

**FURNITURE & FURNISHING**

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**SPECIAL REPORT**

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MAY 2016 FURNITURE AND FURNISHING

The Export Furniture Exhibition (EFE), also in Malaysia, opening on a Saturday at the more easily navigated KLCC, was different in many ways. At this small but busy show less wood furniture was on offer and more upholstered furniture as a percentage. There was less focus on Japan but perhaps more on China with the launching of the China Export Pavilion and a product catalogue for Chinese buyers in pursuit of increased bi-lateral trade. At the heart of EFE a new design initiative "Professional Design Programme" (PDP) was launched jointly by the Malaysian Furniture Promotion Board and the MTC. "Tanggap" was another initiative to encourage young designers set up by the Malaysia Timber Industry Board (MTIB), launched by Director General YB Dr Jalaluddin Harun.

Colour was prevalent throughout the show and generally the individual presentations were up to the usual standard expected at EFE. Although Rubberwood is still a mainstay material for many of the exhibitors, there were plenty of other hardwood species in evidence and extensive use of veneer in bedroom, dining and living collections. Hup Chong Furniture from Selangor presented a full range of mainly bedroom furniture with its front-of-stand presentation in American Black Walnut veneer and dark-stained Tulipwood solids to match. Regent Furniture, also from Selangor, showed a new collection of Acacia living and dining furniture from the Danish designer Morten Georgsen, with the innovative use of Acacia veneer mimicking laminated solid wood. Only one major exhibitor - Latitude Tree - participated at both Malaysian shows. Deep Furniture repeated a similar range of light-coloured Rubberwood as in previous years. Pankin provided a spectacular shocking purple sofa with exposed wood frame that nobody could miss, as did Ita Upholstery Design. 'Inspi' brand may have changed some dining chair designs but has stuck totally with the same brown coloured wood, as have Seng Yip Furniture (SYF); but for inspired branding of ordinary wooden chairs the presentation prize should go to 'Porani' for a small eye-catching display.

At the EFE opening ceremony it was suggested by YB Datuk Sundaran Annamalai Secretary General representing the Minister of Commodities & Plantations that there is now "a return of confidence" but the oft-repeated calls for improvements in design and increased exports echoed previous exhortations from government to industry. This time the target of RM16 billion has been set for 2020. The new Malaysian Furniture Council Strategic Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) calls for furniture exports to grow by 12% annually. The Minister advised that improved design performance is demonstrated by ODM now estimated to have jumped from 33% to 53% of Malaysian production since the last survey; his conclusion being that "Malaysia will develop through design rather than OEM." In the dedicated Design Hall, hosted by the Malaysian Furniture Promotion Council (MFPC), an impressive display of designers from Italy and Belgium working with local factories drew much attention.

The Vietnam International Furniture Fair (VIFA-EXPO 2016) had expanded (36%) even further into the car park of the Saigon Exhibition and Conference Centre (SECC) this year and now needs new permanent space and better facilities. Exhibitors were up by 42% at 253 and the show was exciting after Malaysia, with more appealing designs, much more natural wood and plenty of colours. Furniture was contemporary and there were many international buyers. 'Variety' was the watchword which now attracts many western buyers, be they Australian, European or American. As ever, many of the major Taiwanese manufacturers do not exhibit, so the show is dominated by Vietnamese owned and joint venture or foreign investors now manufacturing in Vietnam.

Among the larger exhibitors were Interwood and International Furniture Corporation, both major exporters to European markets, each with specific lines in American White Oak. Among the traditional Vietnamese producers of outdoor furniture was Hiep Long with an extensive range of Teak furniture. More mixed was the offering from Singapore-based KODA with a wide range of clear and stained American Oak, Walnut and such items as a dining set in smoked grey Acacia. Top of the interiors specialists for projects was AA Corporation with furniture from all types of materials but presented on a rough-sawn lumber background to emphasise the finery of its finished products. Square Home was one of many smaller companies with cement-finished furniture in grey and pale colours. The huge Malaysian-owned Latitude Tree also focused on grey from beds to dining. Another Malaysian company, Kian introduced a new collection of upright chairs - some extremely comfortable. With so much plantation-grown Acacia now available in Vietnam, producers such as Lyprodan are including solid interior pieces in their collections, although Samling Housing Products was there to compete with Malaysian Acacia. Two of the smaller exhibitors of great interest were Danish-designed Nofu with exception quality in minimalist pieces and French-owned Gomo with contemporary European styles and a table football, all in Oak.

