expand the fair to accommodate even more international exhibitors.

Philippe Mechin, a French journalist who has been working within the international furniture industry for many years, is confident of MIFF's plan for international expansion in years ahead.

"MIFF is now definitely one of the most important furniture fairs in Asia, and buyers cannot ignore this platform," said Mr. Mechin.

According to Mr. Mechin, MIFF's advantage lies in its ability to showcase a wide range of furniture, therefore showing the Malaysian furniture industry's capability of producing any type of products—a reflection of the industry's versatility in manufacturing.

"The quality level, the design, and of course the price, are attractive reasons to visit MIFF and to be interested in Malaysian furniture,"



Franz Rivoira, co-founder of Italian Consulting Pte. Ltd., believes that with its new goals, MIFF is setting a high standard for others to follow

added Mr. Mechin.

"MIFF is one of the must-stop events for furniture buyers coming to Southeast Asia while searching for good new design and better price/value balanced products," stated Zilahi Imre, Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of *Mobila* and *MagMob*, Romania's premiere furniture publications.

Currently as the Vice-President of International Alliance in Furnishing Publications (IAFP, Romania), Mr. Zilahi believes in what MIFF stands for and has high regard for what it has achieved throughout the years.

"This event became truly international as a result of a stubborn strategy: continuous investments in promotion campaigns, help given to young furniture designers, and a consistent service offered to exhibitors and visitors—the 'success recipe'," he said.

Aware of MIFF's plan for international expansion in the coming years, Mr. Zilahi



believes that more foreign exhibitors will beam a much brighter light—a new focus on the fair itself—therefore making MIFF an even more attractive show for industry visitors.

"Accommodating more foreign players to your home market is a brave move," he said. "It will demonstrate the fact that the furniture industry in Malaysia is a mature one, ready to compete in the world's marketplace."

Transitioning to design and branding: a potential new route for MIFF?

As co-founder of Italian Consulting Pte. Ltd., Franz Rivoira has been working in the furniture industry for many years and has seen the worldwide trend of shifting from established models to a new model that is different and an improved version of what was known before.

"Malaysia [and MIFF] is in this exact situation," said Mr. Rivoira. "It is a country which has been growing fast on all accounts, but now finds itself at a strategic crossing; and it [MIFF] can follow a new road, if it chooses to."

Speaking at one of the industry seminars at MIFF 2015 with his business partner Roberta Mutti, Mr. Rivoira emphasised the necessity for furniture trade shows such as MIFF to tread along a new route, and demonstrated how the industry could benefit from it.

"So, if you ask me, there is only one path: evolving and transforming itself from an OEM to an OBM and ODM—but this is a process that takes time and effort," he said.

Shifting from OEM (original equipment manufacturer) to OBM (original brand manufacturer) and ODM (original design manufacturer), according to Mr. Rivoira, means that furniture companies have to develop a new way of thinking.

"Because with design and branding, you are not manufacturing an object, but rather, creating dreams and experiences for the final client," he explained.

First, furniture manufacturers need to make this transition, noted Mr. Rivoira. This change will project forward not just in the manufacturers' business image but in the whole industry as well—and in MIFF, most of all.



Zilahi Imre, Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of *Mobila* and *MagMob*, has high regard for what MIFF has achieved throughout the years



French journalist Philippe Mechin is confident of MIFF's plan for international expansion in years ahead

"MIFF is going to benefit enormously from this change, and the companies are going to as well, because their products are bound to become more rich in inner qualities—and so, more costly," said Mr. Rivoira.

MIFF's growth is unstoppable

For many years, MIFF has concentrated on its flagship image of exporting Malaysian furniture to the world.

In the coming years, as it expands its exhibition space for more international exhibitors, MIFF is truly becoming Southeast Asia's import-export hub to the global furniture market.

While this expansion is unstoppable, Philippe Mechin thinks that MIFF's platform for the export market can still continue to grow, especially for western buyers.

"Many western buyers, especially from Europe, have yet to discover the quality of Malaysian furniture products and the

dynamism of the industry in this part of the globe," he said.

On top of that, international buyers are bumping into hurdles in getting their furniture requirements in other parts of Asia.

"International buyers meet more and more difficulties to find affordable products in China," said Mr. Mechin. "This way, the position of Malaysia, which proposes a mix of quality and good price, is a very good opportunity for MIFF, especially with the efforts made by companies in design."

Also, this move will hugely increase foreign visitors to MIFF.

"This definitely will bring new business opportunities for the producers based in Malaysia," added Zilahi Imre.

The world is getting more global each day, and with advances in today's technology, getting to new markets and new customers has become easier and more straightforward.

"This means that we cannot hide anymore, and there is no more secure, sheltered market like we were used to in the past," explained Franz Rivoira.

The bottom line is, change is the only thing constant in the world, and MIFF too is changing for a better and bigger future.

"Of course, you will have to face new obstacles in your way, and need to learn new tricks; but to do that, you need to embrace the 'new world'," said Mr. Rivoira.

The distinguishing features of the 'new world', according to Mr. Rivoira, is to always keep yourself new, with an open mind, and strive towards excellence and service.

MIFF has evolved steadily, actively embracing this innovative way of thinking to drive the market towards these new goals.

"Through this effort, MIFF is setting a higher standard for the companies to follow, and I am quite certain that this is what they should be doing in the next few years," said Mr. Rivoira.

Brave and bold in expanding its global presence, MIFF is indeed becoming Southeast Asia's import-export hub for international furniture.

Industry experts are confident that this move will propel the Malaysian furniture industry into a bigger new phase.



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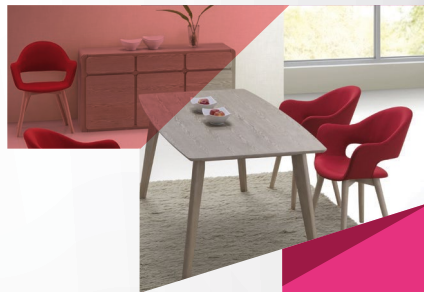
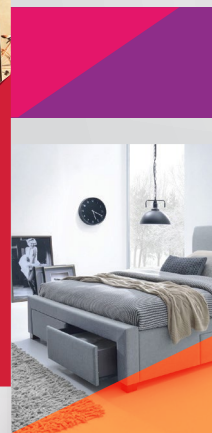


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