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The official magazine of the  
Malaysian International Furniture Fair



# Years of MIFF

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# Letter to Readers

## Onto a Brighter MIFF Future

As we look forward to the future – the future of MIFF and the growing Malaysian furniture industry it supports – indications are good. Each year MIFF is bigger. And as the event grows, so do the returns for exhibitors and attendees. The 2018 show was the largest in history, stretching across two venues (including the ultra-new MITEC and previous location PWTC). This year's show broke all previous records, too. In addition to having the largest floor space, it had the highest sales, the most exhibitors and visitors, and buyers from more countries than ever before.

Next year, MIFF will celebrate a milestone: its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In this issue, we look back at the event's beginnings and uncover how its grown to become the biggest furniture fair in Asia and beyond. From talking to the key personnel behind MIFF to the long-term exhibitors and international buyers, we hear from the people that continue to make MIFF a successful event year-after-year.

This issue also celebrates MIFF 2018's Furniture Excellence Award winners, where we learn not only about their designs, but the people behind them. Throughout every story in this issue, we look at the people behind the business to show how MIFF's current tagline "Design Connects People," inspires us by invoking that human connection.

Read on for post-show highlights, and to hear directly from the designers, buyers and people who help make MIFF what it is today – an event that not only grows business, but also inspires and connects.

We hope you enjoy this issue!

Best wishes,

**KAREN GOI**

General Manager, MIFF  
UBM Malaysia



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# MIFF 2018

# The BIGGEST Milestone

by Tan Sher Lynn  
Furnish Now Writer

The Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF) made history in 2018. This year's fair, held from March 8 to 11, was the largest in MIFF's 24-year history – occupying an exhibition area of 100,000-square-metres in 15 halls across two venues, the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) and the ultra-modern Malaysia International Trade & Exhibition Centre (MITEC). Compared to last year's record-breaking show, MIFF 2018 boasted 25 percent more exhibition space – a remarkable increase from last year.



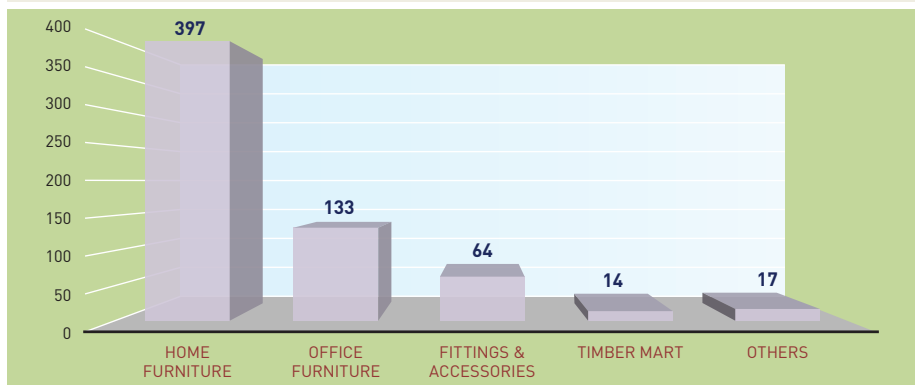
## Breaking All Previous Records

MIFF 2018 not only surpassed last year, it broke all the previous shows' records too. There was a 13 percent increase of exhibitors – from 550 in 2017 to 625 in 2018, and more countries participated as well, with 13 in 2018 (namely Malaysia, China, Taiwan, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, India, Turkey, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore and the USA), compared to nine in 2017. This expanded participation resulted in more new products and collections than ever before.

Of the products showcased, most of them were home furniture (397 exhibitors), followed by office furniture (133), fittings and accessories (64), timber mart (14) and others (7), which consisted of government agencies, associations and publications.

### Exhibitor Profiles

<b>No of Exhibitors</b>	<b>625</b>	} Exhibitor: <b>13%</b> increase
<b>Malaysian</b>	374	
<b>International</b>	251	} Sales: <b>5%</b> increase
<b>Sales Generated</b>	<b>US\$ 984 mil</b>	
<b>Exhibiting Countries</b>	<b>13</b> countries & regions	
	Malaysia/ China/ Taiwan/ Indonesia/ Hong Kong/ Korea/ Japan/ India/ Turkey/ Vietnam/ Thailand/ Singapore/ USA	

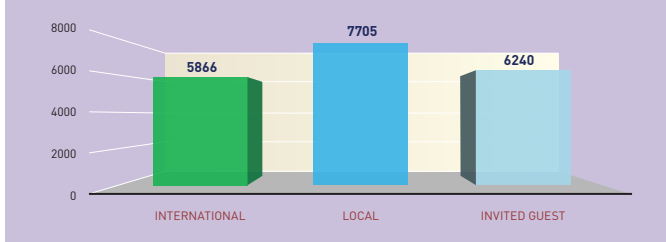


\* Other exhibitors include Government agencies, associations, publications

Visitor Profiles

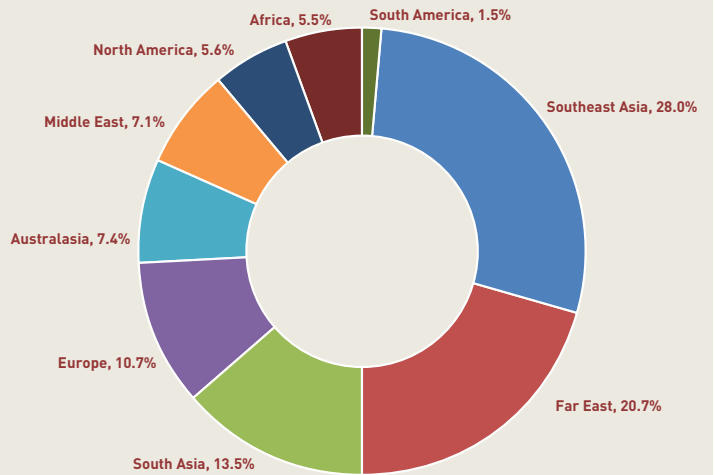
No of Visitors **19,811**  
 International 5,866  
 Malaysia 7,705  
 Invited Guests 6,240  
 Visiting Countries **134**

7% increase  
 40% new visitors



\* Invited Guests including guests from Government agencies, Embassies/ High Commissions, Non-furniture Trade Associations, Universities/ Institutions, Students, etc

International Visitors by Region



More visitors attended MIFF 2018 as well. This year saw a 7 percent increase with 19,811 attendees, of which an astounding 40 percent were first-time visitors. In addition to more visitors, MIFF 2018 also attracted more buyers.

During the four-day fair, the total amount of sales generated reached another all-time high of \$984 million (USD) – a 5 percent increase from last year’s \$940 million (USD).

According to MIFF General Manager, Karen Goi, this year has once again reinforced MIFF’s global standing as a very popular and productive sourcing hub. “It proves that we are effective in drawing new exhibitors, buyers and more products to a much larger show. Generally, exhibitors are happy that they are securing extra business from markets that they have not encountered before, like Africa and South America. Many have expressed that next year, they want bigger booths in MITEC and PWTC to launch more products and scale up their presentations,” she said.

Show Highlights

The larger exhibition space allowed for the launch of more new initiatives to enhance design quality and increase business opportunities. One of these is designRena, a collaboration between FDC in Action and 80 top Malaysian manufacturers which showcased more than 15,000-square-metres of lifestyle-driven furniture pieces.

Also debuting at MIFF 2018 was MIFF Timber Mart, a one-stop material showcase and trading platform for wood and wood-related suppliers and buyers.

With the tagline “Design Connects People,” MIFF 2018 focused on highlighting the human element in furniture design. This was evident in its effort to support creative talent through the Millennials@Design (MAD) gallery, where a group of seven emerging young Malaysian designers (who were previous MIFF Furniture Design Competition (FDC) finalists) collaborated with experienced mentors to showcase their creations through an initiative called FDC in Action.

Another showcase in the MAD gallery was Pattern Banyak, which introduced five sets of furniture representing Southeast Asian design, combining elements of Borneo Orang Asli, Neo Oriental and modern elegant – all themed to exhibit Malaysia’s diversified society. Overall, the MAD gallery reported successful sales and great interest from buyers.

As for the MIFF FDC, young female designers rocked the competition this year, making a clean sweep of the top three awards. Ong Sze Xian, a student of Product and Furniture Design at the First City University College, took first prize for her FLOAT creation, a free-standing shelf based on the concept of play.



Meanwhile, the Best Presentation Awards (BPA) and Furniture Excellence Awards (FEA) were a highpoint of MIFF 2018, with more than 20 winners and merit recipients. BPA recognised exhibitors with the best booth creativity and product display, while FEA rewarded exhibitors for their product innovation and quality.

“The enthusiastic response from exhibitors and aspiring designers resonates with the new MIFF theme ‘Design Connects People.’ This is the real success of the awards . . . to spur greater creativity and bring more excitement and value into the halls of our trade show,” said Ms. Goi.

### Overwhelming Praise

Both exhibitors and buyers raved about MIFF 2018. They were especially pleased with the spacious and well-designed MITEC venue, which was used along with PWTC for the first time this year, as well as the huge variety of furniture on display. Organisers were also commended for producing yet another exceptional show – a high standard that they consistently achieve (and exceed) every year.

Sam Goh, the marketing manager of Synway Furniture Industries in Malaysia, has been exhibiting at MIFF for over 20 years and sang his praises for the show. “MIFF is really



an excellent platform to present our products to an international audience, as the fair is very established and well-known in the industry worldwide. You don't have to fly all over the world to promote your products, instead the whole world comes to you. All these years, MIFF has been the main source of our business and sales. By exhibiting here for four days, I get business for the following 10 months. Overall, I think MIFF does a great job every year and we will definitely continue to exhibit at MIFF in the future,” he said.

