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Standing Strong in a Shifting Market

Malaysia's Competitive Edge in Furniture Trade

by Tan Sher Lynn

While the global furniture trade faces significant headwinds, Malaysia's furniture industry stands out as a resilient and adaptable player. We delve into the intricacies behind Malaysia's strength and competitiveness.

A snapshot of Malaysia's furniture industry

The Malaysian furniture industry is a paragon of adaptive excellence. As the global furniture industry navigates a complex landscape marked by rising shipment fees, supply chain disruptions and fluctuating market demands, Malaysia has emerged as a resilient player in the global furniture trade.

The industry is projected to generate revenue of US\$4.33 billion in 2024, according to the online research website Statista. This market is expected to grow at an annual rate of 4.01%, referred to as the Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR), from 2024 to 2029.¹

Meanwhile, according to the Malaysian Timber Industry Board (MTIB), Malaysia's furniture exports amounted to RM 9.693 billion from January to May 2024,² reflecting a steady growth trajectory amidst global economic challenges.

The success of Malaysia's furniture industry is deeply connected to the

revival of rubberwood as a vital timber source. This transformation has revitalised the industry, positioning Malaysia as a top producer and exporter of wooden furniture to over 160 countries.

Today, the Malaysian furniture sector ranks among the world's top 10 exporters, with about 80% of its output directed to international markets,³ with major ones being the United States, Japan and Australia.

The Malaysian advantage

Several factors have contributed to the resilience of Malaysia's furniture industry, including strategic location and accessibility, a skilled workforce, advanced manufacturing techniques, green practices and government initiatives.

Malaysia's furniture industry has long been recognised for its high-quality craftsmanship, diverse range of products and competitive pricing. The country's strategic location in Southeast Asia,



SCAN FOR MIFF VIDEO

combined with its well-developed infrastructure, positions it as a key hub for furniture manufacturing and export.

Well-connected through a network of ports, including Port Klang—one of the busiest ports in Southeast Asia—Malaysia's geographical position provides easy access to major markets in Asia, Europe and the Americas. This strategic location enables efficient shipment of goods—reducing transit times and costs, which is crucial in an era where high shipment fees are a significant concern for the global furniture trade.

The Malaysian furniture industry is also supported by a skilled workforce proficient in both traditional craftsmanship and modern manufacturing techniques. Malaysian manufacturers have embraced technological advancements and innovations, such as automation and precision engineering, to enhance production efficiency and product quality. This blend of craftsmanship and

technology allows Malaysia to produce a wide range of furniture products, from mass-produced items to bespoke pieces that meet the diverse needs of global consumers.

With growing awareness of environmental issues, sustainability has become a key consideration for buyers in the furniture industry. Malaysia has responded to this demand by adopting sustainable practices across its furniture manufacturing sector.

The country is a leading producer of certified sustainable timber, with many manufacturers obtaining international certifications such as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Malaysian Timber Certification Scheme (MTCS). These certifications ensure that Malaysian furniture products meet global standards for environmental responsibility, giving them a competitive edge in the international market.

Last but not least, the government's robust support through initiatives such as the National Agricommodity Policy (2021-2030) has significantly boosted Malaysia's furniture industry by promoting sustainable timber production, fostering innovation, and expanding global market access.

By emphasising sustainable forest management and the revival of rubberwood as a key timber source, the policy ensures a reliable and eco-friendly supply of materials crucial for furniture manufacturing. Additionally, by encouraging a shift towards value-added products and adopting advanced technologies, the policy enhances the quality and global competitiveness of Malaysian furniture, positioning the industry for sustained growth in international markets.

At the Opening Ceremony of MIFF 2024, Malaysia's Minister of Plantation and Commodities, Datuk Seri Johari bin Abdul Ghani, highlighted that the Malaysian furniture industry has grown from a backyard industry into a global business throughout the years. "Today, there are Malaysian furniture companies listed on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange and Singapore Stock Exchange. Some even have assembly lines outside Malaysia," he said.

