

Working Together: Collaborations Win for Designers and Manufacturers

by Chow Ee-Tan, *Furnish Now* writer

Though it was only launched four years ago, the Professional Designers Programme (PDP) has grown by leaps and bounds – and thanks to efforts from local furniture manufacturers and professional designers, the PDP is helping to drive the industry.

The PDP was initiated in July 2015 by the Malaysian Timber Industry Board (MTIB), with close collaboration from the Malaysian Furniture Promotion Council (MFPC) and support from the Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI).

During the three editions of PDP from 2015 to 2017, 13 Malaysian furniture manufacturers participated with both international and Malaysian professional designers. To date, there are 68 prototypes and finished furniture products available in the PDP catalogue – either for further development or immediate commercialisation.

“The PDP is a journey of learning and discovering the talents of both designers and manufacturers,” said MTIB Acting General Director Mr. Mohd Kheiruddin Bin Mohd Rani in an interview with *Furnish Now*. “It is about learning the process of designing and the elements of design, in which we will discover and rediscover qualities such as our strengths, creativity, passion and cultural diversity.”

He said MTIB has spent more than RM3 million on the PDP and the ROI can be seen even now, with more than RM4 million reported export prospects since the programme began in 2015.

“MTIB plans to pursue the research of lifestyle and furniture design to the next level, through the development of design

with international professional designers and Malaysian furniture manufacturers,” said Mr. Kheiruddin. “We want to promote Malaysian furniture as an element of lifestyle . . . how we live and how we envision our lives to be.”

The TANGGAM Label

As part of their objective to cultivate local talent, Mr. Kheiruddin said MTIB began the annual Malaysian MOBILI Furniture Design Competition (MOBILI) in May 2012. There were 11 finalists submitted by MTIB to the organiser of SaloneSatellite COSMIT, which is also the organiser of i-Saloni.

At the end, five talented young Malaysian designers were selected to participate and showcase their prototypes under MTIB's TANGGAM booth during the 16th edition of SaloneSatellite in April 2013. They continued to participate in 2014 and 2015, and now, TANGGAM has 16 talented young designers who are ready to collaborate with local furniture manufacturers and international designers to produce furniture design for high-end market segments. The development of these marketable designs by local young designers are grouped under the TANGGAM label.

MTIB has also launched TANGGAM Design Centres in Kota Damansara, Johor Bahru, Kota Kinabalu and Kota Bharu. Through projects that are self-initiated or developed in collaboration with the industry, these centres aim to develop new design methods for multidisciplinary collaboration among participants from different disciplines.



Radius dining set designed by Izyan Syamimi, manufactured by Wegmans Furniture Industries

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Professional Designers Programme in Muar (PDP in Muar)

Of all the towns in Malaysia, Muar has the largest cluster of furniture-based businesses, comprising more than 80 percent of the RM10 billion furniture export annually. This once sleepy fishing town has now become one of the largest furniture production lines in the world.

“Therefore, it is only natural that Muar gets involved in the PDP in its evolution to be a global furniture market player,” said Mr. Kheiruddin.

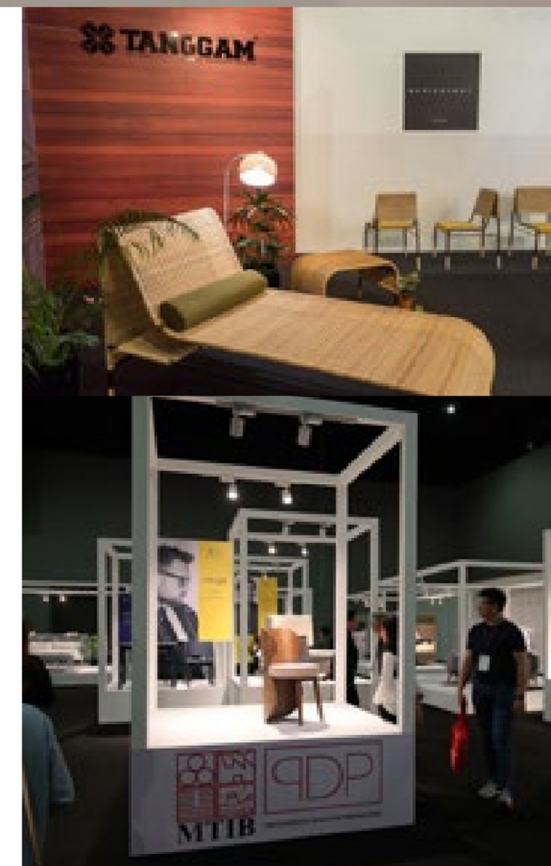
He said PDP in Muar started in October 2018, when the Muar Furniture Association (MFA) and MTIB met to discuss the future of the Malaysian furniture industry – especially the future of its main cluster in Muar.