Another exhibitor was also pleased with MIFF 2018. “We have been exhibiting at MIFF since 2005. This year, our booth is in MITEC which is a new, spacious and well-planned venue. In fact, many of our visitors

and customers commented on how wonderful the place is, and they were very happy with the products displayed. Exhibiting in MIFF has increased our exposure a lot. We not only meet our regular customers here, we also get new customers from continents we don't usually encounter, like Southern and Central America as well as Africa,” said Eric Au, managing director of Ascent Furniture International, Malaysia.

Visitor Tarek Abasy from Wood Line Furniture in Egypt, thought that it was truly worthwhile to attend MIFF. “Although both venues are good, I like MITEC a lot and I think it's beautiful. My trip to Malaysia was fruitful and I felt my time in MIFF was well spent. I viewed some very nice furniture and saw new models of products. The



furniture and other products are really creative and of good quality," he said.

Louise O'Brien and Michael Harrison from the United Kingdom echoed his thoughts: "We also like the nice, new MITEC building – it is very modern. Before coming to MITEC, we had already seen the exhibition booths in PWTC. We came to MITEC to buy bedroom and living room furniture for our company in England."

Meanwhile, the fast pace of business comes as no surprise to Helmut Merkel, editor-in-chief of German trade publication *Mobelmarkt*, and a regular visitor since 2000. "MIFF has remained a flawless business fair. Business was and always is in the forefront. There is hardly any other trade show that negotiates so much and discusses models and prices as they do at MIFF," he said.

MIFF 2018 was also positive for Randy Fiser, chief executive officer of the American Society of Interior Designers, who was visiting for the



first time. "We had a great experience here and we were able to expose American designers to what Malaysia has to offer. It was great to see products similar to those offered in the US here . . . but they were more interesting to us because the designs had a Malaysian influence, which isn't found in North America," he said.

### Into the Future

Next year, MIFF 2019 will run from March 8 to 11 and will be held at the same two venues, with the same theme "Design Connects People." The show will celebrate 25 years of great furniture and will continue with highlights including the Millennials@ Design gallery, the MIFF Timber Mart, the MIFF Furniture Design Competition, the Furniture Excellence Award, Buyers' Night and industry seminars.

"We will also be looking into more customer-centric and design-driven programmes for an even better show in 2019, which is the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of MIFF. So, be sure to 'mark your calendars, and we'll see you at MIFF 2019!" said Ms. Goi.

For more information, check out the official website [www.miff.com.my](http://www.miff.com.my).



**MIFF 2019**  
 8 – 11 March  
 PWTC & MITEC

*Online visitor registration opens from September 2018 at [www.miff.com.my](http://www.miff.com.my)*

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# A 25-year Journey with MIFF

by Khor Hui Min  
Furnish Now Writer

Next year, the Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF) celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Many exhibitors have returned to the show year-after-year, and in advance of this milestone, *Furnish Now* sat down with some of those exhibitors to hear their thoughts about the event and how it's grown throughout the years.

## Decortage

*Proud to Grow with MIFF*

Decortage specialises in designing and manufacturing high-quality solid wood and veneer bedroom furniture. To suit a variety of consumer preferences, the company's bedroom sets are divided into three categories: modern/contemporary, modern/classic and pure classic. Decortage's collections are made-to-order with a lead time of 90 to 120 days, so the buyer can be sure that every piece is perfectly crafted and produced in that timeframe.

A long-time MIFF veteran, Decortage has attended the Fair every year since it began in 1995. While the company has regular customers, they find value in connecting with potential buyers from all over the world at MIFF – which they have been successfully doing for more than two decades.

"MIFF has helped us a lot," said Jeffrey Choo, managing director of Decortage. "In its first year, Decortage was making USD \$1.2 million. Now, we are making more than USD \$3 million. Our revenue has more than doubled."

As one of Malaysia's fastest growing furniture manufacturers and exporters, Decortage's furniture range caters to the tastes of buyers in their export markets, including the United States, the United Kingdom, the Middle East, Europe and Australia. The designs are innovative and functional, and the company strictly adheres to high production standards. They are also known for punctual deliveries, environmentally friendly practices and competitive pricing. Besides quality, another trait prioritised by Decortage is consistent customer satisfaction – two characteristics also embodied by MIFF.

"MIFF has been doing very well from its first year to now. Even though there is a change of management, it doesn't matter to us," added Mr. Choo. "We will continue to support MIFF."



## Green Panel Products

### Boosting Sales through MIFF

Founded in 1999, Green Panel Products makes melamine-faced panels and other value-added wood-based panel products and offers custom design by application, design for low-cost manufacturing, flexible lead times, custom delivery schedules and administrative support.

Green Panel Products has been participating in MIFF for over a decade. "We have been participating in MIFF since 2008," said Parthiban Ramachandran from the company's marketing department. "We feel that MIFF has boosted our export and local sales throughout the years that we have participated."



The company's manufacturing and warehouse facilities are strategically based in Port Klang, enabling the efficient handling and distribution of orders to all destinations throughout Malaysia, Asia, Europe and the U.S. They have a presence in a variety of markets including, but not limited to: interior designers, furniture manufacturers, wood panel traders, constructors and others who use or trade in surface engineered wood panels.

"We also felt that the exhibition allowed us to boost sales for new products, as well as current products that we showcase during the exhibition. Also, we observed that MIFF is a place where all our clients can meet up and discuss the market situation," added Mr. Ramachandran.

Regarding MIFF 2018, Mr. Ramachandran says: "Although now there are two venues instead of one, we feel that MIFF did a good job in providing shuttle services for the clients who visited the exhibition. Also, we noticed that the registration service was very quick and efficient and the promotional campaign leading up to the event was very good and effective."

Founded in 1999, Green Panel Products was built on the idea that there is an intrinsic value – and a personal and financial reward – in producing green, tangible and environmentally friendly products and in providing services that exceed customers' expectations. The company has become well-known for providing friendly, informal service to its customers, while maintaining a professional approach in all aspects of business. Each customer receives the same first-rate service and customer care, whatever their requirements, from a single pack to an extended, phased delivery schedule.

Green Panel Products also realises that they have a responsibility to take care of the environment. Thus, the company undertakes all aspects of its business in ways which are as environmentally friendly as possible.

## L.B. Furniture

### 24 Years with MIFF and Counting

Founded in 1987, L.B. Furniture specialises in manufacturing wooden furniture, especially futons, bunk beds, bedroom sets, youth furniture, occasional tables and wooden sofa sets, with an emphasis on creating high-quality products for a wide range of tastes and preferences in diverse geographical locations.

The Malaysian-based company is currently medium-sized but is growing quickly. Currently, the company supplies products to customers worldwide, including to the U.S., Canada, South America, Europe, Russia, Australia, New Zealand and the Middle East.

"We have been exhibiting with MIFF for 24 years," said Esther Er, marketing manager of L.B. Furniture. "Our main purpose of exhibiting at MIFF is to meet new customers and showcase our products to all our buyers. Every year, we meet our regular buyers too, who keep coming back to MIFF."

L.B. Furniture is based in Muar, with production facilities (including office space and warehouses) occupying 395,000-square-feet in the main furniture industry area. The Managing Director Mr. Lim Chin Heng, and his dynamic management team, are assisted by 600 well-trained employees.

The company adheres to stringent quality controls and has a monitoring system to ensure consistently high standards are met. They also invest substantial resources in an ongoing Research and Development programme, with the objective of improving and developing quality, durable and trendy furniture products.

And a company like L.B. Furniture appreciates when its high standards are met: "Over the years, we have observed that the customer service has improved, as the organiser is giving us more support now," added Ms. Er. "Although there are now two venues instead of one, we still chose to stay at PWTC. Next year, we would like to try the new venue at MITEC."





## Green River Wood & Lumber

### Three Generations of Furniture Makers

Green River Group is a family owned business that takes pride in its beautiful showrooms, state-of-the-art finishing and automated finishing lines (that ensure consistent quality), cutting-edge veneer production facilities, and efficient warehousing. In addition, the Group's facilities practise 98 percent emission-free manufacturing, making it a leader in an age where environmental awareness is growing on a global scale among buyers and consumers.

The Group has found success at MIFF: "Participating in MIFF has exposed our company to an international level. Every year, we see buyers from all over the world come to shop for their furniture line up, and exchange ideas and comments regarding furniture designs and industry news," said Albert Hsueh, Marketing Manager of Green River Wood. "It has been a good way to showcase our products to the world, widen our network, and gain new clients."

"MIFF is one of the top furniture shows to attend in Southeast Asia. It offers buyers a wide variety of home furnishing items and interesting new designs to see every year," added Mr. Hsueh.

The Group traces its beginnings to 1945 when family patriarch Omori Hsu was introduced to the lumber business in Taiwan. His two sons have since joined the family enterprise and expanded the business. Alex Hsu took over the company when Omori retired, setting up his own furniture wholesale business and expanding its reach to Canada and San Diego (CA, USA). In 1988, Steve Hsu started his own business: Green River Wood & Lumber in Malaysia, which specialises in wooden dining furniture. Since then Steve Hsu's business has grown to a group of 14 factories spread throughout Asia, including Vietnam (in 1991) and China (in 1997).

Operating under the names Green River Malaysia, Meilin Wood Products, Guangxi Plywood Factory, Two Thousand Two Co. Ltd., MasterDoor, GreenWay, Master Home, Sofa Square by Timberland, Fuyuan Wood Industries, Timber Industries and Greatree, the group of companies covers production of a wide range of items, from lumber milling, to foam pouring, case goods and sofa production, and more.