"As a highly open economy, our timber and furniture industry is not insulated from the effects of global headwinds. The Malaysian furniture industry is largely export oriented, with 44% of timber exports shipped to 186 countries in the past five years," Datuk Seri Johari explained.

Nevertheless, he remained optimistic about Malaysia's furniture outlook. "Despite these challenging times, there are always opportunities for us to grab. Malaysian furniture companies must remain competitive and capitalise on future trends to target the right consumer groups. We must tap e-commerce platforms as an exciting new track for business growth to extend our reach to consumers in far away markets," he added.

"Trade shows such as MIFF play a vital role in facilitating trade and reaching new markets. Under the National Agricommodity Policy 2030 (DAKN 2030), the export value of timber and timber products is targeted to be RM28 billion by 2025 and RM32.8 billion by 2030. I have been made to understand that the expected sales generated during MIFF 2024 could reach up to USD1.3 billion (RM6.2 billion)," Datuk Seri Johari emphasised.

Insights from MIFF buyers: A real-world perspective

As one of the longest running furniture trade shows in Asia and the biggest export platform for Malaysian furniture, the Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF) is committed to safeguard and elevate the Malaysian furniture industry. To provide a well-rounded view of Malaysia's furniture industry, we spoke to several visitors to MIFF 2024 about their experiences and expectations.



Testimonial 1: Fuad Aliev, Buyer from Uzbekistan

"This is the fourth time I have visited MIFF and I plan to return in 2025. I'm excited to see new models and offerings. I love Malaysian furniture, especially the sofas. The quality of furniture I found at MIFF is really good and better than other fairs in countries I've been to."



Testimonial 2: Jad Taweel, Retailer from Palestine.

"I love coming to Malaysia and MIFF. Malaysia is a beautiful country, rich in wood, and offers great prices. The quality of the furniture here is excellent—much better than what I've seen in other countries."



Testimonial 3: Kenneth Trueit, Copper Trail Merchants, Canada

"We love selling solid wood products from Malaysia because they're much more durable and reliable compared to particle board or MDF (medium density fibreboard). This is my fifth time attending MIFF, and I've witnessed significant growth over the years. There are many

more vendors now and a much wider range of products. I'm particularly impressed with the contemporary designs and trends which are what consumers are looking for today."



Testimonial 4: Richard O'Conner, Stunning Sofas Limited, UK

"This is my third time attending MIFF, and I keep coming back because of the excellent range of products, particularly solid wood furniture, which is a standout here. We've recently resumed selling dining sets, and MIFF offers a great selection, especially as the exhibition has grown significantly with more vendors and contemporary designs. MIFF definitely stands out compared to other international shows."

Looking ahead: The future of Malaysia's furniture trade

As the global furniture industry continues to evolve, Malaysia's furniture sector is poised to maintain its competitive edge. The combination of strategic advantages, a skilled workforce, and a commitment to sustainability has positioned Malaysia as a preferred destination for global buyers. However, to sustain this momentum, the industry must continue to innovate, embrace new technologies, and adapt to changing market dynamics.

MIFF 2025 will continue to play a crucial role in showcasing Malaysia's capabilities to the world, providing a platform for industry players to connect, collaborate, and explore new opportunities. As buyers and manufacturers converge in Kuala Lumpur in March each year, the event will be a testament to the resilience and potential of Malaysia's furniture industry in the face of global challenges. 



Key Growth Drivers

The Malaysian furniture industry is being propelled by several key growth drivers, ensuring its strong presence in the global market.

Preference for modern designs

One of the primary drivers is the shift in consumer preferences towards modern and contemporary designs. Malaysian customers are increasingly seeking furniture that is not only functional but also aesthetically pleasing, reflecting a global trend towards creating stylish and comfortable living spaces.

Growing urban population and rising disposable incomes

The shift towards contemporary designs is particularly evident in urban areas, where rising disposable incomes are enabling consumers to invest in more sophisticated home furnishings. This shift is fueling domestic consumption as well as international exports, particularly as consumers seek stylish and functional furniture solutions.