Among the wood material suppliers at the show were Gutches International Inc. from USA, Lalane from France, Exportdrvo from Russia, the American hardwood Export Council (AHEC) and several local lumber and veneer traders, such as Euro Techno Wood. The winners of the 'Hoa Mai - Apricot Blossom' 2015-2016 Furniture Design Competition which had attracted 238 entries were announced at the opening ceremony and presented by John Chan of AHEC, attended by Nguyen Quoc Khanh, Chairman of HAWA and other local dignitaries. The competition



Designed in Asia and Made in Asia with American Oak and shown in Singapore



American Tulipwood extensively used by STEER Furniture from Malaysia launched at IFFS



Jerry Tan, Mauro Mamoli, Roberta Mutti, Constance Chung & Ernie Koh at the EFE Opening

the American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC), at which a series of open seminars took place during the show. The hall also featured many design exhibits including Design Stars and the American Pavilion built in Cherry, with a collection of furniture 'Designed in Asia and Made in Asia with American Hardwood' which won the 'Best Stand Award'. The various awards at IFFS reflected the true international nature of the show with awards going to Hong Kong, Vietnam, Indonesia, France, Thailand and Singapore.

To conclude the opening ceremony, the sole winner of the single category Furniture Design Award was Ms Kataryna Kempa from Poland who was presented with a cheque for SD20,000 by Mr John Chan, Regional Director of the American Hardwood Export Council, major sponsor of the award.

is organised by HAWA and is supported by AHEC and Hafele. Winner was 28 year old Huynh Tan Anh Tuan with his 'Workspace' in White Oak, second was 'Yak Table' in Tulipwood and third was 'Earth Table' with a combination of Walnut, Ash and Tulipwood, so called as the tiny components were re-cycled offcuts. Other 'Honour' consolation prizes went to five more of the entries.

In terms of trends there was much more natural finished wood, rather than dark stained furniture. Cement finishes and grey-stained dining and bedroom sets were common and there was more Vietnamese-grown Acacia than Rubberwood furniture. The most common imported material by far was American White Oak.

The International Furniture Fair Singapore (IFFS) was this year combined with the Décor Show and Furnipro woodworking machinery show at Singapore's Expo. Undoubtedly IFFS is the most design-focused on the circuit and is linked to Singapore's Design Week and SingaPlural which seek to bring design to the heart of local consumers. The shows occupied six halls and largely focused on quality products which provided inspiration for many visitors there to look, with the mission:

"Celebrate design, invoke inspiration and create conversations" The IFFS is truly international in two senses. The Singapore furniture industry operates offshore with plants mainly in China, Malaysia and Vietnam with their production exhibited at the show. Furthermore there are many international companies which regard Singapore as an essential platform for the region - all too many to mention. Notable Singaporean exhibitors were KODA and HALEYWOOD with Step from Malaysia and Square Roots from Vietnam and Deesawat from Thailand. Notable among the visitors were official delegates from Chongqing, a study group from HAWA in Ho Chi Minh City and many of the international furniture industry media. This show with its individuality as a key element particularly appeals to independent furniture retailers and contract buyers. The low-lit Hall 4 housed the opening ceremony theatre with a screen in American Cherry latticework veneer donated by



FDA Winner Ms Kataryna Kempa receives the only Award at IFFS (2)

IFFINA/MOZAIC was the smallest of the two March furniture shows in Indonesia - a last-minute combination of the IFFINA run by ASMINDO and the Mozaic interiors show at the Jakarta Convention Centre - now a very poor venue. The show was very small, mainly focused on Teak and there was almost nothing on offer that could not be found at the much larger and more comprehensive IFEX across town, with the exception of Cellini. The show did have the interest of a small exhibition on the history of rattan and as a central feature a well displayed "Indonesian Designer Challenge" organised by the design association HDMi and sponsored by Perhutani and FSC among others. FSC also featured on an expansive booth of WWF. Many of the exhibitors displayed logos of 'Indonesian Legal wood' without reference to SVLK. Of the notable companies exhibiting, Abadi Indorama provided a panoply of fine veneers and Goodswood featured its 'urban design furnishings'. Cellini, based in Singapore, stood out



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**Special Report**  
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American Oak dining set by IFC in Vietnam



Dr Gerald H Smith Attaché for Agriculture, U.S. Consulate, HCMC (Centre) with John Chan, AHEC (Rt) and staff at VIFA



Square Roots French Oak furniture made in Vietnam