## Safari Office System

*One Passion, Endless Possibilities*

A top furniture supplier in Malaysia, Safari Office System offers integrated office system solutions, incorporating various contemporary designs into partitions, workstations, chairs, cabinets, coffee tables and more. Clients can mix and match designs according to their needs and customisation, design and layout is also possible.

The company has been providing efficient office solutions and consistent high-quality to worldwide clients for more than 30 years. Safari produces more than one million pieces of office furniture annually and exports to distributors and customers in more than 58 countries including Europe, United Arab Emirates, the U.S., Japan, India, Australia, Southeast Asia, Africa and many other places.

"We participate in MIFF every year, because it creates more awareness about our brand and products among the visiting international buyers," said Wendy Kiew, director of Safari. "It is a chance to get new customers and new contacts to grow our network. Besides the international clients, we have the local buyers for local projects as well."

"We hope that although more and more international furniture fairs and exhibitions are coming up overseas, buyers will still continue to come to Malaysia to attend MIFF every year," she said.

Safari's tagline is "One Passion, Endless Possibilities," and the company strives to go beyond the standard methods to deliver the best solution for each client, no matter what challenges they face. In its commitment to quality, it is no surprise that Safari is an ISO 9001:2008 certified company. Safari has also won a string of prestigious international awards, earning the company global recognition for its quality and innovative designs.

Ms. Kiew further added: "We hope that with its strong branding and position of over 20 years, MIFF will continue to grow from strength to strength and differentiate itself from the rest, including the newcomers."



## Winner Chairs Marketing

### *Proud to Be Part of MIFF*

Founded in 1997 by Director Kenny Wong, Winner Chairs is a specialised manufacturer of office chairs. Over the past 15 years, the company has grown from a small company to a leading office chair exporter in Malaysia.

Currently, Winner Chairs exports its products to more than 100 countries worldwide, including those in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, as well as Australia, South Africa and England.

In addition to the production of popular office chair types and designs, Winner Chairs also produces unique products in both European and American style – simple designs that are comfortable and reliable. The latest collection produced by Winner Chairs is a series of high-quality and ergonomic mesh chairs named “Winner” and “Success.”

Through the years, Winner Chairs' customers have expressed their satisfaction with the quality of their products. Only the highest quality raw materials are used to build the well-designed, elegant and ergonomic furniture, specifically made for the comfort of the human body. Moreover, the production is executed in strictly controlled manufacturing processes, while skilled and expert workers produce the very best quality for every buyer.

Office chair styles have evolved over the years, and Winner Chairs has evolved too, keeping step with the fashion trends of the day. This dynamic and flexible spirit is at the heart of everything the company does and has been a key factor in the continued growth of the business. What has remained constant over the years is an unyielding passion for quality, with exceptional design, impeccable craftsmanship and enduring value. To enhance its position as a leading world-class furniture manufacturer, Winner Chairs provides high quality, innovative products at competitive prices. Its existing collections offer a wide range of choices, and it strives to constantly introduce innovative and timeless designs. Winner Chairs also always put emphasis on quality and punctuality.

Winner Chairs has participated in many international exhibitions including MIFF, CIFF and Index Dubai. Participation in such well-known international exhibitions has provided access to a much wider global market and the company's products are accepted by many overseas buyers. On top of that, they have been awarded the Bifma certification, thus effectively guaranteeing the quality of their products.



“We are proud to exhibit at MIFF for more than 10 years,” said Kenny Wong, founder and director of Winner Chairs. “MIFF is a famous and important international furniture fair. I have been to fairs in many countries, such as in the USA, Dubai, India, Australia, Germany and the UK. I can safely say that MIFF is one of the best in the world.”

“MIFF has improved a lot over the years, and we have grown from strength to strength alongside MIFF. Every year, our business deals at MIFF keep increasing, and we are very satisfied with this. MIFF is a very good platform, and we hope MIFF can be promoted and exposed to countries from where we haven't seen buyers coming from in the future,” Mr. Wong added.





## Titov

### *Helping Customers to Realise Their Dream Lifestyle*

Titov is a furniture manufacturer and exporter, located in Sungai Buloh, in Selangor state, Malaysia. Their products range from bedroom sets, to living room sets and dining sets.

Titov believes in moving with the times to cater to the changing tastes and requirements of customers. Therefore, R&D is emphasised to continuously develop innovative designs and maximise functionality. The company also produces state-of-the-art knock down furniture that will save the ocean freight charges for customers.

Titov's furniture is made from high quality solid wood, tastefully matched with MDF laminate with various types of wood veneer.

The company strives not only to satisfy customer orders, but to help them realise their dream lifestyle. Their mission is to deliver complete design concepts, total home furnishing solutions, as well as value added furniture pieces with quality assurance to all our customers.

Titov has a policy of constantly striving to provide competitive pricing without compromising the quality of its products – a win-win arrangement for its customers and the company.

"We have been exhibiting at MIFF for 10 years. This is a very important exhibition to our company," said Cheryl Tan, general manager of Titov. "We launch our new designs at this fair every year. It gives us the opportunity to promote the new designs to new and existing customers. A large chunk of our annual sales is mainly generated from customers who visited us at this exhibition."

"We are lucky to have a very prominent location at Hall 3, the first booth near the entrance. Hence, we always can get a good crowd for the first few days of the show. Moreover, those who are looking for us will seldom miss our booth. Every year, we manage to get good customers in the show," shared Ms. Tan.

## Chuanheng Furniture Products

### *MIFF, A Platform for Export*

ChuanHeng Furniture Products is a reputable manufacturer and exporter of household furniture products. With manufacturing facilities based in Muar, Malaysia, Chuanheng has become one of the leading household furniture manufacturers to supply to the global market, exporting its products to the USA, Europe, South America, Asia, South Africa and the Middle East, among others.

To produce the best high quality household furniture, Chuanheng has invested in advanced machinery and equipment in order to satisfy the needs of its customers, in both the design and production of its variety of products.

The company is highly dedicated to its business philosophy of "Total Customer Satisfaction," and has stringent quality control measures to maintain a high level of quality at all phases of operations and production.

"MIFF is always a great platform for us to showcase our products to customers from around the world," said Chris Tan of Chuanheng Furniture Products. "Being able to talk face-to-face with clients is an advantage, as we are able to learn their needs, interests and requirements," he explained.

"Experience with MIFF has been great in the past, and we are looking towards more great experiences in future," added Mr. Tan. "As an exporter, we hope MIFF will be able to attract more foreign buyers. This would bring us more clients and of course, it would also enhance our country's economy as well."





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# 25 YEARS of MIFF

## How to Assemble Success

by Joanna Lee  
Furnish Now writer

In recognition of the Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF) celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019, we look at the story behind the remarkable annual event, from its humble beginnings to today's successful international furniture fair.

MIFF has had its share of trials and triumph since the first show in 1995. The success of the fair is credited as a boon to the growth of the Malaysian furniture export industry: In the 1990s, the country's industry was fledgling. In the past 25 years, it's grown to become one of the world's largest – and top 10 – furniture exporters.

"It's all hard work and there's no private agenda," said Dato' Tan Chin Huat, the man behind MIFF, the biggest furniture fair in Southeast Asia today.

### The Seeds of Growth

Dato' Tan Chin Huat saw an opportunity for the young Malaysian furniture industry to grow when the first Industrial Masterplan (IMP1) was rolled out by Malaysia's Ministry of International Trade and Industry in 1985. With its abundance of tropical trees, at that time Malaysia was merely exporting timber and semi-finished wood products. There were only a handful of furniture exporters in Malaysia – the industry was dominated by Europeans and Americans. He saw an opportunity to cool down on what he called "an anti-tropical wood campaign."

He says that if Malaysians wanted to sell furniture, they had to go abroad at that time. "So, why not have it here, for ourselves?" he asked. And thus, the seed was planted.

The first MIFF was held on a very small scale at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC), filled with only a handful of local entrepreneurs.



## Economic Boosts

"In the first few years, purchases from regional buyers were not as encouraging, but there were one or two companies who clocked up orders," he recalled. Their persistence throughout the first few years paid off despite losses.

Then MIFF caught the attention of the Malaysian government. Dato' Tan recounted how Tan Sri Paduka Rafidah Aziz, Malaysia's then Minister of International Trade, had mentioned that she thought the potential economic spin-off from MIFF (which then had over 2000 visitors annually), could be a considerable financial contributor to trade in Malaysia.

In their conversation, Dato' Tan told her about the exhibitors' predicaments in terms of costs from tax regulations. "Seeing the huge potential, she went back to the Ministry and gave instructions that MIFF participants be given a double deduction of taxes and also be eligible for subsidy incentives for booth rental and booth presentation, a privilege previously given only to Malaysian exhibitors participating in overseas shows," he said.

**MIFF's growth was further boosted when the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) discounted furniture import duties up to 50 percent for members. This meant that ASEAN countries importing furniture from each other would pay a maximum of 25 percent in import duties. Subsequently, this helped to increase the presence of ASEAN visitors at MIFF.**

## Competition Leading to Quality Innovations

In 2002, MIFF attracted participants from the People's Republic of China, who emerged as strong competitors for Malaysian counterparts. "Competition sometimes creates a momentum for people to grow faster in terms of design, product creation and creativity," said Dato' Tan.

He smiled as he recounted how the competition spurred Malaysian companies to increase innovation: "Our furniture companies gained a lot from the healthy competition," he said.