E-commerce and digital marketing

The rapid expansion of e-commerce and digital marketing channels is significantly broadening market reach. Online platforms are making it easier for Malaysian furniture manufacturers to connect with a wider customer base, both locally and internationally. This digital transformation is allowing businesses to showcase their products more effectively and tap into new market segments that were previously out of reach. This digital shift has also intensified competition among retailers, prompting them to innovate and offer more value-added services, such as customisation options and fast delivery.

Focus on sustainability

As eco-friendly practices gain prominence worldwide, the Malaysian furniture industry is increasingly focusing on sustainable materials and production methods. This shift towards greener practices not only strives to meet consumer demand for environmentally responsible products but also enhances Malaysia's reputation as a producer of quality, sustainable furniture.

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Creative Content Director: Matt Young
Project Manager: Trang Phan
Chief Editor: Gloria D. Gamat
Associate Editor: Matt Herman
Writers: Khor Hui-Min, Tan Sher Lynn
Graphic Designer: Maricel Salvador

informa markets

INFORMA MARKETS MALAYSIA SDN. BHD.
Suite 5-01, Level 5
Sunway VISIO Tower
Lingkar SV, Sunway Velocity
55100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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From Triumph to Tomorrow

MIFF Highlights and the Road Ahead by Tan Sher Lynn

Step into the world of MIFF and embark on an extraordinary journey through furniture.

Gateway to the world

The Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF), a beacon of global trade since 1995, has long been a cornerstone of the furniture industry. Held annually in March in the vibrant city of Kuala Lumpur, MIFF has earned its place as a premier export-focused furniture trade show, drawing participants and visitors from around the globe.

Over the past 30 years, MIFF has built an extensive international customer community through a combination of in-person and digital outreach, prestigious industry media coverage and vibrant social communities. Exhibiting at MIFF 2025 means tapping into this vast network, spanning both established regions and emerging markets.

This year, MIFF 2024 generated an impressive US\$1.28 billion in export sales on-site, featuring 715 exhibitors from 15 countries and regions. With a total of 19,213 unique visitors from 120 countries, MIFF remains an unmissable event for anyone in the global furniture industry.

MIFF General Manager, Ms. Kelie Lim highlighted that exhibitors at MIFF consistently generate new, high-quality buyer leads during the show, which is why exhibitors return year after year. “We attract a diverse mix of dynamic buyers who come annually to source products. For global buyers, the wide variety of furniture collections available at MIFF is a significant draw. Malaysia is renowned for its wooden furniture, particularly dining and bedroom furniture, as well as upholstered furniture like sofas and mattresses, all of which are in high demand in the global market,” she said.

Malaysian exhibitor and manufacturer, Ms. Cheryl Tan, general manager of Titov Furniture said that MIFF is an excellent platform to showcase her products to a diverse audience. “MIFF is a prominent fair known to major players in the furniture industry, including importers, wholesalers, and exporters. For those seeking Malaysian furniture, this is an essential event not to be missed.”

Meanwhile, longstanding exhibitor in MIFF, Mr. Neoh Yeek of Future Manufacturer said, “We have participated in MIFF for many years, and we have found that it attracts a diverse range of customers from around the world. Through MIFF, we have established numerous new connections and expanded our reach to countries we hadn’t collaborated with before. MIFF provides a valuable platform for engaging with new markets.”

What’s in store for MIFF 2025?

Looking ahead, MIFF 2025 is set to be even bigger and better. With over 700 top

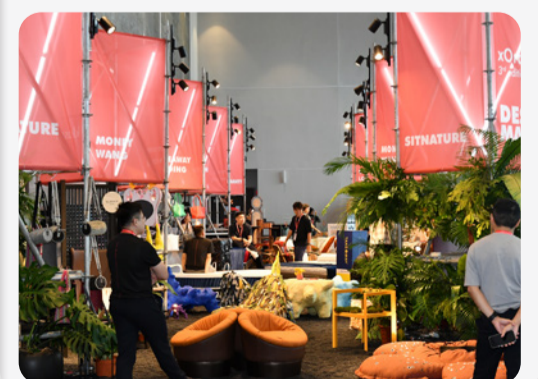
international manufacturers displaying their latest products across 100,000 square meters of world-class exhibition space, MIFF 2025 is projected to attract approximately 20,000 trade visitors from 140 countries and regions.

