

The official magazine of the  
Malaysian International Furniture Fair

## Special Report

Get to know the  
dream team behind  
every piece of  
furniture at Oasis

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## Industry Update

Key players weigh-in  
on the latest about  
Malaysia's furniture  
industry

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# Racks to Furniture

With design, find out how Eonmetall crossed from  
steel pipe to the furniture industry

page 10



# Letter to Readers

## MIFF: Connecting Furniture and People

It's a wrap for the MIFF 2017... and to say it ended with a bang is an understatement. Once again, the show broke sales records and had more visitors than ever before. And with the show in its 23rd year, both organisers and participants are already looking forward to an even bigger MIFF in 2018. If you missed this year's show, you can check out the highlights in this issue's *MIFF 2017 Post-show Report* (page 3).

One of the best things about MIFF, are the people who attend. Design gurus from all over the globe descend on MIFF, and participants and visitors alike are fortunate to meet and learn from them. Each person has an interesting backstory on how they found their way into furniture design, and Laszlo Szikszai from Sixay Furniture in Hungary is one of them. This issue's *In Focus* section (page 6) details the story of how his boyhood hobby of making wooden airplanes paved the way for a career in furniture business and design.

This issue also has a wealth of information for inspiration, advice and trends. Check out these stories:

For innovative shelving design, look no further than our *Cover Story* (page 10) on Eonmetall. Their steel racking designs and metal shelves fit in today's modern home or office ... and it's this design that's connected them with the furniture industry and helped them succeed with flying colors.

Consumer behavior is an ever-evolving beast. So, how are furniture makers dealing with new demands in trends in styling today's modern homes? Find out on page 16 in our *Spotlight* section.

Behind every piece of furniture is a fabulous dream team. And every step of the way, each member has a critical role to play. Find out how they do what they do in our *Special Report* (page 21).

There's no better place to get information than straight from the source, so we thought it was time to check in with major industry players. Check out what the leaders of the Malaysian Timber Industry Board (MTIB), Malaysian Timber Council (MTC) and Muar Furniture Association (MFA) have to say about the industry's status quo, and their projections for the coming years in our *Industry Update* (page 28).

In *Then & Now* (page 32), we revisit past winners of Furniture Design Competition (FDC). Once design amateurs, these young professionals are now living their dreams and giving advice to aspiring designers.

We hope that you enjoy this issue as much as we enjoyed having you at MIFF 2017. We appreciate your continued support.

Best wishes,  
KAREN GOI  
General Manager, MIFF  
UBM Malaysia

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Life After MIFF FDC



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UBM MALAYSIA

A-8-1 Hampshire Place Office,  
157 Hampshire, 1 Jalan Mayang Sari  
50450 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.  
Tel : +603-2176 8788  
Fax: +603-2164 8786  
Email: info@miff.com.my  
Website: www.miff.com.my



MEDIA MICE PTE. LTD.

6001 Beach Road, #19-06  
Golden Mile Tower, Singapore 199589  
Tel: +65 8186 7677  
Fax: +65 6298 6316  
Email: enquiry@mediamice.com  
www.mediaMICE.com

# MIFF Continues to Break Event Records

by Annalyn Zoglmann  
Furnish Now writer



In her assessment of the 2017 show, Ms. Karen Goi, MIFF General Manager, said: “This has been a tremendous year for MIFF and a huge boost for our bigger show in 2018. We had expected a good turnout but the first two days were truly extraordinary. Exhibitors reported they were kept very busy with hordes of buyers.”

“As the organiser, we are very happy for everyone. It clearly shows that MIFF remains a relevant platform and the driver of global furniture trade in Southeast Asia. We will be back even better next year,” Ms. Goi added.

## The numbers

MIFF 2017 generated US\$940 million in sales for its 550 exhibitors coming from nine countries. The majority of the participants came from Malaysia, but furniture makers from China, Taiwan, USA, Korea, Indonesia, India, Japan and Turkey joined as well. The 2017 figures are a marked increase from the \$908 million in sales gained in 2016.

The good news: the Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF) wrapped up its 2017 edition with more visitors and record-breaking sales that exceeded its 2016 figures. It undoubtedly made participating businesses happy and once again cemented MIFF's reputation as the leading industry show in this part of Asia.

There's even better news: as a result of its phenomenal performance in the last few years, MIFF 2018, to

be held from March 8 to 11 next year, will be the biggest MIFF undertaking to date.

Exhibition space will increase by 25%, or a total of 100,000 square meters as a result of the expansion to a second venue at the new Malaysia International Trade and Exhibition Centre (MITEC). This is aside from retaining the original MIFF exhibition area at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC).





In terms of visitorship, there were 18,725 guests coming from 132 countries. Of this number, 34% were first-timers or new visitors. The majority came from South/Southeast Asia and the Far East, and there were some who flew in from as far as Africa and Latin America. The main purpose for visiting was to place orders and source new products for home and commercial use.

A buyer from Design Centre of Chennai, India had this to say: "We are looking for new styles and products. We've been coming here in the last eight to nine years. We come here because it is easier to import from Malaysia. The styles have been changing, which is good. The show has been consistent all these years with no problems."

Most exhibitors only had good things to say about the MIFF 2017 show as their desired results were achieved.

A sales manager of the Guangdong Sunteam Steel & Wooden Products from China said: "We have had a booth here since 2009. We want to focus more on customers from Africa and Europe. It is easier for them to come here [in Malaysia] than to China."

Meanwhile, the team from Yeu Hong Furniture Industries of Malaysia stated that MIFF has been very useful in terms of giving them new sales leads: "We have been here many years already, since 1995. We get a lot of foreign buyers from countries such as India, Russia and Kazakhstan. The organisers are very good whenever I have queries; they will answer immediately."

### Insights

During the opening ceremonies of MIFF 2017 at the PWTC, the fair's Founder & Chairman, Dato Dr. Tan Chin Huat, underscored the importance of research and innovation in making Malaysian furniture stand out in the world.

"Our exhibitors are investing more and more in R&D to come up with their own designs and new products, creating more value for their business and potential customers," he said.

Editor Artem Vasiliev of Russia concurs with Dr. Tan's observation. The chairman of the International Alliance of Furnishing Publications (AIFP) noted that "[MIFF 2017] brings even more cosmopolitan design on stage."

"This will definitely help to satisfy demand and product expectations of buyers from all over the globe. But the key thing is that the most successful manufacturers are not blindly following this cosmopolitan attitude. They manage to keep such critically important national flavour – in terms of materials, colours and shapes – which makes the Malaysian furniture and interior design recognisable on the world arena," Mr. Vasiliev added.

### 2017 Highlights

Talking of national flavour, one of the highlights of MIFF 2017 was the Muar Hall which showcased the products of the members of the Muar Furniture Association.

Muar is a small town in Malaysia which has become the country's furniture-producing hub. There are currently 700 factories [in Muar] and the exponential growth has given birth to the Muar Furniture Industrial Park. Muar having its own hall in MIFF 2017 is a tribute to local makers and artisans. Furniture is undoubtedly now a driving force in the economy, with Malaysia now the third biggest furniture exporter in Asia and the 8th in the world.

MIFF 2017 was also significant for the unveiling of *MIFF Office*. It's a dedicated section in the expo which displayed a complete range of home and commercial office solutions – from work stations to chairs, conference tables, boardroom furniture and even safes. Furniture for commercial use also extends to the ones utilised by hotels, restaurants, schools and those in public spaces.

The allocation of a space for *MIFF Office* was deemed necessary to provide a solution to the evolving work landscape of the digital era where comfort and productivity are key. There is also emphasis on aesthetics and ergonomics despite the growing mobility of today's employees.

And of course, every MIFF show will not be complete without its culminating activity, namely the giving of the Furniture Excellence Award to outstanding exhibitors and the Best



Presentation Award to the best-looking booths.

*MIFF Furniture Design Competition (FDC) 2017* with the theme of *Table2Gather* was also highly-anticipated by industry enthusiasts. FDC in previous years has been a reliable and excellent source of young and innovative designer talents. This year saw Victoria Pamela Yap Wei running off with the first prize for her creation, a multi-purpose table with wooden bar stools that can be transformed into a drawer side table and a kid's chair.

### Onwards to MIFF 2018

Looking forward, MIFF 2018 happens less than a year from now in Kuala Lumpur with the theme *Design Connects People*. The phrase alone is indicative of MIFF's focus on the creative component of the industry which now favours uniqueness and aesthetics over mass production.

MIFF Chairman Dato Dr. Tan Chin Huat noted that "exhibitors now are paying more attention to R&D and the results are showing in MIFF. In the last few years, they have been changing their concepts and coming up with new collections."

*designRena* will be introduced as a new segment in MIFF 2018 and will be a dedicated area for the best chosen furniture exhibitors in Malaysia. *FDC In Action* will be a collaboration platform for *designRena* with past winners of the prestigious *MIFF Furniture Design Competition* working closely with

manufacturers to innovate on their products and presentation.

Another new segment to look forward to in 2018 is the *MIFF Timber Mart* which will be a one-stop wood- and wood-related material showcase and trading platform for global wood suppliers and buyers.

With the exhibition space increasing from 80,000 square meters to 100,000 square meters next year, MIFF 2018 hopes to attract as many as 700 participants, and that's a conservative estimate only.