“It was then decided that the future will have to be the evolution of Muar towards ODM/OBM and that Muar is ready to embrace that inevitable change,” he said.

A total of eight Muar furniture manufacturers and exporters braved this effort for change, with the assistance of six committed designers from Malaysia, Italy and Belgium. The PDP in Muar Showcase presented 16 new and fresh furniture designs at MIFF 2019, all commercially appealing and export-ready.

According to Mr. Kheiruddin, what MTIB anticipates from the PDP are firstly, original furniture designs that enhance product value, and subsequently, prototypes made by the participating Malaysian furniture manufacturers.

He said that currently, eight original designs by professional designers are to be approved for registration by the Intellectual Property Corporation of Malaysia (MyIPO).



From OEM to ODM/OBM

On the efforts taken for the Malaysian furniture industry to become an Original Design Manufacturing (ODM), as opposed to an Original Equipment Manufacturing (OEM), Mr. Kheiruddin said that MTIB has developed various strategic activities with the main objective of promoting the image of Malaysian furniture and catalysing the transition of this sector from OEM to ODM – and even OBM (Original Brand Manufacturing).

“ODM is a good component to determine a better value in products, and will definitely increase the quality and price. It is the main factor in producing solution-based products, thus manufacturers will have better prospects and better market reach,” he explained. “On the macro level, it will help increase the nation’s exports, with better offerings and more market opportunities.”

Mr. Kheiruddin said MTIB was allocated a fund under the 11th Malaysian Plan to undertake programmes to enhance the quality of design for locally manufactured furniture.

MTIB will have more engagements with other agencies (like Malaysia Design Council, FITEC, MATRADE, etc.) in promoting ODM, and more feedback from the industry in understanding the challenges and issues of furniture manufacturing.

“As indicated by a survey, only 53% of the furniture industry is ODM and OBM. In this context, I urge the industry to employ qualified furniture designers with skills and experience, and who will have a beneficial impact on the companies’ performance through improved sales, higher margins and reduced operating expenditure,” he said.

Mr. Kheiruddin is optimistic that the export performance of furniture products will continue to grow in the coming years: “We need to combine our efforts to strengthen the supply chain, produce new market-oriented, value-added products and explore new markets,” he said. “The aggregation of these efforts will definitely contribute towards achieving the resilience of the timber industry and achieve our long-term target by 2020.”



Trou case goods designed by Izyan Syamimi, manufactured by BSL Furniture

PDP Designers

Izyan Syamimi Zainol



Izyan Syamimi won first prize at the MOBILI Furniture Design Competition in 2017, which provided the opportunity to join the TANGGAM programme run by MTIB.

Prior to that, in 2016, when she won second prize at the MIFF Furniture Design Competition – this was the moment she began to further her

profession as a furniture designer, going on to build the furniture brand BASICOLOGY with her partner.

The recent Master of Science graduate in Industrial Design from Universiti Putra Malaysia, has both experience in furniture design and batik design, but fell in love with the former.

A part of PDP since 2018, for PDP in Muar 2019 she created two designs for two manufacturers – a dining set for Wegmans Furniture Industries and a case goods for BSL Furniture.

“Both designs have different significances. The dining set for Wegmans Furniture Industries was for meeting mass production purposes. Meanwhile, the case goods was designed for kids bedroom, and there was an additional idea about furniture for pets,” said Izyan.