"Competition sometimes creates a momentum for people to grow faster in terms of design, product creation and creativity."

- Dato' Tan Chin Huat

## Give Me a Venue to Thrive On

It wasn't only the competition that was growing, but the demand for space was increasing. Since the beginning, MIFF's exhibition venue was PWTC. Director of Event Services at PWTC Mr. Rosdin Johari remembers the early days when MIFF occupied only Hall 3 and 4: "In the beginning, MIFF only took up 8,000-square-metres. Now, it takes up 100,000-square-metres, a combination of PWTC and MITEC," he said.

To mitigate the lack of space, MIFF has engaged Innogen Sdn Bhd every year since 2000 to build "tentages" as temporary halls to comfortably accommodate more exhibitors and visitors. According to the Managing Director of Innogen Mr. Richard Wong, building the tentages was quite challenging. "You need air-conditioning which needs a lot of electricity, so we had to bring in generator sets. Also, the ground is not levelled, so we have to build a platform ranging from 150mm to 1000mm from one side to another as the foundation," Mr. Wong said.

However, Mr. Wong knew that challenges would give way to a special satisfaction in seeing everything set up perfectly for the exhibition. "It's nicer than our own house!" he chuckled, adding that he really enjoys his job building for exhibitions. "MIFF really puts in the budget to beautify their exhibition. When you walk inside some other shows, you'll feel it's just an exhibition. But when you go inside MIFF, it's very pleasant and it feels very nice," said Mr. Wong.

"MIFF really puts in the budget to beautify their exhibition. When you walk inside some other shows, you'll feel it's just an exhibition. But when you go inside MIFF, it's very pleasant and it feels very nice."

- Mr. Richard Wong



**MIFF 1999****MIFF 2018**

While the venue challenges were ongoing, another milestone arrived. In 2004, the Malaysian government removed import duties for furniture. This opened MIFF to a larger international crowd with more than 100 countries, including curious buyers from South America and Russia coming to participate.

The MIFF team's hospitality adds warmth to the participants' experience every year. "Apart from the show, I see MIFF as promoting Malaysian tourism," said Mr. Rosdin. Special excursions have been arranged each year to bring buyers and media members for post-show visits to tourist attractions.

## Growth: Branching into The Second Decade of MIFF

One of the most memorable MIFF exhibitions was in 2009. On that fateful Tuesday in March, the river banks in Kuala Lumpur burst after an hour of heavy rain. PWTC's hall was flooded. Mr. Wong recalled the water level was around one metre. Buyers and visitors were in the midst of business discussions and caught unaware.

For sales manager Angeline Tang, that year was her first time working with MIFF – and it was also the most unforgettable one. "It was like watching the movie *Titanic*. The waters rose so fast before we could do anything," she said. Booths and product samples were immediately damaged.

"We had to switch off all the power so the hall became very dark. The whole of KL was flooded,"

Mr. Wong said. The exhibitors were understandably upset, voicing their anxieties to the MIFF team who quickly sat down and thought of solutions.

Jo Teh, MIFF's senior project manager since 2000 and the second longest serving team member, recalled how Dato' Tan's strong networks in the industry rallied around them to offer help, volunteering their manpower and cleaning equipment.

Mr. Wong remembered how his construction crew pushed through heavy traffic caused by the flood to deliver building materials for the new booths. They were to be built overnight at the MECC hall next to PWTC so that affected exhibitors could move the show to the new venue. "Everyone shifted the products over to MECC," Angeline said. "It was a sleepless night for everyone. By the next day, the show was ready to go on."

It was a baptism of fire for the MIFF team. But the very next year, MIFF bounced back with a new concept that injected positive changes into the Malaysian furniture industry.

## Going Against the Grain

The arrival of more international buyers raised the benchmark. Buyers are keen to see exciting new designs every year, so the MIFF team works closely with exhibitors throughout the year, motivating the furniture manufacturers to strive for design excellence. This has also helped Malaysian furniture makers keep up with furniture design trends both locally and overseas.

MIFF also introduced the Furniture Excellence Award (FEA) to encourage furniture designers exhibiting at MIFF to produce furniture with innovative creativity and originality, while maintaining marketability and sustainability. Exhibitors also have a chance to clinch the Best Presentation Award (BPA) for well-designed and attractive booths at the exhibition.

These awards have created a ripple effect of excitement and ramped up efforts in creative designs – exhibitors are driven to step up their offerings to keep things fresh and attract the growing number of buyers each year from around the world.



Jo Teh (3rd from right) Kelie Lim (2nd from right)

## Spurring Excellence with Awards

In 2010, MIFF introduced its Furniture Design Competition (FDC) to provide a launch pad for young Malaysian furniture designers. The FDC showcases their talent and innovations to an international audience comprised of judges from the industry, global manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers, and international media.

Kelie Lim, Senior Marketing Manager of MIFF has been one of the key people behind the award concepts since its inception. "In 2012, this award program won first prize in the UBM Asia Marketing Awards in the 'Most Creative Campaigns' category because of our team's efforts to nurture young talents for the industry," she shared.

Dato' Tan said one of the main reasons for the award's success is that there is no interference from him or his team. "We have no personal interest or any requests from companies to arrange awards for them. No, not at MIFF," said Dato' Tan. "If you don't put in effort, the judge won't grant you the award."

## Exhibitors Grow Along with MIFF

The exhibitors themselves have seen their businesses grow in leaps and bounds over the years. Dato' Tan was satisfied to see how some furniture makers had grown from small factory settings with zinc roofs into world class factories, with several now publicly listed.

The state of Johor is home to a \$6 billion USD furniture export market, accounting for 60 percent of Malaysia's furniture exports to the world. It is also home to the Muar Furniture Association (MFA) which represents most of the furniture makers in the state. MFA President Keh Wee Kiet is happy that MFA has collaborated with MIFF since 2013. "Each year, MFA helps small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and new members participating in

MIFF, assisting them with entering the international market, and thus maintaining MIFF's competitiveness at global exhibitions," he said. "I hope our cooperation is not limited to the annual MIFF. In Malaysia, MFA and MIFF can consider holding various furniture exhibitions with different themes, or even organise more exhibitions in other countries."

## Nurturing Budding Giants

To continue supporting the FDC winners, MIFF also created "FDC in Action," a program where MIFF FDC winners collaborate with manufacturers to produce quality product designs and presentations.

In 2018, MIFF showcased the new Millenials@Design (MAD) gallery, a finely curated segment of the exhibition. The gallery features work from the best of young Malaysian designers, in particular past FDC winners, as well as several creative furniture design initiatives including Pattern Banyak and TANGGAM®, a creation of MTIB (Malaysia Timber Industry Board) and the Sarawak Timber Industry Development Corporation (STIDC). "We have talent here in the country. With that, our exhibitors can maintain their production costs without resorting to importing designers," said Kelie.

"This program is also in line with our new concept "Design Connects People," which smoothly incorporates



"We have talent here in the country. With that, our exhibitors can maintain their production costs without resorting to importing designers."

– Ms. Kelie Lim

the growth of MIFF's space at MITEC. MIFF emphasises on design. Design could cover new products or new business opportunities and new business solutions. In life, everything relates to design, and everything is about design," Kelie explained.



## The Force behind MIFF

In the same way, MIFF's own team has been nurtured to maturity. The passion for their work and united team spirit is evident if you speak to each MIFF team member. Dato' Tan is thankful for his team, especially general manager Karen Goi who has been working with him since 1997. Kelie and Angeline also said they enjoy their "family" team spirit, which sees everyone covering one another at work, eating and travelling together, and supporting each other no matter which department.

Jo, who is known as a good team trainer, credits Dato' Tan and Karen's leadership style as enabling freedom and trust for their team members to do their jobs well. "No one has an autocratic style here or needs to micro-manage. And I feel good that my people can take over my jobs. This is so I can go to another level. If they don't grow, how can I grow to another level?" Jo said.



"The team keeps improving year after year. They have good teamwork with good members. They show their professionalism. There are no last minute things from them."

- Mr. Rosdin Johari

### MIFF 2014



MIFF 2014 Buyers' Night

### MIFF 2017



Dato' Tan (3rd from right) with delegates at the MIFF 2017 Welcome Reception

Mr. Rosdin, who worked with the MIFF team and has seen them grow, only has praises for them. "The team keeps improving year after year. They have good teamwork with good members. They show their professionalism. There are no last minute things from them," he said. "I would say they're all about 75 percent planning, planning and planning. Then, when it comes to D-Day, they have less hiccups."

## Looking Forward, Beyond the Trees

MIFF has indeed grown at many levels. Angeline says that in the past few years at MIFF, international buyers have been interested to collaborate more with Southeast Asian companies and have found the opportunities to connect at MIFF.

MIFF is also ready to offer a more complete furniture package to buyers with a comprehensive, all under-one-roof concept. For example, MIFF 2018 introduced the new Timber Mart to connect buyers to raw materials for furniture and construction.



"We want to ensure not just a bigger show but a quality show as well where everybody can find what they want at the show."

- Ms. Angeline Tang

"The core of the show is still the furniture industry, but we would like to supplement the furniture industry," said Jo.

"We want to ensure not just a bigger show but a quality show as well where everybody can find what they want at the show," Angeline added.

**"We hope everyone will see MIFF as a 'cannot-be-missed' event. It's not because I want your rental for the exhibition, but it's because we have a good event in the country and people related to the trade must come and work together so that we can continue to strengthen the importance of the event, which is going to benefit everybody," said Dato' Tan.**

"As a part of the MIFF team, we hope to bring business success to all our visitors and exhibitors. And of course, we hope to have another 25 years!" Kelie concluded.