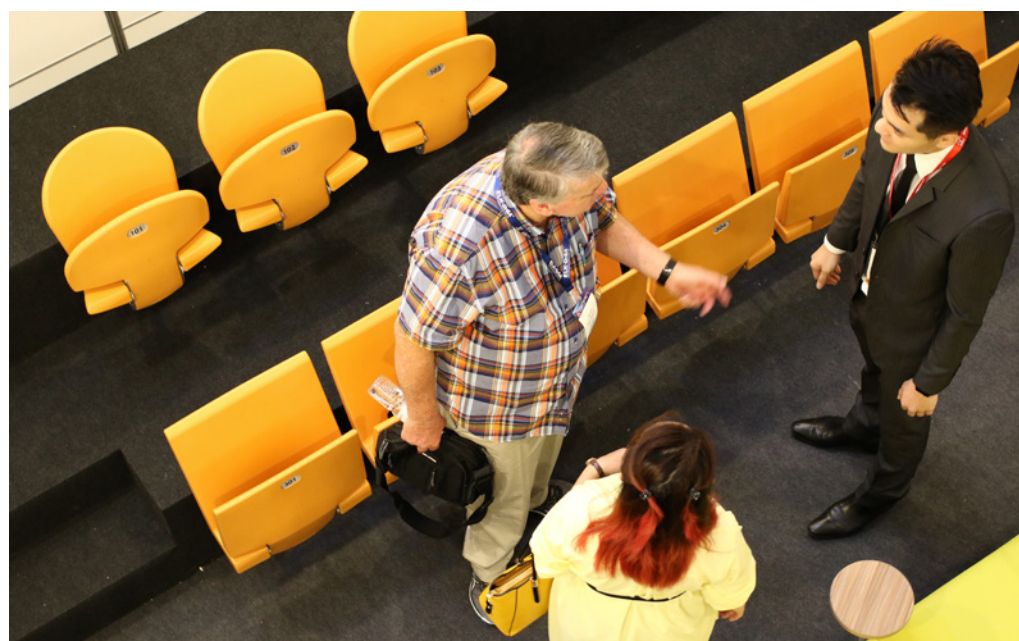
The original venue, PWTC, will play host to eight exhibition halls in MIFF 2018. It will house displays for Office Furniture, Mass Market Home Furniture, and the China and Taiwan exhibition halls.

The new additional venue at MITEC, on the other hand, will be the home of 9 exhibition halls featuring mid- to high-range home furniture, soft furnishings, sofa and upholstered furniture plus the rest of the international exhibitors.

MIFF General Manager, Ms. Karen Goi called on both local and international industry players to take advantage of the golden opportunity to drive sales, learn the latest trends and expand their business through valuable networking in MIFF. For more information, check out the official website [www.miff.com.my](http://www.miff.com.my)

**MIFF 2018, 8 – 11 March  
PWTC & MITEC**

Online visitor registration opens from September 2017 at [www.miff.com.my](http://www.miff.com.my)



# From Toy Airplanes to Beautiful Hand-Made Furniture

by Hazlin Hassan  
Furnish Now writer

A Hungarian boy's hobby turns into a lifetime of design craftsmanship

As a 10 year-old boy, Laszlo Szikszai used to play with wood a lot...but designing and making toy airplanes.

The budding designer started learning carpentry, building construction, working with solid wood and also timber construction. He soon realised that this was not for him.

"To be honest, the doors and windows weren't too exciting for me. I had a great master and I loved and still love to work with wood but I knew it at once, I won't work as a carpenter, not even for a minute. I wanted more," said Mr. Szikszai.

He first began to draft furniture designs when he was a 14-year-old teenager.

"They were rather copies with a hint of original taste but to tell the truth they weren't too impressive," he said modestly.

He became a wood engineer instead and later on, began learning about design. Then he went to university where he concentrated on interior architecture and wood architecture.

## Design Inspirations and the Birth of Sixay Furniture

In 1994, Mr. Szikszai began working in Vienna. In 1995, he started his own business under the name Sixay Furniture. His first range of furniture was born. It is still sold today.

Now his company is an international furniture brand renowned for its excellent design, the unique style, the superb ergonomics, the durability and the timelessness of its pieces.

Its range of chairs, stools, tables, beds and various other pieces designed to last for a lifetime, is handcrafted by highly skilled cabinet makers.

The high level of craftsmanship is evident in its distinctive and gentle shapes, ergonomic design, the careful choice of materials, and superior build quality, all of which make the company's furniture stand out.

The types of hardwood used include beech, core beech, maple, oak, ash, cherry, pear, walnut, black walnut and plum.

Mr. Szikszai's products reflect his passion for nature, design and quality, all of which started when he was still a young boy.

When asked what sparks his ideas for his designs, he said that he gains inspiration from nature, and the shapes and formations of nature, especially the lines of the human body, in particular the female.



One event which has also left its mark on him was the Vienna Secession, an art movement formed in 1897 when artists resigned from the Association of Austrian Artists, which controlled exhibitions and favoured more conservative-minded artists.

The *Art Nouveau*, an international style of art and architecture that was popular between 1890 and 1910, which uses natural forms and structures, particularly the curved lines of plants and flowers, has also inspired him when creating his designs.

Another motivation behind his impressions when coming up with new ideas, is the influential Bauhaus German art school.

Mr. Szikszai also often draws from the modern, simple and functional Scandinavian design when composing his creations.

But he never creates a design simply for the sake of designing.

“To me functionality was always important – that I never design something autotelic but something you can use, smart and well-thought-out furniture. And of course I do like the ideas of other designers and every interesting thing that I see in the world,” he stressed.

“To me functionality was always important – that I never design something autotelic but something you can use, smart and well-thought-out furniture.”

“My goal is from the beginning to invent and create something lasting and of long standing. In my eyes the things which are not functional are not even really beautiful. What is uncomfortable can't be nice.”

## Of Practicality and Functionality

For Mr. Szikszai, practicality is always at the forefront of his designs, whether it be for kids' furniture or living room sets.

“In the first place always functionality – the probable need of the future owner – and only then follows the design. It is in very rare situations – or I can say almost never – that I sacrifice the maximal functionality on the altar of design,” he said.

“My goal is from the beginning to invent and create something lasting and of long standing. In my eyes the things which are not functional are not even really beautiful. What is uncomfortable can't be nice,” he explained.

When asked as to which designers he looks up to, he said he has many.

“I love especially the obsessed ones who are not only the superstars of their own time but they also create something everlasting,” he shared, while naming Hans J. Wegner, Gio Ponti, Arne Jacobsen, Charles & Ray Eames, Otto Wagner, Gaudi, Steve Jobs, and Walt Disney among them.

When asked where he sees his company in 20 years, he said: “In 20 years I really hope that we will be the most determinative brand of the branch. Ageless, timeless but also reflecting our era and first of all, ecological – the best in the world of solid wood furniture.”

“It would also be nice if we could create a few (designs of) furniture which would be registered in the history of furniture and design,” he said.

But when asked to name several of his favourite pieces, he demurs.

“I do not have a favourite – there are some which are successful and less successful. To me it is elemental that I won't give out something from my hands for what I would feel ashamed later on. I really like to use them myself as well,” he said.



## What's next for Sixay Furniture?

“We are a company where people love to work and are proud that they can be a part of the team. My dream is that our partners and customers will think the same of us, and keep in mind that we are a high quality providing, likeable and trustworthy company.”

In recent years, Sixay Furniture has moved towards introducing its pieces to Southeast Asia, including Singapore, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur.

Since last year, the company has forged a partnership with XTRA Furniture Malaysia which celebrated its 21st birthday with a version of Sixay's quirky and cool PARIPA (MUSTANG) rocking horse for adults. The breath-taking beautifully-designed horse can hold up to a weight of 150 kgs.

There is also a children's version, known as PARIPA MINI, which is ergonomically-shaped, functional, with fine joinery and no loose pieces to ensure a safe and fun ride for everyone. Made with beech plywood and walnut saddle, or birch plywood on individual orders, the surface of the horse is treated only with natural materials, wax and oil, and is the perfect gift and hardwearing toy for children and big kids alike.

Along with the company's foray into this region, its participation at the Malaysian International Furniture Fair 2017 proved an eye-opener.

“The fair itself is really interesting through the eyes of someone arriving from Europe. I was really surprised that I could hardly find some furniture made from solid wood in a country where wood has a leading position,” said Mr. Szikszai.

“But it was also a nice experience to me that I found a good number of well-prepared and serious companies who would find a place for their products worldwide even in high quality industry fairs with a higher price segment,” he added.

“Malaysia is such a rich country in quality wood – you really should concentrate on that in the furniture industry – there is such a huge possibility in that which you could grab to create high quality furniture,” shared Mr. Szikszai.

As for Sixay Furniture [the company], the design guru hopes that his daughter will eventually helm the company.

“I wish that in 20 years my daughter will lead the company and that she would love it and take care of it like I did from the beginning,” he emphasised.

“We are a company where people love to work and are proud that they can be a part of the team. My dream is that our partners and customers will think the same of us, and keep in mind that we are a high quality providing, likeable and trustworthy company.”





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## *From Steel Pipes, Racks and Design*

# Furniture is B

by Gloria D. Gamat  
Furnish Now editor

Industrial racks are not a new concept, but because of Eonmetall, they are certainly getting a new design. Out of the storeroom and into the storefront, racks are getting some much needed attention thanks to some revolutionary innovation and ideas.



