

Take a break on the bench

**HAUS**  
By Ms Kwek Sin Yee (right), 39, alumna of Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa) who teaches at the school.  
What: Much like a kampung house verandah, where family members hang out, Ms Kwek hopes those who use her house-shaped bench will socialise or stargaze within its roofless frame. The square bench can also be a performance or installation space.



**LOOP BENCH**  
By Mr Huang Yeren, 25, recent Nafa graduate  
What: This long, singular bench loops overhead like a roller coaster track. Users can face one another with some shade over them. The loop could also be a fun challenge for parkour enthusiasts.



**WHEELER**  
By exchange student Chanya Limpasitipon, 22, from Thailand  
What: It is hard to miss this unconventional bench that has separate seats and a single bright yellow coiled frame. Ms Chanya, a fourth-year industrial design student from the School of Architecture and Design at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, took note of how bicycles are designed.



**DOGGO & KITTY CAT**  
By Ms Belinda Gan (above), 20, recent Nafa graduate  
What: Ms Gan's benches portray how pets behave. Her two "dogs" look as if they are sniffing each other, while the "cat" is on its back, looking for a tummy rub.



**BRENCH**  
By exchange student Duangjai Lertwattanamongkol, 22, from Thailand  
What: The fourth-year industrial design student from the School of Architecture and Design at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi modelled her benches after the shadows cast by the trees along Bencoolen Street.



**FAMILIAR STRANGERS**  
By Mr Melvin Ong, 32, Nafa alumnus who runs a design consultancy  
What: This series of three curved benches of different heights and lengths is Mr Ong's homage to the horse bench – a basic flat board fitted with four legs. The award-winning designer, who teaches part-time at Nafa, hopes that the benches will encourage communication among strangers.

PHOTOS: CHEE YING QUAN, DAVE LIM

# Sit pretty in Bencoolen

Six quirky benches by students and alumni of the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts add a splash of colour to the street

**Natasha Ann Zachariah**

Anyone wandering along Bencoolen Street can now rest on a new set of playful benches that are also enticing for art lovers, stargazers and perhaps parkour enthusiasts.

Paddle Pop-coloured dogs, a gable-roofed house with no walls and a roller coaster-inspired loop are among the six quirky benches that brighten the new-look Bencoolen Street.

Six students and alumni from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa) each came up with his or her own twist on the ubiquitous four-legged wooden bench.

They are winners of a design competition organised by Nafa last year. Their creations, picked from 26 entries, were installed last month.

Ten benches were shortlisted before seven were chosen for production. Since then, six have been made and the last one is in the works.

The benches, which are made of various materials such as chengal wood, mild steel and fibreglass, complement the new look of the tree-lined Bencoolen Street.

They were chosen by judges from the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), Land Transport Authority, National Heritage Board and the school, among others.

The benches were funded by the URA under its Our Favourite Place programme, a scheme that aims to enliven public spaces.

For more than five years, pedestrians walking down the street have had to dodge construction work on the upcoming Bencoolen MRT station, which is scheduled to open

later this year as part of the third phase of the Downtown Line.

The refreshed street, unveiled in March, now has a wider walkway and a cycling path that covers the stretch between Middle Road and Bras Basah Road.

Given that the school has three campuses in Bencoolen Street, a Nafa spokesman says it is a "major stakeholder" of the area.

He adds: "As Nafa's School of Art and Design offers a course on furniture design, this is an excellent learning opportunity for our students and alumni to share their talents as part of our community engagement."

This is the most recent bench design competition that has been completed. In 2012, cross-disciplinary design practice Farm held an open call to the public to create benches using wooden planks from the seats of the former National Stadium.

For the benches in Bencoolen Street, the designers thought about how to make functional, yet pretty, benches.

Recent Nafa graduate Belinda Gan wanted a "playful and eye-catching" seat that would distract pedestrians from their mobile devices for a bit.

The result was Doggo & Kitty Cat, a trio of fibreglass benches shaped like animals. Painted in ombre hues reminiscent of Paddle Pop ice cream, Doggo consists of two canine-shaped double-seater benches, while Kitty Cat is a solo seat with the feline on its back.

Ms Gan, 20, who has a diploma in furniture and spatial design, studied how these animals behaved and translated that into her benches.

Determined to perfect the look of the benches, she often stayed up late

during the course of the project, from the design phase to the production period. She also asked friends and family for their opinions.

She says: "I didn't sleep much during that time, as I just kept thinking of ways to make the concept better."

Meanwhile, her fellow winner and former Nafa student Kwek Sin Yee took inspiration from the verandahs of kampung houses, where the occupants would gather to entertain guests.

She created a 3m-tall minimalist structure, with an elevated square timber deck and red steel frame shaped like a house. However, it has no walls and is open on all sides.

Ms Kwek, who named it Haus (German for house), hopes users will not just perch along the edges, but climb inside or lie down to daydream or stargaze. She designed it in her free time after school.

She also intends for Haus to be used as an installation performance space. There are small holes in the frame for artists to hang their materials or works.

The 39-year-old, who is now a lecturer and programme coordinator for the 3-D design programme at Nafa, says: "It isn't your typical bench. It's more than just a seat and users can interact with and play in the space."

Both designers are delighted to see people using their work, instead of treating the benches like art that cannot be touched.

Ms Gan says: "I hope my bench brings joy to someone's day. That would make the hard work and sweat worth it."

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