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# MIFF: International Buyers'

by Tan Sher Lynn  
Furnish Now Writer

With 25 percent more exhibition space, the Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF) 2018 offered attendees more products than ever before, with a record number of 625 exhibitors from 13 countries. There was also a seven percent increase in visitors, with 40 percent of visitors attending for the first time. Ninety-three percent of buyers came to MIFF mainly to place orders and source for new products, and 95 percent of buyers reported satisfaction with the show.

To learn more, *Furnish Now* spoke to seven buyers from around the world about what MIFF means to them and how it's helped their businesses grow.



## MITEC Rocks

One exciting aspect of this year's exhibition was the debut of a new venue: the Malaysia International Trade and Exhibition Centre (MITEC), which hosted the event along with the longstanding Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC).

Opened last year, MITEC is Malaysia's largest exhibition centre with more than 45,000-square-metres of gross exhibition space. In essence, MIFF buyers loved this new venue because of its futuristic design, spacious layout and the arrangement of booths and showrooms that made it highly negotiable.



## Thumbs Up for Malaysian Suppliers and Products

Meanwhile, Mr. Yoan Wong, owner of Sen Furniture Ltd. (United Kingdom), is full of praises for Malaysian manufacturers.

“Around the world, there is a demand for all kinds of Malaysian products. In the Western world, it’s a known fact that Malaysian products are usually more reliable. Particularly, the most important thing between a buyer and a supplier is communication. Malaysians speak many languages, which makes it easier to communicate. And communication facilitates understanding, which makes buyers more at ease, while saving time and money. Essentially, this means business is carried out efficiently – because when buying is simple, it gives you more time to sell,” he explained.

Mr. Wong said that his company does sell European furniture, which they source from Poland. And even though Polish furniture is good, the choices are restricted. “In Asia, there’s a lot more to choose from,” he said.

Mr. Wong also stated that his company is not a typical buyer as they also partner with factories for expansion. “For example, there are buyers in the UK that we could introduce to Malaysian factories. We can act as a spokesperson. It is very important that the manufacturer and seller communicate and know each other well, because feedback from the seller is needed before a product can be developed further.”

Prabhat Rai from online retailer PnN Homewares (United Kingdom) echoed Mr. Wong’s views on buying furniture in Malaysia: “Buying in Malaysia has been a fantastic experience. Everybody speaks English, which is great. We didn’t encounter any problems or challenges in Malaysia.”

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“Around the world, there is a demand for all kinds of Malaysian products. In the Western world, it’s a known fact that Malaysian products are usually more reliable.”

– Mr. Yoan Wong,  
Sen Furniture Ltd.

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## A Source of New Ideas and Designs

Danny Bec, director of Western Office Furniture (Australia), was delighted to see new designs and ideas in MIFF: “We come to Malaysia looking for new ideas and inspiration, like the way furniture is manufactured. The fair has a great atmosphere and people are nice. We chat with manufacturers and find new and interesting products as well, like the swiveling bar stool that can be moved from side to side in different ways when you are sitting on it, which can prevent back pain.”

According to him, if buyers are willing to pay the right price, they will get good quality products. “As retailer of office furniture, we are here to meet the manufacturers so we can buy directly from them instead of the middleman. Doing so will make our prices more competitive.”

Mr. Bec also expressed his hope that the exhibited furniture could be separated into home or office furniture to make the show floor easier for visitors to navigate.





“A lot of dining sets we purchased at the show [MIFF 2018] are highly functional, like the space-saving drop leaf dining sets. Any furniture that provides an extra benefit or utility has an added bonus, particularly in the U.K.”

– Mr. Prabhat Rai,  
online retailer  
PnN Homewares

## A Focus on Functionality

PnN Homewares deals with mid- to high-end living room furniture, mainly selling to consumers in the United Kingdom (U.K.) and Europe. “I would say 40 percent of our sales comes from the U.K., which is where our business started and where we are based. In the U.K., houses are small, so we need furniture that offers maximum functionality, while taking up minimum space. A lot of dining sets we purchased at the show [MIFF 2018] are highly functional, like the space-saving drop leaf dining sets. Any furniture that provides an extra benefit or utility has an added bonus, particularly in the U.K.,” shared Mr. Rai.

“Currently, we have a portfolio of about 1,800 products. This is our first time in Malaysia, and we wanted to explore the rubber wood furniture which Malaysia is mainly known for. We’ve already ordered a wide variety of them – quite a few containers in fact. We bought a lot of dining sets.”

He stressed the importance of doing business online today, especially in the U.K. “Everything nowadays is going online. Lots of retail shops in the U.K. are shutting down because more and more people are choosing to buy online. Previously, people used to just buy smaller items, like clothes, online. But now, they even buy furniture or bigger items online, especially via online giants like Amazon and eBay.”

## Love at First Sight

Sarang Waghmerer from Wishful Homes (India) was impressed with MIFF: “It’s my first time here and I find it very nice. There’s a huge global presence at the fair and I can clearly see what is going on around the world and in which country, like trends and new technology used in furniture. I came for sofas, beds and dining sets and there’s really a huge variety. Coming here has exposed me to so many things and I will surely be back next year.”



Maria Cora Buala from Ace2Ace Business Solutions (Philippines) and her colleagues loved everything about MIFF. "This is our first time visiting MIFF and we love it! Everything is wonderful. My architect, engineer and operations manager are also here. We see a variety of furniture, and good designs of chairs and tables. We got a lot of contacts and information and exchanged a lot of business cards. The seminars are also very good and helpful. We will definitely be back next year!" she said.

Meanwhile, third time visitor Kolykhalov Stanislav, import manager of Epicentr K (Ukraine), recalled that the first time he visited MIFF in 2016 he was pleasantly surprised that it was such a good show and they had managed to connect with many new manufacturers. With 60 stores around Ukraine, Epicentr K is a major retailer in the country, with two brands offering various products across most segments, except for food.

"We come here [to Asia] to look for new designs and products for dining rooms and bedrooms. We source from Malaysia and China, and I find that the prices of Malaysian furniture are still competitive," Mr. Stanislav commented.

## Catalyst for Growth

Rafael Fernandez, president of RTR Distribuciones (Dominican Republic) is both a wholesaler and retailer. He visited MIFF looking for wooden furniture that is functional, modern and stylish, yet affordable. He stressed



the importance of going to fairs like MIFF: "You just can't stop going to fairs – never. See everything, feel everything and ask questions. Without these fairs, we wouldn't have business. In my country, we kind of started the trend of buying from Asia. And that's how our business began and everything else just grew from there," he shared.

In a nutshell, MIFF has achieved incredible success in creating an excellent and highly favourable platform for global trade and businesses, as shown by the buyers' positive comments and feedback. On top of that, the exhibitors were highly pleased as well: 84 percent of were satisfied with MIFF; 87 percent said they will recommend the show to others; and 90 percent said they would participate in MIFF again.

"We come here [to Asia] to look for new designs and products for dining rooms and bedrooms. We source from Malaysia and China, and I find that the prices of Malaysian furniture are still competitive."

– Mr. Kolykhalov Stanislav,  
Epicentr K





# Design and People

## Let's Hear it from the Young Designers

by *Chow Ee-Tan*  
Furnish Now Writer

While furniture design may be more niche-driven than interior architecture, industrial and other forms of design, more young people are recognising its potential for growth in the Malaysian market and are venturing into the field. Some of these young designers are part of furniture design groups and have had their work exhibited at the Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF) – and a few have even emerged as winners in the Furniture Design Competition (FDC).

*Furnish Now* catches up with four young designers to talk about their journey, inspirations and aspirations.

## JASPER LEE JIAN KANG, 30

Since he was young, Jasper Lee Jian Kang loved to create things and explore new forms. So, it's no surprise that he went to design school and graduated with a master's degree in Industrial Product Design from Coventry University (United Kingdom).

After earning his degree, he lectured for a couple of years. He began dabbling in interior design when a friend needed help with a home renovation. Following that, it was the FDC at MIFF 2016 that really kick-started his foray into furniture design.

"I saw the competition as a good opening for designers, but I never expected much because my entry was a last-minute work. My design consisted of many types of materials and I wanted to learn more about local manufacturer's capabilities," he shared.

Although his prototype wasn't made and he didn't get to collaborate with a manufacturer, through the experience he learned more about the furniture industry in Malaysia. That's also when he started to get more involved in furniture design.

Jasper describes his design style as simple, minimalist with a touch of extra elements. And for him, the key principle in design is all about creating ideas.

"Most importantly, a design should reflect its user. It must be functional, and suit one's personality. I would also prefer it to be sustainable and not create too much waste, as I care about the environment," he said.

He also noted some important traits that a designer should possess: a good attitude and strong belief in what they do, a good eye and sense of fashion, and the ability to recognise consumers' wants and needs.

Jasper believes that furniture design has a lot of potential in Malaysia. In addition, he's found that in the furniture industry, many manufacturers do not have a designer working for them. "Many designs are created by the boss or a carpenter, and by directly referring

to European or American design. However, I do see some manufacturers that are working with designers nowadays," explained Jasper.

Thus, he foresees there will be more demand for furniture designers in the future, especially since MIFF is providing a lot of support to get designers and manufacturers together. And with more success stories, he believes that others will want to work with designers. Jasper says that it is important to have this industry support from the manufacturers and furniture makers. He hopes to collaborate with manufacturers to create brands or enhance their products.