◀ Recently retired as a psychiatrist in America, Dennis has set up his new artist studio in Penang, Malaysia. Today, Dennis is painting his son, Matt, from memory. Pieces from Eonmetall's *180° Rack* brand suited perfectly, from the *Afisa* and *Kuhina* racks, to the *Kope Papa* and *Huli Tafel*, an artist like Dennis has everything he needs at arms' length of each other.

## The Steel Pipe Origin

You don't often find the words "revolution" and "steel pipes" in the same sentence, however, Eonmetall is set to change that. The company, which began as a steel pipe manufacturer, has now evolved into an international business with revolutionary marketing ideas and innovative design geared to impress both residential and commercial consumers.

Kent Goh, the COO of Eonmetall Group and creative director of *180°Design* shares how it all began: "In the beginning when my father founded the company, we were focused on making steel pipes. Then one day, a Middle Eastern guy came to my father with the idea of setting up a racking business. Back then, my father understood that there was a demand in the Middle East for racks, so he listened to the client's needs and saw a potential new market."

With the mindset that every generation needs a new revolution, the founding parents of Eonmetall Group jumped at the opportunity to cross borders and pursue a potential new market for their products. Despite the lack of higher education, his father had a keen entrepreneur's acumen, and thus the company began to produce industrial racks. The rest, as they say, is history.

When the time came for Mr. Goh to take over the family business, he admits that it was a bit awkward in the beginning. All home rack products in the market looked alike, plus he discovered some serious quality issues when testing them — he couldn't set up the racks by himself! He knew there had to be a better way, and to take the business to greater heights, a revolution was necessary.

"After testing the racks, I went straight to the R & D team and told them something was wrong. We needed to design a new model and come up with some prototypes to test," said Mr. Goh.

From this the Eonmetall Systems' *180°Rack* brand was born. These new racks were not only easy to install, they were of better quality too. And because the product had changed, Mr. Goh knew the marketing needed to change too. He decided to take his product out of the industrial racking business, and into the residential furniture market.



▲ He's fond of painting family interests. This is his wife, Teresa, who loves eating crabs. And that is the *Afisa Rack* — a combination of steel and wood from Eonmetall's *180° Design* collection.

# orn



▲ Gardening, and entomology, are other enjoyed hobbies...the *Kuhina Rack* keeping the trinkets well organised.

## Arrival in the Furniture Market

Now that Mr. Goh had a quality product that could be assembled at home, he just had to figure out how to sell it. How could he sell industrial racks as consumer furniture? Turns out, Mr. Goh had plenty of ideas to accessorise and customise the racks for a variety of uses.

“My first idea was to produce the racks in different colours to attract customers. Then I also considered accessories – what if we remove the steel shelving and replace it with a plastic tray? It could serve as a multi-function rack. We could add accessories to turn the racks into planters for different plants,” explained Mr. Goh.

It didn't take long for him to realise that the possibilities were endless. “For example, we found that many work tables don't have good lighting, so we created a table with a LED light. And thanks to printing technology, we can also experiment with patterns and materials like camouflage, flowers, marble or wood.”

And remember that small problem about self-assembly? Eonmetall now has a rack that can be set up in one minute. Not only are these racks simple to use, some of them are also designed for ease of use

and transport. “Why do I have a rack that takes me 15-20 minutes to set up? That's a waste of time. So, we designed racks that people can just lock and take out,” said Mr. Goh.

On the business side, Mr. Goh operates with a long-term plan. He has a business in mind that will last for generations to come. “My father provided me with the platform. And like everything else, I have to build it step by step, and very slowly. I believe that with a strong base, you can go further,” he said.

Before finally exhibiting at the Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF) in 2014, Mr. Goh attended the show almost every year as an observer. “I thought that our product might be the only one in the exhibition. We only had [just] one rack, and that turned out to surprise the market,” he shared.

Since then he has delved into furniture design and increased market exposure by attending various furniture shows worldwide. “My exhibition experience started at MIFF and it has helped me [and my company] grow. By standing with MIFF, you can aim for the bigger markets together.”



▶ A visit from grandchildren has left their shoes and toys behind (on the *Afficher Rack*), now happy mementos of time well spent.





## The Design Factor

But it wasn't only a good business idea to transform the industrial rack into consumer furniture. Mr. Goh was, in fact, living out his dream to design furniture. Mr. Goh had always wanted to pursue a career in interior design and architecture, however, his father convinced him to go into business instead. He thought he would never have the opportunity to pursue his dreams, until he realised he could apply his creativity and design to racks.

"That's why I took the industrial rack and turned it into a home rack. Employing design, I have transformed it [the rack] into furniture," he said.

Now, Mr. Goh intends to use design to change the company culture. In fact, he is calling 2017 "the design year". He admits that his company has many engineers, so only the design element is lacking. While Eonmetall Systems' *180°Rack* brand came about in 2013, this year, the company added *180°Design* to its portfolio.

"Once you bring in designers, you can make previous versions work better. Design helps to raise standards. I believe that if you continue to use the old methods, your standards won't improve," elaborated Mr. Goh.

"There is a gap in the design culture of many furniture companies, and I hope to help change the way people think, even in the industrial market. Old industries are too comfortable and don't want to change. But we need fresh creative minds to change," he said.

Keeping his aspirations to be a professional furniture designer alive, Mr. Goh is now working with a team of designers in the furniture section of his company. They are setting up a new office that will include a showroom, co-working office and a design studio. He hopes to recruit more designers, with the idea that other companies could outsource their design needs to *180°Design* as well.

▲ Look closely and you'll see this is a different version of Dennis's son. Not entirely happy with the first rendition, Dennis has painted him again, later into the evening. Thanks to the *Huli Tafel* for providing a nice, sturdy platform.

“There is a gap in the design culture of many furniture companies, and I hope to help change the way people think, even in the industrial market. Old industries are too comfortable and don't want to change. But we need fresh creative minds to change.”

- Mr. Kent Goh, COO, Eonmetall Group and Creative Director, *180°Design*



“I would like to change the way people think about racks – that you just don’t put a rack in a storeroom, that like fashion, it can also be very trendy.”

- Mr. Kent Goh

▼ During a painting break, it’s nice to have a coffee table nearby for more relaxed pleasures. *Kope Papa* (which comes with the *Noho Stool*) can be a coffee-work-table in one.

## Going Global

Some people live, eat and breathe their work. Well, Mr. Goh literally dreams about designing furniture – he wakes up with design ideas. But his inspiration doesn’t just come from dreams, it can come from anywhere – from his personal travels, or from attending exhibitions worldwide. “For example, when I saw Swedish furniture, I felt that it had a soul. The way the colours are used made me feel so comfortable,” he said.

In his more than 10 years in the business, Mr. Goh is aware of his competition. There might be a lot of industrial racking businesses in the market, but very few have turned their products into furniture. Eonmetall takes pride in the colours and designs of its racks, making them stand-out from the rest.

In terms of quality, the racks have passed the Australian Racking Standards, a certification of standards that the company’s competitors in Malaysia have not yet accomplished. By setting a good example, Eonmetall hopes that its marketing concepts will influence the industrial business as well.

And his ideas seem to be working, as the racks are getting attention from the international market. “A big Korean supermarket is our biggest customer in the region,” said Mr. Goh. But he doesn’t plan to stop there. He intends to supply every corner of the world, one rack at a time.

“I want to be a home rack expert and supply all over the world. I would like to change the way people think about racks – that you just don’t put a rack in a storeroom, that like fashion, it can also be very trendy,” he concluded.

A racking revolution, indeed.

### Editor’s note:

Eonmetall’s *180°Design* website is [www.180degreedesign.com](http://www.180degreedesign.com). Dennis Young’s paintings can be found at [Dennisyoungarts.com](http://Dennisyoungarts.com). Matt Young, his son painted on the cover, can be found at [Mediamice.com](http://Mediamice.com), the publishing partner of *Furnish Now*. Technically, Dennis still lives in America, but Matt reimagined his studio life in Malaysia with the visionary help of Eonmetall and their fantastic racks for personalised use.





**KINHENG FURNITURE SDN BHD (336029-V)**

AL44B, Kampung Baru Sungai Buloh,  
47000, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia.

Tel : (603) 6157 1223/0249 Fax : (603) 6156 4905/6140 1525

E-mail : [kinhengfurniture.marketing@gmail.com](mailto:kinhengfurniture.marketing@gmail.com)

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## **KINHENG - A Class of Its Own**

When you stepped into our booth during MIFF 2017, you might be surprised that you seem walked into a nature. Mary Davis quoted: "A walk in nature walks the souls back home", that's what we're trying to interpret through our furniture.

Nature is pleased with simplicity; our bedroom collections perfectly show detailed and simplistic design as well as the art of nature. When you look deep into our fine artwork, you'll understand everything better. Every fine artwork tells a story.

Since early 1990's, Kinheng never stop to improve and develop new designs concept to our customers. Every epic piece has involved lots of workmanship, craftsmanship and designer's innovative ideas. This had made us outstands as a symbol of superior classic design yet finest quality manufacturer in Malaysia.

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Our collections offer you extra comfort in your home environment come with traditional warmth and elegance. Nature never goes out of style, you will be proud to bring us home.

