

MIGHTY DUO

Porsche Cayenne S Coupe and Skoda Kodiaq | C6&7



FIVE CATS AND A FLAT

A feline-friendly home for five British shorthairs | c3



Chantal Sajan

Forget the post-pandemic "new normal" and prepare for "normal" instead.

Home-grown furniture designers like millennial Celine Ng are upbeat about the future and are taking a more balanced approach, looking at designs that can be produced sustainably in a world more aware of climate change.

"The pandemic has been with us for almost two years, and we have all become accustomed to it," says Ms Ng, 30, who runs Fraction Design Studio.

"What was once thought of as the 'new normal' is now, well, just normal."

"Our customers are investing in home-office telecommuting infrastructure to help them work more effectively and have become used to having young children around while they work."

Ms Ng believes that sustainable furniture will be more valued in a post-Covid-19 world than fast furniture – made of cheap materials that leave a high carbon footprint – and this is the design direction her firm will pursue in the months ahead.

"A piece of furniture should be more than just a beautiful piece that suits a home or an office," she says. "It should be crafted from recycled materials, flat-packed without unnecessary packaging and delivered by an electric vehicle. The use of the furniture should also be inclusive, catering to people of all abilities, and leave only a small carbon footprint."

Mr Nathan Yong, who co-founded Grafnik Furniture store more than a decade ago, is also advocating for more awareness about where furniture comes from and how it is made.

He is one of the earliest multidisciplinary designers in Singapore.

Furniture of the future

Sustainable, holistic, multi-functional home fixtures are what Singapore furniture designers want to create for a post-pandemic world battling climate change

Swedish fashion giant H&M is celebrating its 100th anniversary in Singapore and marking this milestone by turning the spotlight on home-grown artists and craftsmen.

Mr Yong and nine other artists and designers were chosen to create limited-edition pieces that are on sale at the H&M Orchard Building store till the end of the month. His tie-up with the fashion retailer has resulted in chairs and shelves made from waste metal and marble, as well as a lounging pool called Trash Bean Bag, which H&M Singapore head of communications Lisa Chai says is the most popular design from the collaboration.

The range costs from \$280 for the Trash Bean Bag to \$550 for a bar stool made from offcuts. Other furniture designers are also moving away from purely aesthetic considerations to creating pieces that are sustainably sourced, that look good and which can last a long time.

Founders of home-grown furniture design firms such as Mr Ahmad Habshée of Urban Salvation, Mr Jarrod Lim of Jarrod Lim Design and Ms Chan Wai Lim of Trigger Design Studio are looking at more holistic ways to create, such as working with recycled wood or sustainably sourced hardwoods and designing multi-tasking furniture such as a dining table that can double as a work desk.

Local designers are also getting help in their plans to charge forward with various initiatives rolled out by the Singapore Furniture Industries Council (SFIC).

SFIC president Phua Boon Huat says the industry can expect to see an upsurge in the future.

"Research has shown that the outlook for the global furniture industry remains promising, with a projected healthy growth rate of more than a per cent from 2021 to 2025," he tells The Straits Times.

In April last year, the council rolled out its fifth SFIC Membership Assistance Scheme called SFIC Assist during the early stages of the pandemic to help its more than 300 members cope with the down-

turn and prepare them for the upturn.

Mr Phua says that globally, furniture companies are increasingly shifting their operations towards one that is part of a larger lifestyle proposition. They are looking at design where furniture fulfils both the functional and aspirational needs of customers.

In October last year, SFIC introduced Create+Space, a new business-to-business e-sourcing and marketing platform that is the first-of-its-kind in the Asia-Pacific region led by a trade association. The platform, supported by Enterprise Singapore, is a virtual meet-and-greet space that is aimed at trade buyers such as importers, distributors and architects looking for premium furniture and furnishing items for their projects.

Mr Phua adds: "Upping the ante with the use of sustainable materials in design solutions will also be an increasingly important focus for many."

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Salvaged wood turned artisanal furniture

AHMAD HABSHÉE,
URBAN SALVATION
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Mr Ahmad Habshée started working with salvaged wood in 2015. He dug into his own savings to create distinctively Singaporean artisanal furniture that was good enough to be shipped to the world.

At his six-year-old furniture business, Urban Salvation, he designs classic pieces focused on a modern aesthetic using quality, sustainable hardwoods from Singapore and Indonesia. He honed his skills over the years through working with master craftsmen in Malacca, Bangkok and Semarang in Java. Today, he has parlayed his passion into a 7,000 sq ft workshop and gallery space at Tampines Industrial Park A. He has a team of eight designers, makers and crafters catering to his growing base of customers.

The 32-year-old is also currently taking full-time classes for a diploma in furniture and spatial design at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. "I promised my longstanding customers that I would go back to school and relearn everything about furniture design to revolutionise Singapore's furniture industry," says Mr Ahmad, who comes from a family of furniture makers.

His great-grandfather and grandfather were woodworkers and his father, who is retired, used to work in a furniture shop. "I believe what resonates with my customers is how I value the act of educating others, and learning from them too," he says. "It's the personal connection when they step through the doors of Urban Salvation."