"My focus is to work with manufacturers who produce materials like wood, metal and glass, and to form collaborations with those who are interested in trying out new things," he said. "To achieve that, I need to build trust with manufacturers, and I also need time to work on the collaborations. I look forward to creating a brand or designing a more complete set of furniture to showcase in major events like MIFF."

Looking ahead, he also wishes to create successful pieces to show on the international stage as well. "It is important to let world know that Malaysia has the ability to make good design products," he concluded.



"Most importantly, a design should reflect its user. It must be functional, and suit one's personality. I would also prefer it to be sustainable and not create too much waste, as I care about the environment."



## WEN YEE KOK, 25

London-based interior architect and designer Wen Yee Kok admits that she never aspired to be a designer when she was young.

“I just knew I wanted to do something different, so I went straight into interior design without thinking much.

Fortunately, it turned out that design is something that I really enjoy doing,” said Wen Yee, who took a diploma course in interior design from Taylor’s University (Subang Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia) before going to the U.K. and obtaining a First Class Honours in Interior Architecture & Design from Nottingham Trent University.



“My inspiration can come from anywhere – from an advertisement across the road, to a magazine I pick up at the bookstore, to observing raindrops against the window – you just need to open your eyes to see.”

Wen Yee, who hails from Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, is no stranger to exhibitions and competitions. In 2012, she won the Excellence & Gold award at the *SPADE Award Competition* in Singapore for her submission entitled “The Negative Space.” In 2013, her module furniture design – a wall-mounted storage panel called “Jemore” – won her the top prize at the MIFF FDC and her design was exhibited at MIFF that same year.

In 2016, her interior architecture project “Farm to Table” was exhibited in London and Nottingham. Recently, she returned home to Malaysia and exhibited a series of furniture, “Mix & Match,” under the Pattern Banyak group at MIFF 2018.

While her interests lie at the crossroads of design, narratives and the exploration of local cultures, Wen Yee does not subscribe to any particular style. She believes that designers need to be like chameleons and adapt to different projects in order to stay fresh and authentic.

“My inspiration can come from anywhere – from an advertisement across the road, to a magazine I pick up at the bookstore, to observing raindrops against the window – you just need to open your eyes to see,” she said. And living and working abroad has been eye opening for her. “Here, every big design event is close to me, like the annual Milan Design Week, London Design Festival, Venice Biennale and many more. It’s very inspiring on this side of the world.”

Wen Yee thinks there is a lot of potential in the furniture design field that has yet to be uncovered. “I noticed many local designers are trying too hard to be fancy and extravagant in their designs. They should focus on the fundamentals of design in the first place, in terms of local materials, furniture needs, craftsmanship, sustainability and so on,” she noted.

“Some try to imitate the Scandinavian designers as that furniture is among the most popular nowadays. But I think Malaysian designers should look at their own local authentic and vibrant style and show the rest of the world what Malaysian designs have to offer,” she explained.

Moreover, Wen Yee thinks that designers should remain stubborn and meticulous about their passion. “Don’t settle for the norm and always push the design. Stand firm on what you believe. And remember, the beauty is in the details,” she said.

Wen Yee approaches design from a holistic approach and would like to diversify her skills into other areas like branding, graphics, art direction, furniture, architecture, UX/UI design, social design and more.

“I’m hoping to gain all the experience I can abroad, and eventually, I will head back to Malaysia and start my own multidisciplinary studio,” she concluded.



# VICTORIA PAMELA YAP WEI, 27

Although she majored in interior design, Victoria Pamela Yap Wei's true love is furniture design.

She spent the first six years of her career working as an interior designer before trying her hand in furniture design. Since then, Victoria has founded her own design company called Zangtoria Designs, and she also works as a formal product development designer for Master Sofa. She made her official designing debut with an entry to the FDC at MIFF 2017, where she bagged the gold prize with her unique table and stool set called "The Able," which was inspired by the Hong Kong tram.

She said the FDC competition provided a good platform for designers to showcase their talents and creativity. Ms. Yap was thankful for the chance to develop the prototype of her design and noted that winning the competition also brought her other opportunities.

"I am thankful to the judges for their great advice, and to the manufacturers that I worked with. It was also great to meet with designers from different backgrounds," she said.

When asked to define her design style, Victoria says that she does not really subscribe to any particular school of thought, rather she likes to have fun with colours and "safe forms" that have no sharp edges. She also pulls inspiration from daily life.

"Earth is an interesting place. You can make something new and surprising with every single thing you see and love. And I always remember to be thankful that we can be creative in life," she said.

To her, the design industry in Malaysia is getting more advanced as people see and learn about design from both their daily life and social media. Today, more creative artwork is in the market, and she believes there will be a high demand for such designs in the future.

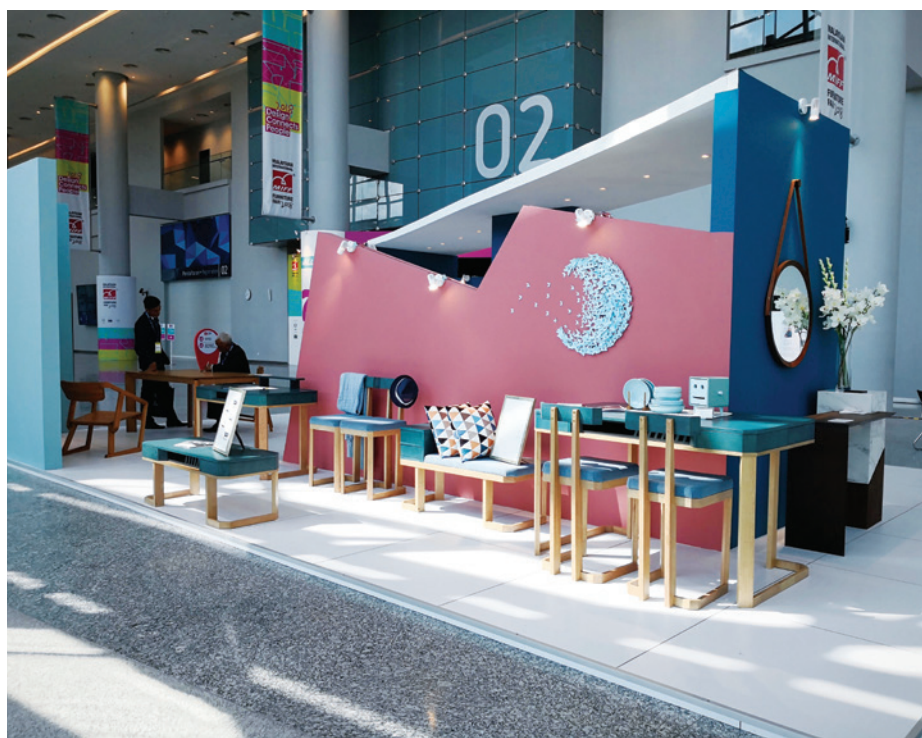
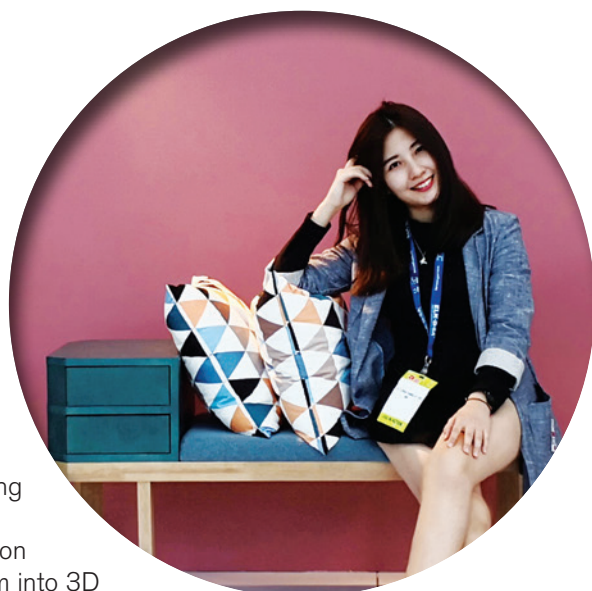
"I think people should know what they're good at and find the right fit for their skill set. It's fun to learn new things and to make a living doing something you're comfortable with," shared Victoria.

"I'm doing what I love. I like drawing and designing sofas that my clients love," she said. "I usually begin with sketching, taking notes and making lists, then I take the sketches into contraction drawings and turn them into 3D visual. In design, you need to go back and forth a handful of times until an awesome idea pops out."

As for Zangtoria, she envisions a global presence with a diverse portfolio of urban projects that will carry Malaysia's hallmark of creativity, innovation and experimentation. Her latest living room design series called "Babnyo," is inspired by the Baba and Nyonya culture and features iconic, solid timber in elegant, simple lines.

"As a designer, I hope that everyone can own furniture that is creative and enhances their space. In the future, I want to design a series of unique product ranges that is memorable and dedicated to style and quality, and that will also satisfy clients with discerning tastes," she shared.

"I'm doing what I love. I like drawing and designing sofas that my clients love. I usually begin with sketching, taking notes and making lists, then I take the sketches into contraction drawings and turn them into 3D visual."



## KEN LIM, 24

“I believe that design is not only about aesthetic and style, it also must serve a purpose and function. Design is a tool where people can imagine and create things – and in the process, we can serve the needs of community through design.”

As a young designer in the Pattern Banyak furniture design group, Ken Lim is passionate about both community space design and furniture design.

Ken is currently attached to Designstrea, an interior design firm in Kuala Lumpur. He began his designing career just one year ago, a few months after graduating with a degree in Interior Architecture from Taylor's University, Lakeside campus (Subang Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia).