**VISIT US AT MIFF 2018, BOOTH 316**

# Hottest Trends to *Style* Your Home

by Hazlin Hassan  
Furnish Now writer

In today's fast-paced society, as lifestyles change, so do popular trends, along with new ideas for furniture. So what furniture trends will last beyond today?

Here are what some Malaysian furniture makers say are the latest modern lifestyle requirements from their buyers:

## Technology to Boost Your Lifestyle

Technology has become almost as important to the way we live our lives as breathing. Nowadays it is part of our homes, not just as a tool to improving our urban living, but also as decoration. Furniture makers are now using home technology and incorporating it with our choice of interior design.

## Eco-consciousness All the Way

With the average homeowner now using more and more technology than ever before, we are also becoming aware of the effects on the environment. More people are looking for ways to help balance and save the ecosystem, from growing food on their balconies to composting. So how do you incorporate eco-friendly practices when selecting your furniture? One of the popular ways to create a Greener future design is through the use of sustainably-sourced wood and other clean materials.

## Heritage Design

Amid rising mass consumerism and production, many find it convenient to adopt an easy throw-away attitude towards the items they currently own. But now craftsmanship and heritage designs are fighting back, with a focus on the human element. Handmade items created individually and built using solid wood and other materials such as iron can endure years -- nay, generations even -- of loving wear.

## Scandinavian Design

The ever-popular Scandinavian design is making its way into almost every home on the globe. The trademark of this style is beautiful craftsmanship, using natural materials, especially wood, to create an understated and simple aesthetic, which is at the same time affordable and functional. Is it any wonder that more and more consumers are falling head over heels in love with Scandinavian trends?

## Natural Colour Palettes

Softer colour palettes look set to be the favourite. More people are choosing natural wood colours, such as walnut, wood, sand and off-white shades. Such themes are calming, and invoke a sense of Mother Nature coming into your home, providing you with much-needed respite from the weary daily drudge of life. These colours are versatile and work well with almost any theme.



So how are home-grown Malaysian furniture companies keeping abreast with the latest lifestyle changes and adapting their furniture to suit today's consumers' lifestyle needs?

We talked to some manufacturers to find out...



## Home Best Enterprise

Home Best Enterprise's collections change continually to keep up with the ever-changing trends in today's fast-paced style of living, making furniture that is not only functional but also convenient to the buyers' lifestyles.

"We will continue to create different styles of products but ensure that they match the consumers' current housing layout and construction. Our company's product development is based on customer requirements," said Tey Lay Hui, general manager at Home Best.

As part of the ever-growing push to be green, home owners want everything to be eco-friendly now, and Home Best is ensuring that it only uses eco-friendly materials.

One problem they are facing however is the slowdown of the economy which is going to have an impact on the furniture industry to some extent, said Mr. Tey.

"In 2017 (and we foresee in 2018), the international market economy is slow, plus the shortage of workers, and raw material prices have been rising, which increased the pressure on the furniture industry," he noted.

"The shortage of workers is causing our production to be slow, resulting in low yields and high costs that indirectly affect our competitiveness," added Mr. Tey.

Meanwhile the increase in the cost of raw material is affecting the usage of raw materials and new colour productions, which may prove to be a dampener on their future designs.

Looking ahead, the Muar, Johor-based company, which focuses on living styles and housing space, will showcase "new technology & contemporary style" at the Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF) 2018.

## Decortage

Decortage designs make peace with modern developments and one's roots.

This furniture maker from Selangor, Malaysia, makes modern yet classic bedroom furniture, made from high quality solid wood plus solid wood and veneer, which will last for years.

"Strong structure and innovative design is always our basic requirement to build our furniture," said Julian Choo, business development manager at Decortage.

While there is a shift in lifestyle for consumers in recent years, Mr. Choo believes that culture remains the root influence of people's lifestyles.

Thus their designs reflect a modern interpretation of one's roots.

"With our products, we learn and preserve the tradition and lifestyle of people. Preservation hinders evolution so we kept the root essence of tradition and culture, and improvise with modern trends in our design," he explained.

He personally thinks that trends will eventually just turn out to be a passing phase because they follow never-ending cycles which will change continuously over time.

Instead, Decortage focuses on a heritage concept, building bold, handsome and durable furniture destined to be enjoyed for generations.

"Our bedroom sets are designed so that consumers will appreciate them as art and pass them down generation by generation," he said.

For the 2018 MIFF show, Decortage will showcase the modern classic PALOMA series bedroom set featuring a mixture of modern art and classic elegance, the beauty of which will not fade as time passes.

Made of solid rubberwood and with the combination of high quality MDF laminated with rubberwood veneer, every piece is perfectly crafted and finely handled, making it a suitable gift for your loved ones.



PALOMA BEDROOM



## Deesse Furniture

Makers of stylish and modern furniture, Deesse Furniture combine modern elements with tradition to offer a natural style with simple and elegant nuances in its furniture collections.

They see modern classic and Scandinavian designs as the most popular styles today, and that this will most likely continue into next year.

Deesse, located in Muar, Johor, Malaysia, said that simple, comfortable and tidy are the most sought-after requirements for its furniture.

The company believes that time and technology will be the prime movers for lifestyle changes.

The furniture maker noted that those born in the 70s, 80s and 90s are growing up, and they are currently the big purchasing groups as they have started to build their homes.

"This has made big differences to the market. To make sure we are able to change and react immediately to the lifestyle, we are participating in fairs and visiting exhibitions around the world frequently so that we would know the changes in the different markets and countries," shared BK Aw, marketing executive at Deesse.

"This buyer group seeks a simple and comfortable lifestyle," he noted.

"We are foreseeing that the modern classic and Scandinavian trend will still be shining in the years 2017 and 2018. Colours will be focusing more on smoother and comfortable hues," Mr. Aw added.

Deesse predicts the Scandinavian trend will be staying for quite some time due to the influences of the Internet, movies and other external factors. Besides, the style is also extremely popular with the younger generation.

For MIFF 2018, Deesse will be displaying its modern classic style, and possibly adding Scandinavian designs and materials.

## Seow Buck Sen Furniture

Muar, Johor-based Seow Buck Sen Furniture, which has been around for more than 30 years, specialises in Scandinavian and contemporary lifestyle furniture designs, making bedroom sets, television cabinets, shoe cabinets, office furniture, and so much more.

Its marketing manager, Mr. Edmund Law said that industrials and retro- or funky-colour designs are slowly becoming the trend, made popular by "new generation buyers".

"I believe that this trend will continue for the next 3 years," he shared.

Scandinavian and contemporary styles will also remain popular among buyers, Mr. Law said, and as such, his company will still focus on these, and showcase their range at MIFF next year.



## Ivorie International

Specialising in modern Italian dining and living room furniture, Ivorie International is no stranger to going green.

In fact, now it is going a lot greener than ever before, recycling disposed and lower grade rubberwood and turning them into aesthetic pieces of sturdy furniture.

The rubberwood, found in abundance in Malaysia, is also grown in well-managed plantations, hence there is no worry of depletion or deforestation.

Ivorie International, also based in Muar, Johor, has more than 20 years of history as the birthplace of Malaysia's furniture export industry.

"More and more consumers require their furniture to be environmentally-friendly," said Chua Yee Ting, marketing manager at Ivorie.

"They are requesting for materials such as MDF board, materials and fabrics which are more environmentally-friendly," Ms. Chua added.

However, all these tend to push up the price of the product as they often cost more, she noted.

Looking farther, Ivorie International aims to be a leading green furniture producer that is well-recognised and trusted in the industry.

"Consumers also love furniture that use special details, and a mixture of different materials such as wood and metals," said Ms. Chua.

Most people are very much into natural wood colours now, such as walnut or natural oak.

And as expected, the Scandinavian design is a winner each and every time with new home owners.

"It's a young look, simple, easy to mix and match with your home. Young people like it, as it is not so expensive," explained Ms. Chua.

While consumers are busy rushing with their fast-paced high-tech urban lifestyles, at the same time they are embracing simple, modern, functional and aesthetically-pleasing interior decor, which must also satisfy their conscience and ethics to create a greener and more sustainable future, and possess heritage qualities, through design.

It is clear that Malaysian furniture makers are trying to create positive visions for the future, all of which are essential for the planet.





# BEST-BETECK FURNITURE SDN.BHD.

(Company No.: 896352-T)

PTD 10636, Jalan Kempas 1, Kawasan Perindustrian, Bukit Bakri, Jalan Bakri, 84200 Muar, Johor, Malaysia.

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# The Furniture Making Dream Team

## Creating Liveable Spaces at Oasis Furniture Industries

by Shantini Harriet  
Furnish Now writer

In the big business of furniture manufacturing, staying competitive in changing economies and lifestyles is not as simple as just trying to outdo your competitor. Building a brand name that speaks for itself, and understanding your market trends and needs play a big part in how manufacturers remain competitive and sustainable.

The road to ensuring this takes a lot of planning and logistics, constantly having your finger on the industry's pulse, creating functional and aesthetic products, perfecting process efficiency, striving for quality, while still being mindful of the human factor that can change everything you do in a split second.



Oasis Furniture Industries is a Malaysian office seating solution provider for dynamic spaces since 1998 to more than 65 countries, and have made it their passion to create liveable office furniture with design driven, health, and environmentally conscious products. With ISO 9001: 2008 and ISO 14001:2004 certifications, along with a host of industry and tradeshow awards locally and abroad under its belt, Oasis has a proven track record of accomplishments and success.