“As young designers, being involved in such programmes is a good opportunity for us to have more connections. Instead of hoping manufacturers listen to us, manufacturer’s knowledge is valuable as they have much more experience in the industry,” she said.

On the collaboration at MIFF 2019, Izyan said both she and the manufacturer had thorough discussions before she came out with the concept design. “Such collaboration is very important. When we work with local manufacturers, we have a different vision on how our designs are staged,” she said, adding that designers have good support from the manufacturers at PDP in Muar.

She said designers need to do more prior art research to constantly improve and create novel designs. And to her, the PDP is a good exercise for Muar’s manufacturers, who are striving to move from an OEM to an ODM basis.

“The manufacturer may have a better platform in the industry by having novelty designs. A successful designer is a label and marketing tool that would benefit the manufacturer. With more exposure for novelty designs, the industry will mature and eventually realise the practice of ODM.

“During PDP in Muar, I could see the efforts of the manufacturers working towards ODM,” she added.

Eric Wong

A qualified architect specialising in furniture design including home furniture, office furniture and education furniture, Eric Wong won an award in the MOBILI furniture competition in 2016. He has been invited by MTIB to participate in the PDP since 2017, and this year was the third time he was involved in the programme.

“It showed the keen attitude and vigour of the participating manufactures and their capabilities. Overall, it was a pleasant experience to work with the manufacturers and their efforts were notable,” he said.

Eric had two products exhibited in PDP in Muar 2019: the RAINTREE dining set manufactured by Mobilia International, and the FIS sofa manufactured by Rodas Furniture Industries.

“The concept of RAINTREE was to address the common problem for seated users around a long table with

legs at four corners,” he explained. “The RAINTREE table takes its metaphor from a tree with big canopy, and its legs resemble a tree trunk that are positioned away from the table corners.”

Meanwhile, the FIS, derived from the word ‘Fissure’, is a sofa with carved fissures to form the components of a sofa-like seat, backrest and armrest.

“Designers always strive to support platforms like PDP that promote good design. These events can improve the visibility of local designs to the world, whether they’re held locally or internationally,” said Eric.

He said the PDP’s main objective is to provide manufacturers with opportunities to work with professional designers. This adds new perspectives and dimensions to their products in terms of design quality, and subsequently establishes their brands in the global market.

“Ultimately, we hope to create an environment where the whole industry will be more design-oriented . . . with products that are not only be functional, but also aesthetically

pleasant, distinctive and innovative. At the end of the day, we would like to see an ecosystem that spawns more world-acclaimed brands and local designers,” he said.

He said through programmes such as PDP, he hopes the Malaysian furniture industry can gradually mature to a state where more manufacturers will have designs and quality on par with globally leading brands.

“Hopefully, more manufacturers will leave their comfort zones and be willing to evolve their existing operation to collaborate with designers, invest in research and development of the products, and have a perpetual strategy to market the products and rebrand their names,” said Eric.

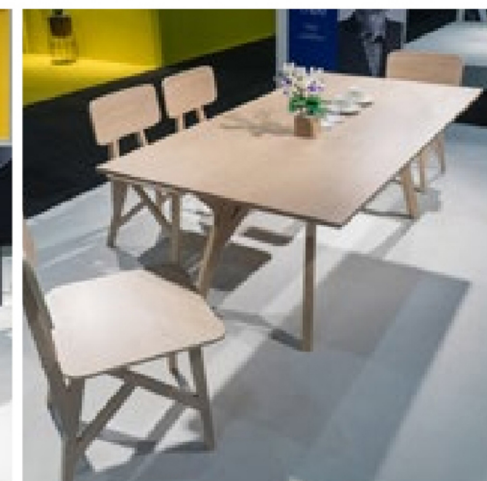
“People respect and value good design – and designers can contribute and flourish, so that more and more manufacturers will have their own distinctive designs and establish brand names in that direction,” he concluded.



RAINTREE dining set designed by Eric Wong, manufactured by Mobilia International



FIS sofa designed by Eric Wong, produced by Rodas Furniture Industries



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