During his university days, one of his lecturers and furniture designer Mr. Walter Tan, invited him to join in a furniture making and design collaboration – and that's how he became part of the Pattern Banyak group. Ken was also actively involved in various exhibitions while at university. He participated in the Pangkor Island Festival Community Place Making Exhibition and the Kuala Sepetang Community Furniture Design & Collaboration of Furniture Making for China International Furniture Fair 2016. In addition, his final semester project won an honorary mention at the Asia Young Designer Awards 2016 in the Interior Design category.



“I believe that design is not only about aesthetic and style, it also must serve a purpose and function. Design is a tool where people can imagine and create things – and in the process, we can serve the needs of community through design,” he said.

Ken believes that it's not just the form, but the love and passion from the creator that makes a design valuable. “Without great passion and desire, a designer couldn't persist in the design journey. Another important trait is having a conscience toward society. Without care or love towards one's history – culture and human – how can a designer create something that's good?”

Not surprisingly then, his inspirations come from the community, and that includes culture, history and humanity. He also derives his inspirations from story-telling, as he believes that narrative is always a strong tool for design.

Ken thinks that the furniture designing industry in Malaysia is still in the immature stage as many designs either draw their inspiration from overseas, and other designs remain impractical in terms of functionality.

“Nevertheless, I do believe in the future of Malaysian furniture design. Design in Southeast Asia is still something new but unique, and it can truly represent us, without any reference from overseas design,” he said.

Currently, Ken is working with the Pattern Banyak group and would like to promote the Pattern Banyak trademark to make designs from Southeast Asia more well-known in the international market. Ken says he wishes to one day to have his own design and research studio that specialises in community research and design, related to history and culture of Malaysia.

“I would like to gather a group of researchers, designers, historians and social activists to form a community that shares the same passion to create something meaningful for Kuala Lumpur,” he added.



# PIONEER PROCESS

## Cementing Great Possibilities

by Joanna Lee  
Furnish Now writer

Just when you thought that cement is merely construction material to cover, something new arrives to break the mould – like cement furniture. Pioneer Process, a materials company in Malaysia, has done just that, creating the first cement furniture in the market. Company Managing Director Mr. Edmund Yap lets *Furnish Now* take a peek at his company's unique products.

Mr. Yap says that to create the furniture they use timber or plywood as a carcass inside, and then apply a special cement known as 'Artisan Wall' onto it. The cement sofas and couches have a distinct industrial, yet modern and Scandinavian inspired look, which sparks curiosity and second glances. The surface's texture is smooth, invoking the cool appeal of concrete.

The cement has several advantages. "It is an engineered cement. After it is set, it is very hard, it won't crack, and it is shrinkage-free," explained Mr. Yap.

Pioneer Process invented its specially engineered cement – officially called FormCal® Artisan Wall – in 2015. They discovered that Artisan Wall adheres to wood, mineral boards, cement and concrete surfaces.



Mr. Edmund Yap

**"We introduced this to bring a new look to interior furniture," he said, acknowledging a demand in the market from people looking for cement furniture. The cement furniture could also be produced in variations of grey to match the interior and intended ambience.**

This creation was the result of 18 years of innovation at the forefront of aesthetic cement. "Aesthetic cement means we express the natural beauty of the cement without having to paint over it," said Mr. Yap, a trained materials engineer whose passion and expertise is in creating aesthetic cement



inspired by his travels to various cement and concrete tradeshows worldwide including the World of Concrete tradeshow in the U.S.A.

Pioneer Process also has created a range of outdoor cement furniture like countertops, table tops and outdoor seats which are made entirely from their company's proprietary weather-resistant cement material known as FormCal® GFRS (glass fiber reinforced stone). "It looks like stone but it's made from cement," Mr. Yap explained. Interestingly, FormCal® uses VOC-free (non-chemical) cement as a binder.

According to Mr. Yap, there are but only a few companies in the world producing GFRS technology. "We are the only ones in Asia, and we've created GFRS right here in Malaysia," he said with a smile.

In another area of the showroom, Mr. Yap showed furniture made from combined rainforest wood with cement, as well as furniture made from the exquisite combination of wood, cement and steel. They've also created cement planter boxes, decorative wall posters, wall panels and even cement lampshades.

"When we developed cement furniture, we found there's market acceptance. That's why we want to take part in MIFF 2019 for the first time," said Mr. Yap. "We want to find strategic alliances with manufacturing partners, possibly through product licensing," he added. He is hopeful for local or international partners who may be looking to extend their manufacturing offerings through creating a market for cement furniture.





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# Malaysia's Creativity and Innovation Shined at MIFF 2018

by Chow Ee-Tan  
Furnish Now Writer

This year's Furniture Excellence Awards (FEA), which is an important event at the Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF), saw innovative and functional furniture designs taking centre stage. Divided into two categories, Household Furniture and Office Furniture, the awards were showcased to all MIFF exhibitors with the objective to encourage designers to conceptualise furniture designs that are original, aesthetic, creative and visionary. Featuring a distinguished panel of judges, the bar is set high and the industry watches closely.

So, what does it take to win the FEA at MIFF? To find out, *Furnish Now* spoke with the Platinum Award winners of both categories, as well as the Gold and Silver Award winners for the Household Furniture category.



### Platinum Award Winner (Office Furniture Category) Retro System by Work Studio System

The concept behind "Retro System," FEA's Platinum Award winner in the Office Furniture category, is a home-like, less formal workstation and furniture design for office environments.

It is produced and marketed by Work Studio System, which provides ergonomic office system furniture, seating and office solutions and services to today's corporate workplace. The company's brand is associated with high-quality, functional, modern and innovatively designed system furniture.

"For Retro System, human ergonomics and health is most important," said Ms. Vivian Lim, business development senior manager of Work Studio System. She noted that the system was designed to help increase productivity and promote creativity. It is also easy to assemble and environmentally friendly.

"The idea is to keep all the work tools within reach by maximizing the usage of space and by creating more useful space on the work surface, like the stationary tray. A mobile phone can even be stationed on it," said Ms. Lim.

One innovative feature of Retro System is that it can easily transform from a general workstation into a meeting/discussion centre by removing the privacy screen and storing it at the bottom of the system.

"The modular design of Retro System enables it to adjust to the user's needs, as all of the components can be added-on or removed," explained Ms. Lim.

She disclosed that the initial inspiration behind this workstation was a pet-friendly furniture design that was created to work alongside pets. Using laminated veneer lumber (LVL), the workstation also features a burn marked company logo.

She believes that the creativity and innovation of the Retro System was the main reason it won the FEA Platinum award: The system features a new functionality and versatility in office furniture design. In addition, they discovered new, local material that is sustainable to use.

This year was the company's first ever participation in MIFF and she believes winning the award will help to increase the company's exposure and strengthen its image and brand.

Retro System is now available in the Asia-Pacific's higher-end markets.

"To attract young talent, we expect that the trend in office furniture will shift toward home-like offices, or more relaxing and less formal environments, rather than the traditional corporate office. It will be an open system that allows more communication among team members. Materials used should be environmental friendly and most of all, designed with health and ergonomic factors in mind," said Ms Lim.

### Gold Award Winner (Office Furniture Category) Elements by Euro Chairs Manufacturer

"The world around us is changing faster than ever. People are connected while they work, while they travel and while they socialise," said Euro Chairs CEO Mr. Melvin Chay.

In fact, he says the trend in office furniture is going towards "collaborative furniture," where flexibility is key in the ever-changing working environment.

"Office furniture is no longer rigid. Designs should encourage human interaction, and complement the use of technology," he said, adding that devices have made us mobile. Thus, furniture should adapt to every environment, to every style and optimally support diverse activities.

That's where their winning design "Elements" comes in.

In the Element range, all parts are modular, making it easier to make changes in the interior setup. Every piece also includes special eco-friendly benefits.

Mr. Chay noted that one of the guiding philosophies behind Elements comes from "activity-based working."

"We believe that when people are able to choose where to sit, they structure their days more productively. They are more conscious of what they're going into the office to do and why they're doing it," he explained.

He emphasized that it is crucial to create space that functionally supports diverse work activities, such as a short notebook session, small group meetings (in an acoustically improved environment) or working in a quiet zone (where one can retreat into a private space).

"Euro Chairs has always customised to the need and requirements of the users, and has integrated sustainable elements into their furniture so that consumers can have a socially conscious style for every environment," he said.

The company began in 1976 with only three employees – and now, the company has flourished into an international producer of office furniture with more than 600 staff and an established sales network that spans over five continents.

Euro Chairs has participated in MIFF since the start of the exhibition and has won numerous office furniture awards in various categories.

Mr. Chay said that winning the FEA Gold Award is motivation for the design team, and recognition that they can produce innovative designs, as well as materialise the production.

"Externally, this is a good testimony for us and a boost in marketing our showcase to overseas buyers," he said.





## Silver Award Winner (Office Furniture Category) RAMMA by Oasis Furniture Industries

According to the Managing Director of Oasis Furniture Industries Ralph Ong, RAMMA is a manifestation of new space and its purpose is to create a seat for different office spaces. The RAMMA collection is inspired by the process of metamorphosis.

Created by furniture designer Sujak, RAMMA provides an opportunity for users to work in different office settings. Each piece is handmade using materials such as wood, plywood, foam and upholstery. The curve surface design exudes a sense of harmony and tranquility.

"RAMMA visualises the ingenuity of nature in shaping life. . . where we follow the flow and accept the best forms and beauty. It was created to allow new visuals and further enhance the value of space," said Mr. Ong.