A piece of furniture is only as good as its maker, and one that is made from the heart takes a whole team of people working in tandem, efficiency and harmony. To achieve this, Oasis leaves nothing to chance in its pursuit for excellence.

When a group of people get together and pool their expertise, you get a team that works as one to achieve the end game. Let us see how this dream team weaves its magic....

“Selling furniture is easy but what is important is making it purposeful... If furniture gives rise to tension and stress, then it is not good furniture.”

- Mr. Ralph Ong,  
Managing Director, Oasis  
Furniture Industries

## Two Heads are Better than One

Like all well-laid plans, it usually starts with an idea. In order for that to happen, we have to start from the top. Managing Director, Ralph Ong is the intrepid leader of Oasis and responsible for steering his team to where they need to go by devising overall concepts and company direction together with Operations Director, Nathan Lam.

To better fulfil best office solutions for different target markets, Oasis formulated six pioneer brands: BUROSC, Perfect U, Arte Como, Oasis Platinum, Oasis Superb and Oasis Sofa.

Already in the market for the last 19 years and a market leader in Malaysia, Oasis' ambitions run high, to earn its stripes among the Top 10 Far East office furniture solution providers. From Mr. Ong's viewpoint, trying to compete with top brands from the US and Europe that continue to play a big role in the market despite high operational costs is pointless. They are at a level beyond reach, sharing 20% of the market with very high quality products and even higher profile customers. Fortunately, the other 80% is up for grabs to anyone willing to go the extra mile. Oasis re-invented itself by offering multi-brands and business units for different demographics.



Mr. Ralph Ong

The Oasis mantra for balanced, enjoyable work and life resulted in its latest concept, “The Livable Office”, for a purposeful workplace that enables people to feel right at home while working.

“Selling furniture is easy but what is important is making it purposeful,” said Mr. Ong as he shared some insight on this concept. “If furniture gives rise to tension and stress, then it is not good furniture. People spend at least eight hours a day at their workplaces, performing various activities that require focus, circumnavigating around the office, and interacting with other people, necessitating maintained energy levels, health, and positive productivity.”

On that note, Oasis understands that creativity should not be for innovation sake alone but in keeping with the company's maxim, “Ergonomically Designed for Health”. By discerning how people work and being mindful of the challenges posed by open space workplaces, Oasis' livable office series, and collections will give the best furniture possible that can work for them in terms of comfort, ergonomics and style.

Following Mr. Ong and Mr. Lam's brainstorming on ideas and direction, it now falls to Mr. Lam in mobilizing the rest of the departments into action. Mr. Lam believes in his team's discipline for setting standards, commitment to quality and delivery and using their own initiatives in problem solving, knowledge development and making decisions.

## Knowledge is a Powerful Tool

With much appreciated guidance from Mr. Ong and Mr. Lam, the marketing team spearheaded by Ms. Joey Yap and Ms. Suki Tan gets down to business formulating concepts that will make them unique or more attractive to customers compared to others by providing product input. These young, vibrant women will attest to the fact that it is a lot more complex a process than meets the eye. They first identify the market they want to focus on from available data they have collected: market trends, buyer psychology, and philosophy, customer profiling, researching cultures and even the economics and politics of different countries.



Ms. Joey Yap

Using the “Livable Office” concept as an example, Ms. Yap and Ms. Tan explain their methods and thought processes when first exploring its potential as a marketable product line. Ergonomics and the environment is a genuine concern for Oasis when creating any product. Everything they do falls back to their company motto.

Firstly, it was important to connect workplaces with people and bridge the generation gap. The workplace consists of multi generations with different preferences and requirements. Older generations are more ergonomically inclined, while younger generations tend to prefer collaboration and socialising in the workplace. With that in mind, marketing knew that they had to come up with furniture that is suitable for everyone working in one space while enabling them to focus, collaborate, socialise, learn and progress.

Next, they used the philosophy of yin and yang to emphasise on balance and harmony by blurring the line between home and office. People need to be comfortable at work, as the office becomes their home away from home. To create fully utilised workspaces while minimising the real estate footprint, the “Livable Office” concept made space purposeful.

Understanding space and the activities conducted there, along with smart resource management in terms of technology and people, helped marketing better plan the types of furniture best suited for each workspace. In addition, a more portable and agile product makes for better interaction with its environment and people. Increasing productivity and creativity by connecting workspace, people, and activities are the basis of Oasis’ product development.

Finally, marketing reasoned that instead of fulfilling customer needs and wants through each brand, they could integrate these brands in creating solutions for each type of customer through different service packages while still maintaining brand value.

Through customer profiling, marketing categorises its customers into different groupings, then creates service packages for these customers to meet their needs in specific ways. The service packages delineate customers from the big players in the market who look for exclusivity and very high quality requirements, to projects that need large quantities, and even those that require small select pieces.

Sometimes communicating concepts into tangible designs can get lost in translation especially when formulating more than one concept. Therefore, it may take time to match concepts to design and product functionality. In addition, it can get quite frustrating when unsolvable technical or material sourcing issues hinder concepts from becoming reality. What’s more, thinking in advance (at least five years ahead) on how the market may evolve by identifying current trends and patterns, proves harder year by year as people become more unpredictable with their needs and desires. Despite everything, marketing presses on.

With these concepts swimming around in their heads, marketing will now enlist the inspiration of the R&D department to bring these concepts to the drawing board.

## The Art of Furniture Making

Design, material sourcing and product development conducted at Oasis’ R&D department is the realm of furniture designers – those special people whose creations require technical know-how, whose artistic skills that spark an emotional connection with their creations, and most importantly, who understand commercial saleability.

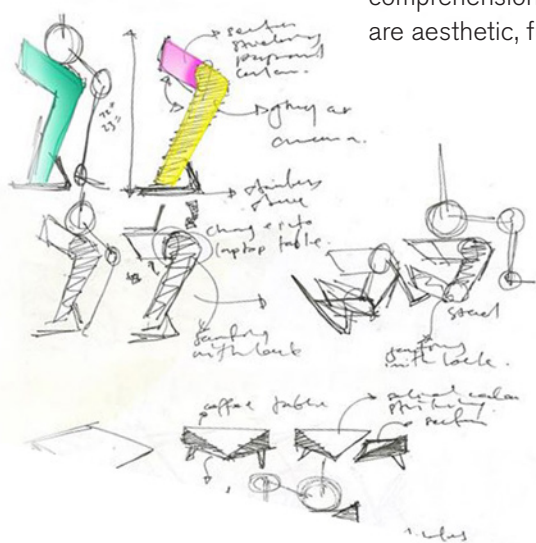


(left –right) Ms. Suki Tan, Mr. Ralph Ong, Mr. Nathan Lam and Ms. Joey Yap

Oasis' in-house designers, Aneza and Shah with the help of outsourced designers, Sujak and Izzul, receive input from the marketing department on furniture concepts, features and benefits. From the input provided, they will do their own market research on existing similar furniture in the market and study their pros and cons.

With the data and analysis collected, they will then design the furniture that best benefits and brings value to their customers. Integrating a strong storyline and concept, the artist in them brings a piece of their soul into the design through inspiration from our daily lives and the beauty of nature, with the desire of creating familiarity with the furniture.

While ensuring material availability, sustainability and costing controls, the designers are aware that when creating tangible representations of concepts, however much inspired, they must justify their creations with value for design. Mr. Lam explains that designers need to be philosophically and psychologically aware of people's inclinations and needs, market trends, technology and technical knowledge of furniture making. Through their comprehension of these elements, ideas and inspirations are translated into products that are aesthetic, functional, and marketable.



Mixed materials are now the trend but designers are sometimes in a conundrum to find the equilibrium line between unlimited design ideas as well as practicality, and availability of materials that can limit their creativity flow.

Potential designs are entrusted into the capable hands of the sample maker who constructs prototypes that will be reviewed by the management, marketing and QA & QC. At the same time, the procurement team from production will be ensuring the availability and sustainability of materials by suppliers to meet their requirements. Depending on how well the sample meets the initial marketing concept and input from everyone, the prototype review may take some time going back and forth until everyone is satisfied. Product development can take anywhere from three months to a year to fruition.

On approval, the sample maker subjects the prototype to a test run through the production line. He will devise an industry engineering process design to ascertain that the process flow runs smoothly and efficiently while ensuring the design fits the mechanics of the production line.

If all goes well with the test run, marketing will then launch the product into the market and promote it to targeted customers. When customers start making enquiries, the sales team takes over by taking orders and negotiating on pricing, specifications, color, etc. With orders in hand, the sales team issues a job order and then it goes straight to the production line.

## All Systems Go

The day starts like any other day for Assistant Production Manager, Kamarulzaman bin Rahman or Man, as his Oasis family fondly calls him. His 15-year experience on the job fits in perfectly when overseeing every aspect of the production line at Oasis' manufacturing facilities.

With a factory space of over 100,000 square metres and production capacity at 12,000 units per month, Mr. Rahman certainly has his work cut out for him. Sectioning the production department into different production lines specialising in front and back processes of the production flow, the production controller double-checks that all materials go to their respective sections, while the production output in-charge personnel ensures that production targets are met.