Visitors will enjoy a well-segmented display across 17 halls, a free shuttle service between venues and countless networking opportunities – from the Opening Ceremony to the Buyers’ Night Gala Dinner. Exhibitors and visitors alike will benefit from the chance to showcase and discover the latest products while engaging with a diverse range of customers and industry professionals. The event also provides a strategic platform to track market trends, monitor the competition and stay ahead of ever-evolving furniture demand.

Ms. Kelie Lim highlighted that MIFF 2025 is set to elevate both exhibitor and visitor experiences with a focus on sustainability and innovation.

“We are committed to attracting a diverse line-up of exhibitors, increasing international participation and adapting to market trends. The show will continue to be a premier trading platform for Malaysian and regional furniture manufacturers,” she said.

“The exhibition setup will follow sustainable practices, including reduced printing and increased digitisation. We will also engage the younger community through the MIFF Furniture Design Competition (MIFF FDC) and the creative platform xOrdinary. Additionally, we will expand the virtual tree-planting campaign introduced last year, with real trees being planted in Sabah in partnership with the Muar Furniture Association (MFA). This initiative reflects the industry’s growing commitment to sustainability, which has made significant strides post-COVID,” she added.



Opportunities at MIFF 2025

Unmatched Exposure

Showcase your products to a global audience and gain recognition in the international market.

A Real Business Show

MIFF 2024 generated US\$1.28 billion in export sales, highlighting the event's substantial impact.

Networking Opportunities

Connect with industry leaders, potential partners and buyers to forge valuable business relationships.

Market Insights

Gain insights into market trends and consumer preferences to stay ahead in a rapidly evolving industry.

Growth Potential

Expand your business horizons, enter new markets and achieve sustainable growth with MIFF 2025.

Shaping the future of furniture design

Young designers represent the future of the furniture industry, and MIFF is dedicated to supporting them. Through the MIFF Furniture Design Competition (MIFF FDC) and xOrdinary, MIFF nurtures young designers by providing them with a prestigious platform to showcase their creativity and innovation to a global audience.

MIFF Furniture Design Competition

The MIFF Furniture Design Competition (MIFF FDC) is a highlight of the fair that celebrates creativity in furniture design and has aimed to uncover and nurture young design talent since 2010. Over the past decade, nearly 3,000 design students and young professionals have participated in the competition. Many of the past winners and participants have gone on to establish their own design studios or collaborate with local manufacturers.

According to Chief Judge Dr. Eric Leong, it is crucial for designers to stay at the forefront of trends in furniture design and MIFF FDC strives to encourage this with different themes each year that reflect the changing needs of society.

Come 2025, MIFF FDC aims to celebrate the fusion of two dynamic realms—fashion and furniture—with the theme “The Fashion Inspired Furniture”. Dr. Leong emphasised that fashion has evolved into a defining aspect of modern lifestyle, extending far beyond clothing into various realms of daily life. Hence, integrating fashion into furniture design is essential for future trends.

“I always emphasise to students and participants that as designers, we must be aware of global trends and anticipate future needs. In our ever-evolving world, incorporating new elements

like technology into furniture design is essential. For example, during the pandemic, we considered post-pandemic living conditions in our design briefs. It's important not only to understand the current situation but also to foresee future trends, which is why our design competition constantly adapts to educate both buyers and manufacturers,” he explained.

To sustain and boost young designers' engagement, Dr. Leong highlighted that MIFF FDC will provide more than just a submission platform. The competition will continue to organise workshops, seminars, talks, and factory visits for participant interaction with industry experts. MIFF FDC will also honour the contributions of lecturers and mentors, involve more manufacturers, and ensure that the competition remains impactful and relevant.

xOrdinary: Empowering Creative Visionaries

xOrdinary is a dynamic platform dedicated to innovative and independent design. It champions the power of creative thinking and aims to transform how design is approached and executed.