"With different working conditions in the modern office, RAMMA can become a space to hold short discussions or meetings. In addition, with a backrest design that is higher than a regular sofa, it can give the user a sense of privacy," added Mr. Ong.

RAMMA is available in Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

According to Mr. Ong, for the designer, it was meaningful to win the award and receive recognition from a group of skilled people – but it will mean a whole lot more when consumers experience what he's trying to convey in this design.

Oasis Furniture Industries is no stranger to winning awards. In the past, they've won the Platinum Award for Lolla and Bracca, as well as the Gold Award for Privva.

"We have participated in MIFF for 14 years. It's been a great journey where we have gained a lot of new experience, knowledge, as well as exposure through this platform," said Mr. Ong. "We are confident that MIFF will continue to grow as the main platform to showcase Malaysian furniture and interact with industry players around the world."

He says that the trend in office furniture has moved beyond the open plan concept. "Furniture has been designed to cater to various activities' needs and wants, or what's known as activity-based working office, which offers a more effective workplace. Collaborations and connections are the key in creating an innovative workplace," he explained.

Oasis Furniture Industries prides itself as an activity-based working office solution provider and has been exporting to more than 65 countries since 1998. They develop new and innovative products under six brands - BUROSC, PERFECT U, ARTE COMO, OASIS PLATINUM, OASIS SUPERB and OASIS SOFA.

The company's product portfolio ranges from solutions for director rooms, workstations, conference rooms, collaboration spaces to work lounges, work cafés, phone booths and hot desk pods.

## Platinum Award Winner (Household Furniture Category) Sunshine Cot by Vistawood Industries

A baby cot named "Sunshine Cot" beat hundreds of other home furniture designs to emerge as the FEA Platinum Award winner in the Household Furniture category at MIFF 2018.

The product is manufactured and marketed by Vistawood Industries, which began in 1991 by manufacturing wooden parts for furniture and later, ventured into wooden infant furniture.

"Since 2005, we have been producing bedroom sets for infants, as well as furniture pieces like baby cots, bay chairs, changing tables, cradles and playpens under our brand Funbies," said Ms. Ivy Chew, the company's executive director.

She said the company is exporting to overseas markets including Japan, Korea and Europe, and is exploring markets in other countries as well.

"We designed the Sunshine Cot with the idea of making a comfortable and cozy space that will nurture the next generation," said Ms Chew. "The cot is inspired by wonderful sunshine in the morning, therefore we added sunshine colour elements to it."

She highlighted that Sunshine Cot is designed to be multi-functional, by converting to a sofa chair and study table, which prolongs its usage after the child no longer needs the cot.

The cot is comprised of a P2 grade of medium density fiberboard (MDF) and eco-friendly paint. Its hardware was tested and found to be leadless, which ensures that it's harmless to babies.

"Nowadays, parents are willing to invest more to make sure their children get the best quality, so I believe the market for nursery furniture will be on the rise," she said, adding that she believes Malaysia's furniture industry is doing well in the international market.

Ms. Chew thinks Sunshine Cot was chosen as the winner because it's different from the norm, with its bold colours, simple design concept and multi-conversion function.

Vistawood Industries is no stranger to MIFF, winning the Second Prize Best Presentation Award in 2017 and Merit Award in 2016. The company has participated in MIFF for a decade.

"Winning this award is confirmation for our efforts over the years . . . it also means that our products are well accepted by the market. We will be developing new models and delivering them to the market annually to capture this business," she shared.



Hardwood furniture manufacturer Acacia Home Furnishing received the Judges Commendation Award.



**Gold Award Winner** (Household Furniture Category)  
*Metal Study Desk* by Çilek Mobilya A.S.

First-time MIFF participant, Turkey-based furniture company Çilek Mobilya A.S., emerged as the FEA Gold Award winner for their innovative study desk, in the "Dark Metal" range.

A family-run company founded in 1995, Çilek designs, manufactures and sells furniture and room accessories for babies, kids and teens under the concept of "Çilek Room."

The winning piece features a functional table with added features designed for students. Sales manager, Mr. Yahya Onder Zigindere said: "The Dark Metal desk not only looks good, it is also functional and pays attention to details."

"This study unit module may be assembled on the desk, there is a shelf under the table for books storage and a leather cell, where small items can be put. The unit is also readily equipped for technology and comes with a dual entry USB input and charger," he explained.

It also features a metal board for hanging notes, as well as a blackboard that can be used with chalk or chalk pens to for making notes.

"The table, with hand-made leather handles, has a drawer and two partitions. There is a project bag for hanging papers near the desk, and hand-made leather hooks," he shared.

Mr. Yahya said that the award is proof that the company can present the study desk to all countries and that it will be a key international product for them.

"We think that in the last 15 years people were demanding "thematic" children furniture, but today, demand is toward more simple designs with pastel colours," he added.

Çilek now has more than 500 stores in 80 countries on five continents and aims to increase the number of its sales points to over 1,000 in the next five years. Its furniture is manufactured in Turkey, and the company has branches in the USA, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Germany. Their main markets are the Gulf Countries and Europe.

## Silver Award Winner (Household Furniture Category) *Dream Kingdom Mattress* by Getha Bedding

A premium mattress from Gertha Bedding, called the "Dream Kingdom Mattress," was the FEA Silver Award winner.

Considered to be in a class above all other mattresses, the Dream Kingdom is made with 100 percent natural latex and is combined with layers of camel hair, which regulates body temperature regardless of the season. It also uses the superior quality of Spanish Velour to give the mattress a luxurious look.

According to Getha Bedding export manager Ms. Melissa Tan, the concept is a 50-cm. tall, ultra-luxurious mattress with a signature stool – the first and only mattress that comes with a stepping stool. This is to ensure the ergonomics of this design fits well with daily use.

Ms. Tan said she believes that the unique design of this mattress is not found anywhere else, and thus, it is a breakthrough design that differentiates itself from other mattresses.

"We are happy that we won the Silver Award, as it's a recognition that we can leverage to reassure buyers that we're a company that's innovative and different," she said, adding that the Dream Kingdom Mattress has already captured a lot of attention in the international market.

She said with the price starting at RM62,000, which includes the mattress, divan (bed frame) and stool, the Dream Kingdom Mattress is targeted to the upper-segment market. The finishing and handwork would also appeal to the discerning consumer who appreciates fine craftsmanship and luxury. The mattress is exclusive as the company only produces 15 pieces a year.

Getha is a homegrown Malaysian company that started in 2002. The company carries mattresses and bedding accessories including pillows, headboards and divans.

According to Ms. Tan, she foresees a growing trend in quality mattresses and bedding as people become more health conscious. "As with the focus on food trends leaning towards organic and natural food, consumers will soon realise that sleep is also very important to good health. Education on what constitutes good sleep will also lean towards more natural choices," she said.

She noted that today, people spend a lot of time doing research on quality products and rely on brands they trust. Therefore, companies always need to be innovative and updated in their products.



## Furniture Design Competition (FDC) first prize winner: *FLOAT* by Amanda Ong Sze Xian

The Furniture Design Competition (FDC) has been an integral part of MIFF since 2010, providing a platform for young designers to demonstrate their talent and innovation. It challenges participants to look deeper into real furniture manufacturing environments for creative ideas to create their prototype furniture.

A 22-year-old designer Amanda Ong Sze Xian won the FDC 2018 first prize award by impressing the judges with a minimalist shelving unit design named "FLOAT." She won RM6,000 cash, as well as a trophy and certificate.

Introducing her winning design, Ms. Ong said the free-standing shelving unit with a minimal look and functional form is inspired by the theme of "play."

"As the theme of FDC this year is "Design Connects People," I believe 'play' is a big element that connects people in everyday life. Thus, the design concept of *FLOAT* takes inspiration from the basic structural layout of jungle gym, also called monkey bars," she explained.

The sleek and clean-looking shelving unit suits any corner of the living area, and can also be used as commercial display unit. According to Ms. Ong, *FLOAT* is influenced by the floating motion while swinging hand-over-hand from one end to the other, therefore, she presented layers of wood plates that look like they are floating in the middle of the unit, but are in fact supported by light-weight metal frames.

She used local hardwood, Kembang Semangkuk (known as KSK) for the frame and a thin layer of brass coated steel rod in the middle surface. The design is currently under development for production.

"The aesthetic value, which fits current trends, functionality and modularity of *FLOAT*, enhances users' experience and increases the market value of this product. This led judges to comment that the design is mature enough to be launched in market," she shared.

Hailing from Batu Pahat, Johor, Ms. Ong obtained a BA (Hons) in Furniture and Product Design, from First City University College, a franchise of Nottingham Trent University.

"During an internship with a local hardwood furniture factory, I was taught about furniture design from conceptualisation to production. As a designer, it is important to understand the manufacturing process and what I learned in the internship reinforced my design progress," she said.



Ms. Ong is exploring and trying different kinds of design styles. She favours elegant, contemporary style and derives her inspirations from nature and various objects and people around her.

She participated in the MIFF FDC in 2017 and was a semi-finalist. Winning the award in 2018 is no doubt a milestone in Ms. Ong's design career, boosting her to go further and achieve more.

"As a designer, you should never limit the ideas in your mind. Never limit yourself in how hard you work and never limit yourself in your dreams, as there are always higher goals to achieve. Always be curious and explore your ideas more," she said.

This August, Ms. Ong will start work as bespoke product designer at Royal Selangor. Her short-term goal is to develop and improve her creative thinking as well as other soft skills.

"I want to gain more understanding of the market demands and engage myself in a more collaborative design approach, learning how to apply agile practices to my design workflow, producing more effective and high-market value prototypes and more," she concluded.



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