Currently 67 people strong, Mr. Rahman begins his day walking his rounds from line to line, checking on progress.



### ▲ Fabric Section

The first section in the production line, various types of materials like PVC, leather, fibre, and fabric are marked using fabric molds depending on the design. In turn, these materials are cut into precise pieces that are sprayed with gum. Finally, tailors sew these glued pieces into various component pieces.

Interestingly, according to Mr. Rahman, molds are the most important components of the production department for repeat orders. These molds are stored regardless of when it will be used again even if a repeat order for that particular design may be a long time coming.

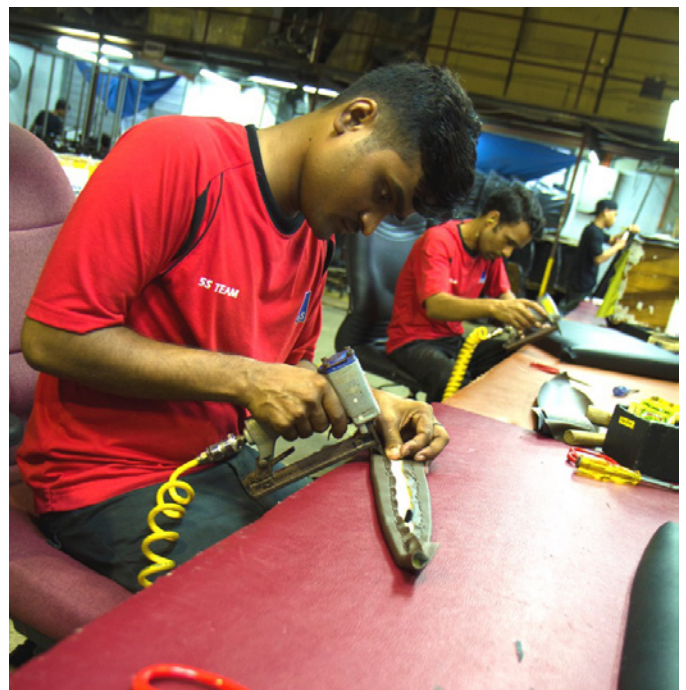


### ▲ Gum Section

Workers are assigned to handle a brand each where prepared pieces from the fabric and plywood sections are then gumed together with foam. Funny enough, you may make the mistake of thinking you are in an old derelict place with giant cobwebs fluttering in the wind when you first step into this section. However, those are just the remnants of the gum flying everywhere when sprayed on components. Luckily, clean-up jobs are done weekly.

### ▼ Plywood Section

On any given day, the noise levels are deafening at the plywood section with carpenters hammering, drilling and sawing ready-made plywood chair molds. The molds, which are single and double layered are marked, re-cut if needed, smoothed and then drilled with holes. Next, nuts, bolts and clips are fitted in, and layered with plastic covers, while chair arms are fitted with brackets.

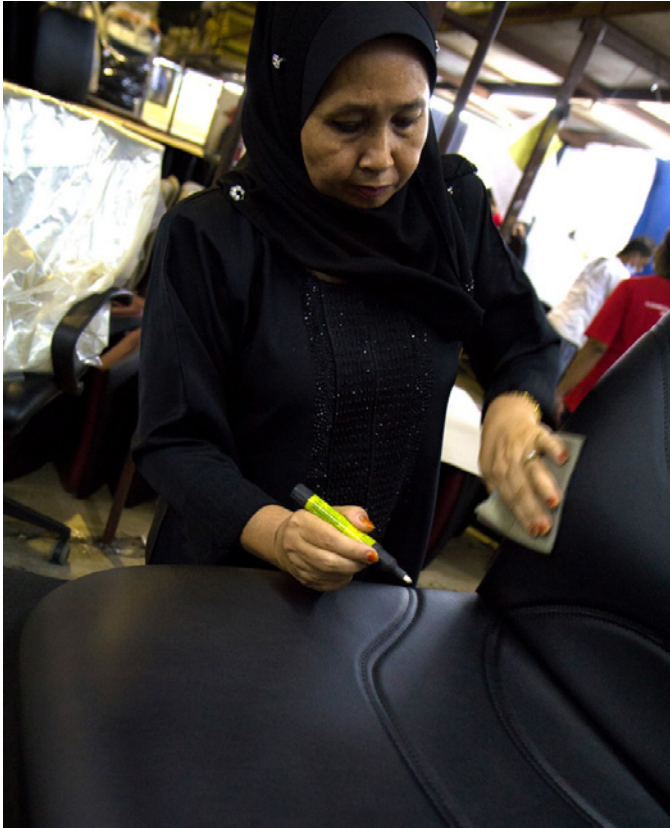


### ▲ Stapling Section

There are five lines running at the same time, handling different sets per line. All pieces are finally stapled down and assembled into recognisable pieces of furniture.

## Assembly and Cleaning Sections

At the assembly section, all furniture from the stapling section are fitted with screws and bolted down tight. After that, these finished products are given a thorough clean-up job and wrapped in plastic at the cleaning section.



## Quality Control

The quality control (QC) section is probably the most important section of the production line and Mr. Vincent Wong is the man kept very busy doing just that. There are three types of QC conducted at Oasis: incoming quality control (IQC), in-process quality check and output quality check. IQC checks all raw materials and bought-out components coming in before going to the production line. In-process quality check ensures consistency in quality during all stages of production, while output quality check does product testing on finished products. At Oasis, finished products are 100% checked for quality, safety and functionality. Checks may be conducted at either the assembly line or the cleaning stages depending on the complexity of the product. Quality is not just about policing for quality but ensuring that workers in turn understand the value for improvement to ensure quality.

Mr. Wong has a mental to-do list of checks when finished products find their way to his domain. First, he checks the outlook of the product, and then he does a stability test to check balancing and seat levelling on a sheet of glass. Next, the function tests to ensure all mechanical parts are functional, followed by the comfortability, stability and ergonomics of the chair by experiencing it (i.e. sitting on it).

Place feet firmly on the ground at 90 degrees (no dangly feet) and then adjust the lumbar at the back of the seat. Adjust the retractable seat and the tension according to body weight and size so that you sit comfortably without toppling over. Incidentally, all Oasis chairs are weight-sensitive reclining. Then adjust armrests for proper support, forearms should rest fully on armrest and shoulders straight.

Mr. Wong makes sure that products meet specification requirements of different countries and are BIFMA-standards (Business + Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association) compliant. The only challenges are when there are new products, new specs and the need to set new standards. Only when Mr. Wong is satisfied with all his checks will he give his seal of approval for finished products to progress to the loading dock.

As smooth as the production line runs most days, Mr. Rahman reflects on some of the challenges they do face from time to time. Late arrival materials and insufficiently trained new workers can impede the production flow but Mr. Rahman takes it all in his stride – just another day at the office for the furniture making dream team.



## Packing & Loading Section

All products are finally plastic wrapped and packed into boxes with Mr. Wong making one last check on packing and destination labels before heading off to the loading bay for shipping out.



**MASTER GRADE FURNITURE INDUSTRIES SDN. BHD.**

Email : [info@mastergradeurniture.com](mailto:info@mastergradeurniture.com)

[marketing-mastergrade@hotmail.com](mailto:marketing-mastergrade@hotmail.com)

Tel : +6 06 9869598 Fax : +6 06 9869959

Website : <http://mastergradeurniture.com>

# Malaysian Furniture Industry

# The Next Ten Years

by Shantini Harriet  
Furnish Now writer

Spanning more than 25 years since its development in the 1980s, The Malaysian furniture industry's evolution from a cottage-based industry, mainly catering to the domestic market, to the primarily export-oriented one of today, took a lot of joint effort from the government, manufacturers, associations, and other agencies and interested parties in the industry.

## Overview

The introduction of the abundantly available Malaysian oak (rubberwood) as a suitable material for quality-made furniture, further increased the potential growth of the industry. Coupled with institutional support from the Malaysian government in ensuring good infrastructural facilities, an influx of foreign labour, modern warehousing, telecommunications, transportation facilities and incentive initiatives, the industry looked well geared for an efficient and consistent supply chain.

Together with the initiatives, guidance and assistance of the Malaysian Timber Industry Board (MTIB) and the nation's marketing arm, Malaysian Timber Council (MTC), through resources management, promotion, marketing and trading opportunities, the furniture industry moved even further towards growth and expansion.

In 2007, despite a budding global financial crisis that developed in 2008 and 2009, Malaysia remained within the top ten furniture exporters of the world to more than 160 countries of which USA, Japan, Australia and UK were its biggest markets. With total exports of RM 6.7 billion, the wooden furniture industry was the largest contributor accounting for 29.3% of Malaysia's total timber-based exports that year.

Ten years down the road, accounting for 2% of the total global furniture exports, the wooden furniture industry is still going strong albeit many challenges along the way. Nevertheless, it is on the threshold of evolving yet again in preparation for the next decade to come, which begs the question, "How does this lead actor and its supporting cast expect to further its development on the international stage?"