Curator, Mr. Lim Bo Qiang shared that the concept for xOrdinary originated in 2019, prior to the pandemic. At that time, he and other MIFF FDC alumni had the opportunity to present their designs at the fair. “I wanted to make it more engaging, so I proposed extending this opportunity from MIFF to other talented designers. I invited friends known for their exceptional designs to join us. The feedback was very positive. Post-pandemic, I proposed rebranding and expanding our categories to include furniture, lifestyle goods, and art, as we believe these elements complement each other well,” he said.

In 2024, the goal of xOrdinary is to create a dialogue through design. “We want our design and exhibition to speak for itself, allowing the public to experience, touch, and feel the ambiance of our booth. As design plays a significant role in sustainability efforts, we have innovated our booth presentation to align with this. We use scaffolding that is quick to construct and reusable. One highlight is our booth flooring, which is laid with recycled plastic beads,” Mr. Lim said.

Looking ahead to 2025, xOrdinary aims to showcase even more distinct and confident styles, reflecting Malaysia's design identity inspired by tropical flora and traditional elements.

“We will feature new design innovations and also highlight our progress over the past three years, including the evolution of our community and current exhibitors. We've observed a trend toward more polished and well-presented furniture and goods that better appeal to the market,” added Mr. Lim.

“xOrdinary acts as a creative hub for Malaysian talent, showcasing their innovations at MIFF to gain international exposure, valuable feedback, and build global connections. In today's tech-driven era, xOrdinary's unique approach helps lead trends in Malaysian design and continuously offers new industry perspectives,” he noted. **h**

About the Contributors



Kelie Lim
GENERAL MANAGER, MIFF

Kelie Lim has risen through the ranks in her distinguished career spanning 15 years. She brings significant experience in international B2B exhibitions having led a wide range of teams across different industries. She oversees brand strategy, marketing and communications in delivering innovative in-person and digital experiences for customers from across 140 countries and regions.



Dr. Eric Leong
CELEBRITY DESIGNER AND CHIEF JUDGE OF MIFF FDC 2025

Dr. Eric Leong has been serving as the chief judge for the MIFF Furniture Design Competition (MIFF FDC) for more than 5 years. A distinguished design expert with a keen eye for innovation, he evaluates and influences fashion-inspired furniture trends. Known for his extensive experience in design and his commitment to excellence, Dr. Leong is pivotal in shaping the industry's future.



Lim Bo Qiang
ARTIST DESIGNER AND CURATOR OF XORDINARY

Lim Bo Qiang's journey with MIFF began when he won first prize at the MIFF FDC in 2016. Since then, he has led the development of the xOrdinary platform and built a successful career, valuing the collaborative opportunities provided by MIFF and industry partners. Lim is dedicated to community-driven initiatives and making significant contributions to the creative industry.

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MIFF and MFA Plant Trees in Sabah to Promote Environmental Sustainability

by Khor Hui-Min

A team from the Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF) and its strategic partner, the Muar Furniture Association (MFA), recently embarked on a meaningful mission in Sabah, aimed at restoring the delicate ecosystem of the Lower Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary through a tree-planting initiative.

This initiative, which took place over two days on July 8 and 9, saw the team planting 100 trees, fulfilling a pledge made during MIFF's 30th anniversary event in March 2024, Southeast Asia's largest furniture trade show.

The pledge was simple yet impactful: for every six trees virtually planted by visitors at the anniversary event, a real tree would be planted in the sanctuary. This promise reflected

MIFF's commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship, values that resonate deeply within the furniture industry, which relies heavily on natural resources. The 100 trees planted in Sabah are just the beginning of a broader commitment to reforestation and environmental conservation.

The tree-planting effort was led by prominent figures within the industry, including MIFF General Manager Ms. Kelie Lim, MFA President Mr. Steve Ong and MFA Executive Advisor Mr. Desmond Tan, who also serves as the president of the Malaysian Furniture Council (MFC). Their participation underscored the importance of leadership in driving sustainability initiatives. These industry leaders were not just symbolically present; they actively participated in the planting process, demonstrating their personal commitment to the cause.