Dato' Dr. Jalaluddin Harun

Datuk Dr. Abdul Rahim Nik

Mr. Koh Chon Chai

In 2016, furniture contributed a significant 34% from the total export of timber products which valued at RM 22.11 billion, an increase of 3.8% from 2015

# and Beyond

## Standing in the Eyes of the World

Malaysia is currently ranked 8<sup>th</sup> in the world for furniture exports according to Centre for Industrial Studies (CSIL), and has been on a phenomenal streak through consistent surges in exports over the last decade. Based on MTIB statistics, in 2011, the export of wooden furniture was RM 6.2 billion whilst in 2016 it increased by 17% to RM 7.6 billion, and the first quarter figures for this year are just as encouraging showing an increase of 6.4% from RM 1.87 billion in 2016 to RM 1.99 billion in 2017.

As an important sector and contributor to the overall timber industry, MTIB Director General, Dato' Dr. Jalaluddin Harun explained Malaysia's positioning and the furniture industry's impact on the Malaysian economy.

"In 2016, furniture contributed a significant 34% from the total export of timber products which valued at RM 22.11 billion, an increase of 3.8% from the previous year," he said.

Muar Furniture Association (MFA) President Koh Chon Chai attributes the present success of the industry in Muar "to always having close communications between the government and its members, and the platform that MFA provides through participation in exhibitions and such to connect them to the world markets."

Under the National Timber Industry Policy (NATIP, 2009-2020), the Malaysian furniture industry has been targeted to export RM 16 billion by 2020 and the composition of export is 60% value added vs. 40% commodity based. To achieve this target, MTIB deduces that the industry needs to maintain its present growth at 11.8% or higher for the next five years.

This would mean that the furniture industry would have to embark more aggressively in shifting from original equipment manufacturer (OEM) to original design manufacturer (ODM) and original brand manufacturer (OBM) of furniture products, enhancing Malaysian furniture particularly on the high value added exports. Currently, ODM and OBM, which are combined at 53% levels, will need to achieve levels of 70% to meet its target.

Dato' Jalaluddin strongly emphasises on the need for the shift: "When we started, OEM put infrastructure on the ground, taught us about quality, production flow, technology and the spirit of competitiveness, but we cannot rely on this anymore if we want to ensure growth but by becoming more competitive with product development. With good designs, automation and robotics we can increase our export volume."

MTC CEO, Datuk Dr. Abdul Rahim Nik, shares this viewpoint: "Of course, in the long run, we cannot run away from going into automation realisation. Furthermore, to achieve better development, the industry themselves have to upgrade their products and quality as well, and more importantly, to enhance in

## In A Nutshell...

### Malaysian Timber Industry Board (MTIB)

Established in 1973 by an act of Parliament, it is a statutory body accredited by the Ministry of Plantation Industries and Commodities and mandated as the lead agency to promote and coordinate the overall development of the timber industry. It is responsible for initiating development of the various sectors of the timber industry and providing technical, marketing, licensing and other forms of assistance to ensure their continued growth within a rapidly industrialising Malaysian economy.

#### Relevancy to furniture industry:

*Providing the furniture industry with raw materials, information on the market, suppliers, buyers, promotion and marketing, export and import licences, processing facilities, knowledge, education and skills training.*

### Malaysian Timber Council (MTC)

Established in 1992, MTC promotes the development and growth of the Malaysian timber industry in the manufacture and trade of timber products. Its mission is to ensure the sustainability of the Malaysian timber industry by improving its competitiveness, enhancing market access and creating trade opportunities. Headquartered in Kuala Lumpur, MTC has regional offices in London, Dubai, Guangzhou and Bangalore.

#### Relevancy to furniture industry:

*MTC does marketing and promotion by participating in trade fairs, business matching sessions, overseas missions, pavilions locally and abroad, bringing Malaysian companies overseas to either participate or visit certain shows of interest, and seminars and conferences to disseminate information by inviting international speakers to share market outlook and trends in different countries or regions.*

### Muar Furniture Association (MFA)

Known as the Furniture City of Malaysia, Muar is the foremost furniture hub in the country with some 700 factories that account for about 45-50% of Malaysia's furniture export. Established in 1982, the MFA comprises of all furniture and furniture parts manufacturers in Muar.

#### Relevancy to furniture industry:

*A driving force in the Malaysian furniture industry, it endeavours to give its members international exposure and recognition by providing better sales platforms and promoting international business.*



Malaysian Timber Council (MTC) exhibition booth at MIFF

“When we started, OEM put infrastructure on the ground, taught us about quality, production flow, technology and the spirit of competitiveness, but we cannot rely on this anymore if we want to ensure growth but by becoming more competitive with product development. With good designs, automation and robotics we can increase our export volume.”

- Dato' Dr. Jalaluddin Harun,  
MTIB Director General

terms of design and adopt some value creation along the line. Therefore, in order to do this we have to be mindful of development in our potential region. Over the years, trends and governments change in these prospective regions so we must have on-ground intelligence and be more aggressive and effective with our marketing and promotion to help and support these industries.”

Furthermore, since the wood-based industry is one of Malaysia's leading industry sources and plays an important role in Malaysia's industrialisation programme, the main development objective of the Industrial Master Plan (IMP) is:

- To change the wood-based industries to major resource-based industries.
- To maximize the value-added products from forest resources.
- To establish Malaysia's reputation as a center for high quality wood products such as furniture, joinery, and moldings.

### Initiatives

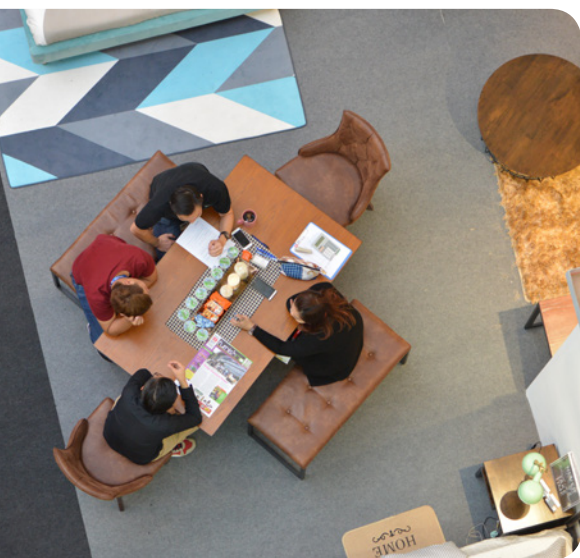
Over the years, organisations like MTIB, MTC and the MFA have played their part in initiating strategies, programmes and events in developing the furniture industry thus far but with the future hanging over the horizon, these organisations and others go the extra mile by continuing proven methods, formulating new initiatives or revamping previous ones to stay relevant to the industry.

Some of these present and future initiatives are:

#### Human capital

This involves training and educational programmes by MTIB like the Wood Industry Skills Development Centre (WISDEC) for technical training, Tanggam Design Centre (TDC) for development of international calibre designers and the Professional Designer Program (PDP) that facilitates collaboration between international professional designers, Tanggam designers and manufacturers. Also it involves the Terengganu Timber Industry Training Centre (TTITC) for skilled and semi-skilled workers by the Terengganu state government, Furniture Industry Technology Centre (FITEC) for transference of technical knowledge, manufacturing technology and furniture production by MARA.

This is essential not only for enlarging the pool of knowledge and skilled workers to facilitate the adoption of advanced technologies but also to expand their skills training.



### Manufacturing clusters

Part of the success of the manufacturers in Muar, under the MFA banner, is close proximity with each other by establishing furniture-manufacturing clusters with essential supporting industries. Taking it a step further, MFA together with MTIB and the Johor state government are going to start developing a modern high-tech furniture park to house this cluster of manufacturers and attract others into the cluster. The project will start sometime this year and scheduled for completion in two years.

### Raw Materials and Labour

The humble rubber tree deserves much respect. Ironically, having made Malaysia at one time the world leader in latex, this previous by-product of latex, managed to put Malaysia back on the global map as 83% of its furniture export comes from rubberwood. Despite a diverse range of timber species, it has remained the mainstay of the furniture industry.

To help ensure continuous supply of rubberwood apart from the replanting of current plantations, which is about 1.1 million hectares, MTIB's Forest Plantation Development (FPDSB) company initiated development of 122,000 – 124,000 hectares (70% for rubberwood) of new plantations for 15 years. These plantations will plant rubber (timber latex clone), acacia, teak, sentang, mahogany, batai, kelempayan, binuang and bamboo, which are all suitable for furniture. That said, MTIB hopes the government can consider a policy ensuring a minimal acreage is reserved for rubberwood for the sustainability of the furniture industry.

Since the limitations and levy imposed by the government on foreign labour has caused a shortage of workers and concerns on the ability of manufacturers meeting delivery commitments for the industry, it is hoped that with modernisation and automation, the industry will become less dependent on foreign labour.



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### Conclusion

The furniture industry will need to heed the winds of change and overcome more challenges in the next decade to ensure its prominence as a global player. With the continued support of the government, associations and other agencies, manufacturers will have to up the ante with design and product innovations, state-of-the-art technology, usage of new bio-composite materials, implement lean management, and create a Malaysian brand identity, to expect a growth curve at a greater level of achievement and value. It will not be an easy undertaking for all concerned but the rewards will outweigh the effort.



# Life After MIFF FDC

by Ruchi Mahajan Ranga

Thanks to the Furniture Design Competition (FDC), thousands of aspiring furniture designers around the world have found a platform to display their talent, both in Malaysia and abroad. Launched in 2010, and held annually at the Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF), the FDC helps to hone young talent in the furniture industry, while bestowing valuable experience and providing industry recognition. And for those who have won the FDC, it's brought about significant changes.

Let's check in with some of the past winners of the MIFF FDC to see how the competition has impacted their lives...

## Emmy Kong Pek Kei

Winner of MIFF FDC 2013



As a toddler, Emmy Kong Pek Kei had a flair for doodling and drawing. As she grew up, her mother introduced her the arts, and she continued to refine her skills. And although Emmy was studying to be a doctor, when the time came to declare her major at university, she chose product design over medicine.

In 2013, when Emmy Kong Pek Kei won 1st prize for her *Unity Table Design*, it was life-changing to say the least. Her participation in the MIFF FDC was part of required university coursework – however, it turned out to be one of the most beneficial moves of her career. Because of the MIFF FDC, she was able to work with an esteemed manufacturer while she was still pursuing her second year in university. She was also part of their team during an exhibition in Germany, which she credits as an eye-opening experience with massive exposure to the latest trends in industrial furniture design. She also expanded her network of designers – many of whom she continues to communicate with today to discuss designs, trends, ideas and industry gossip.

Currently, Emmy is the Director and Interior Decorator at *Cosy Looks Windows Fashion* in Selangor, Malaysia, as well as the stylist and designer for *The Bourgeois Ladder* project, a collaborative art fashion project to create an awareness of upcycling used products to fabricate sustainable wearables by using fabric, paper and plastic bottles.

“In light of so many career options these days, it's not easy to pursue life as a designer. You have to keep abreast on the latest trends, demands and technology in order to showcase beautiful objects for the world, without compromising on their functionality,” said Emmy. But at the same time, in the middle of the challenging environment and strong competition, she finds the field to be extremely exciting – everything and anything that a designer can dream of can be drawn or (possibly) be built.



Having started in furniture, Emmy is succeeding in her current career in the fashion industry.

In addition, Emmy encourages all designers to follow their passion with practicality in mind. To explain her ideology of beautiful yet functional furniture to aspiring designers, she said: “We constantly have to change designs in order to comply with our client’s needs, building and production restrictions, and most commonly now, its effect on the environment.”

“The world of design is ever-changing, and as designers, we are responsible to adopt sustainable furniture design options. We can research the latest trends and technology, while finding ways to help reduce waste and aid humankind through design,” she added.

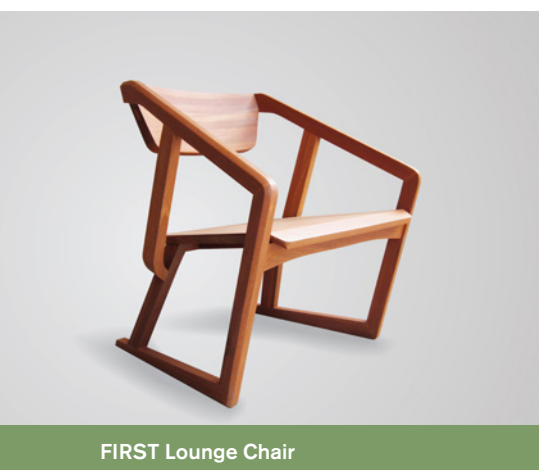
Emmy believes that aspiring designers should design what they love, and find ways to produce those things, when possible. She summed up her advice with the following: “Nothing comes easy, but it’s better to try and fail than not to try at all. You will never know where it will take you.”



Scadena Outdoor Swing



HAAI Barstool



FIRST Lounge Chair

## Francis Lye

Winner of MIFF FDC 2014



Francis Lye, the co-founder of Kuala Lumpur’s award-winning furniture lifestyle brand *Mfivio*, credits his win at the 2014 MIFF FDC as the starting point of his career. His MIFF FDC design, the *XSR*, wowed judges and visitors alike with its brilliantly ergonomic shape and its perfect combination of technology and comfort.

“I’ve always been interested in both science and art, but I felt that I had to choose one or the other,” said Francis. “I have a passion for creating things, and I thought this would be an area where I could excel. However, it wasn’t until university that I stumbled upon industrial design, which turned out to be the perfect combination to satisfy both of my passions.”

In addition, Francis liked the idea of creating furniture that people would love to have in their homes. Currently, he is working on a new designer collection made from solid timber for a furniture lifestyle brand based in Australia. He is also working with a Chinese electronics startup company that is slated to launch its new product range next year.

With his experience, Francis has some advice for aspiring designers:

“I learned early on to never take anything for granted. It doesn’t matter how rich or poor you are. What matters most is what you become. Hard work always pays off. What you do for others always comes back tenfold. The key is to not expect it.”

He also noted that true designers have a self-fueling passion. They will be motivated to improve naturally, and to find design mentors to hone their skills – two things that are essential for career development.

He also praised the MIFF FDC for their instrumental role in launching the careers of young and talented designers. “It is the best platform to attract attention from main industry players and to stand out from the crowd,” he noted. “The MIFF FDC connects designers with local manufacturers, which is an amazing opportunity to tap into the furniture industry and make connections.”

“My experience with the MIFF FDC has been priceless. It’s enabled me to grow and become a better designer, while helping me understand what the market needs,” he added.



# Lim Bo Qiang

Winner of MIFF FDC 2016



Like many designers, Lim Bo Qiang has been passionate about arts and crafts since his early childhood. However, it was when he joined a furniture company that his passion for the arts evolved into a career in furniture design.

At the 2016 MIFF FDC Bo impressed judges with his vision of adding a modern twist to traditional furniture design. His *Muk* sofa, with its high levels of aesthetics and multi-functionality won him the competition, while his *Kyte* and *Dudoo* designs also took home outstanding awards for their beautiful design and unique appeal.

Bo's experience with the MIFF FDC has opened his eyes to new horizons in furniture design. "Being part of the MIFF FDC has changed my life," he said. In fact, winning the MIFF FDC has opened doors and created many opportunities for him. The experience boosted his confidence, and he's now running his own studio: *B.O. Design*. In fact, life after the MIFF FDC has been busier than ever for Bo – in addition to his studio, he's also working on some interior design projects and some bespoke furniture design.

"Life in the world of design is amazing, every day is a challenge," Bo shared. "Starting a studio is never easy. You have to be humble, but also have the courage to take risks. In addition, you have to not only continue to learn about design, but you also have to learn how to run a business."

Bo encourages aspiring designers to follow their dreams:

**"Get out there! Share your thoughts, talk about your ideas and find inspiration. The more you give, the more you gain. Don't be afraid to put yourself out there – even if you think you are not ready yet. We are never ready until we step out."**



Bo shares design styles & tips on an event and renovation talk.



Latest design collection launched and exhibited at *iSaloni Milan Furniture Exhibition 2017* in Italy, featuring *Anya* collection (Chaise Longue & ottoman)



Working on one of the interior design projects, featuring a functional feature wall.

# Nathan Liow Heng Yee

## From MIFF FDC To The World



Nathan Liow Heng Yee has always been attracted to beautiful things. And this drive to make the world more beautiful led him to design... to create something beautiful, functional and significant. Like many designers who enter the MIFF FDC, Nathan was encouraged to participate as a student. However, his involvement soon became personal, and life-changing.

Nathan was a top 10 finalist in both 2013 and 2014 when two of his designs were shortlisted: the Gendang Stool which was inspired by the traditional instrument, the *Gendang*; and the *Hayden Bureau*, a multi-functional home office piece.

"After two years of competing in the FDC, I noticed that the process had not only boosted my confidence, but also changed my perception of furniture design – I learned how to balance function and aesthetics to fulfill market demands," he said. In addition, he felt lucky to have the opportunity to be employed and work abroad during the years he was involved in the competition.

But that was just the beginning for Nathan, and the best was yet to come. "At the moment I am working on a residential wall system project. It's something totally new to me – the technical construction aspect is very different from furniture design, and it's taught me how to blend furniture and space."

"I'm not only interested in the function of furniture design, but in the different facets that stem from it: brand building, product design, space planning and interior decor," Nathan added.

Currently, Nathan is based in China and has the privilege of working with Philip Yap, chief judge for the MIFF FDC. "This work has provided many opportunities for me to broaden my horizons in both furniture and interior design. In the past few years, I have learned how to combine different disciplines when approaching a new project, and have found the point where expertise meets experience and curiosity, without forgetting the fundamentals," Nathan said.

He is also collaborating with influential manufacturers in China who have equipped him with additional skills and technical know-how in prototype design: "We are in the process of establishing our own lighting brand for residential and commercial use by the end of October 2017."

As a young designer, Nathan says that life in the real world can be both challenging and interesting. "Dealing with the personal preferences of clients can be challenging," he explained. "Before we can begin a project, we have brainstorming sessions with the client to ensure we have all the correct information to complete the project smoothly and successfully."

"On the other hand, it can also be really interesting," Nathan added. "I have the opportunity to work in different fields and meet new people which helps me to discover different ways to be creative. I enjoy every moment of the design process – especially when your idea turns into reality. That feeling is indescribable."

Nathan encourages aspiring designers to remain passionate and curious at all times – and to keep in mind that persistence is key.

**"In my opinion, design is not about blindly pursuing or following trends, but rather studying the market to understand potential needs... otherwise you risk becoming a follower."**



The first showroom of our new established furniture brand called *TangTang* in Shanghai during January 2016, with the design team.



Company trip to Salone Milano in April 2017.



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