The tree-planting campaign was strongly supported by MFA and manufacturers, including Ecomate, Ivorie International, Nova Talent, HengLin Home Furnishings and Wasaniaga, showcasing the industry's commitment to environmental stewardship. By supporting this initiative, these companies are not only contributing to the restoration of a vital ecosystem but are also setting a benchmark for others in the industry to follow.

The initiative was facilitated by Animal Projects and Environment (APE) Malaysia at a reforestation site designated by the Sabah Wildlife Department. Located near Sandakan, the Lower Kinabatangan region is Malaysia's largest RAMSAR wetland site and is home to endangered species such as the Borneo pygmy elephant, orangutan,

proboscis monkey, rhinoceros hornbill and crocodiles.

The tree-planting campaign was launched at MIFF 2024 as part of a broader effort to raise environmental awareness. The trade show itself was a resounding success, attracting nearly 20,000 visitors, a third of whom came from 120 countries and regions around the world.

Ms. Kelie Lim expressed gratitude for support from the global furniture industry and sponsors, noting that as a leading trade show drawing international buyers from across the globe, MIFF has a unique opportunity to inspire the communities it engages with to contribute to environmental efforts. She was pleased to see that the campaign created a more relaxed and positive atmosphere among visitors this year.

Mr. Desmond Tan, MFA executive advisor and MFC president, also highlighted the importance of the collaboration between MFA and MIFF. "This is a significant collaboration between MFA and MIFF and a timely endeavour which aligns with a sustainable furniture industry," he said.

He stressed that ensuring a sustainable environment is a collective responsibility, one that the industry must take seriously to secure a better future for subsequent generations.

Mr. Steve Ong, president of the MFA, echoed these sentiments, expressing his pride in being part of the initiative. He emphasised that the collaboration with MIFF goes beyond merely participating in the trade show; it also involves making a meaningful contribution to sustainability. "Our involvement goes beyond simply bringing our members to participate in MIFF; we are also committed to contributing to sustainability for a better future," he stated.

Throughout the campaign, the tree-planting team gained a deep appreciation for the extensive effort involved in forest restoration. The process is far from simple; growing seedlings for planting is a challenging and time-consuming task. It takes an entire year for the seeds to mature into seedlings that are ready for planting in the restoration sites. Even after planting, these seedlings require ongoing monitoring and care to ensure their survival. The journey from seedling to a mature tree that can provide shelter and food for wildlife spans several years, underscoring the long-term commitment required for successful reforestation.

In conclusion, the tree-planting initiative by MIFF and MFA in the Lower Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary is a testament to the furniture industry's growing commitment to sustainability. Through collective efforts, the industry is taking meaningful steps towards environmental stewardship, recognising that the future of both their business and the planet depends on responsible actions taken today. This campaign serves as an inspiring example of how industries can contribute to global conservation efforts, fostering a legacy of sustainability for future generations.

Watch our tree planting journey in Sabah — scan the QR code to witness the event!





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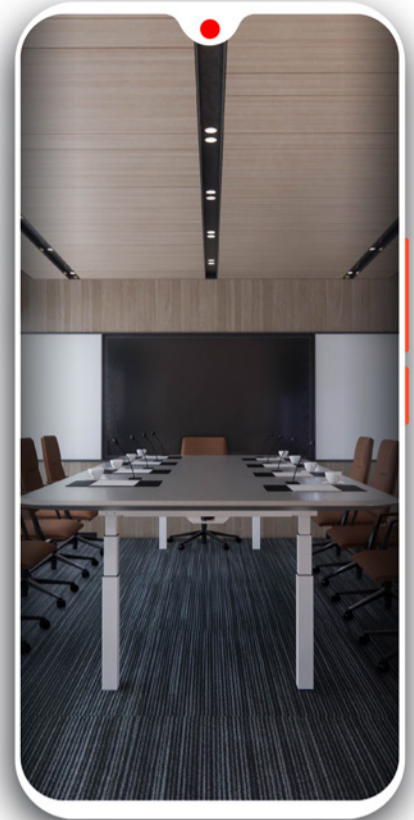
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