"There is also the charm of customised artisanal furniture. You have full control of the design and through that, you always learn something new."

The company stocks classic furniture pieces that feature Scandinavian-style pin-legs, and with forms and shapes inspired by mid-century modern furniture.

But Mr Ahmad believes in pushing the envelope in design and exploring silhouettes that are more homespun to showcase the unique character and personalities of his customers.

The company recently launched two original collections – a Black Series designed by Mr Ahmad and an Industrial Pipe series designed by Urban Salvation's in-house designer Muhammad Zulfadli Abdul Rahman, 29. "Both collections use reclaimed teak, while Zulfadli's collection features industrial pipe as well. The idea is to tap into the modern industrial aesthetic that has become popular in vintage cafes and modern bistros.

"We want to set ourselves apart from the competition, which means having to take a leap of faith and venture into an market that most companies might be hesitant to explore."

Urban Salvation's Mr Ahmad Habshée designs classic furniture pieces with a modern aesthetic using salvaged or sustainable wood. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

FROM C1

At this cafe, drink the coffee, then buy the cup

ETCH&BOLTS

Flagship Store: 3 Little Road, Level 2
Concept Store: 12 Joo Sait Drive

Is it a shop? No, it is a cafe. No, wait – it is a furniture design company. Actually, home-grown furniture studio etch&bolts is all of the above.

Founded in 2014 by Ms Zaelyn Tan, 31, the studio started in a tiny shophouse in Keong Saik Road and moved to a 5,000 sq ft showroom at 3 Little Road about five years ago for more elbow room for its growing band of eight full-time designers.

The company specialises in designing bespoke furniture. The pieces are made to last using hardwoods, natural marble, granite and quartz and no two pieces are alike. “We certainly are not the cheapest in town, but we assure our customers that the quality of work and our prices are competitive,” says Ms Tan.

Prices start at \$399 for a solid oakwood side table to about \$3,000 for a walnut eight-seater dining table. The company also offers pet furniture upholstered with designer fabric. There are more than 200 fabrics to choose from and the designs are customisable.

In January, the studio opened its concept store, styled as a cafe, in Dhoby Ghaut. The idea for Void Cafe was to showcase the range of lifestyle products that etch&bolts also sells besides its furniture customisation service. This includes its locally made tableware, arts and crafts, and home accessories such as rugs, carpets and lighting equipment.

At Void Cafe, besides drinking locally roasted speciality coffee, customers also get to buy “everything you sit on or touch”. This includes the coffee cups that our customers sip from,” says Ms Tan, a graduate in interior and multimedia design from Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. She heads the cafe, a subsidiary of etch&bolts, with designers Shaun Ng and Muhammad Faizal Misdi, both 32.

“We wanted a full-service approach to design where customers get a one-stop experience of furniture and lifestyle products,” says Ms Tan.

“We are also currently looking to take the brand overseas by focusing on our homeware and pet furniture range.”



Nathan Yong's furniture line featured in Crazy Rich Asians

NATHAN YONG, GRAPHKUNT
04-01 Funan Mall
107 North Bridge Road

Furniture design trailblazer Nathan Yong is perhaps the only Singaporean whose creations have appeared in Hollywood movies.

“I’ve seen my Folks Line Credenza in many movie sets and it is also a best-seller in Design Within Reach,” says Mr Yong, 49, who drew inspiration from 1970s turntables and music equipment for his line of sideboards and cabinets under his Folks label. Design Within Reach is an American furniture chain with more than 50 stores in the United States.

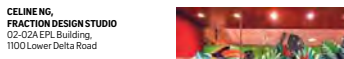
His Folks Line Credenza (below) has appeared in movies such as *Nocturnal Animals*, the 2016 psychological thriller written, produced and directed by Tom Ford, as well as in *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) directed by Jon Chu. Mr Yong co-founded home-grown furniture store Grafunk in Funan Mall showcases Mr Yong’s own designs under his Folks and Grafunk private label “studogranfank”, as well as Japanese and European designer furniture and fittings including Ligne Roset and Louis Poulson.

The recipient of Designer of the Year at the President’s Design Award in 2008, he also exports his designs to retailer Design Within Reach

in the United States, Heals in Britain and other furniture retailers in Europe and Asia. He has a master’s degree in design from the University of New South Wales, Australia. His Folks label also bears the Made With Passion brand mark, an initiative by the Singapore Brand Office and Singapore Tourism Board. Folks is sold in the US, Britain, Australia and South Korea.

After more than 20 years in the business, the designer wants his latest work to make people think about sustainability. He recently collaborated with Swedish fashion giant H&M to create his Trash Bean Bag, a body-moulding chair, that takes a dig at what constitutes “bad design” – disposable, trashy and quickly executed.

The H&M line also features Mr Yong’s shelves and stools made from metal and marble waste from factories in Singapore. “I collected the offcuts after rummaging through waste bins in industrial estates here,” he says. “I have less design interventions with the pieces in the H&M collections because I believe the less I design, the less waste I generate. The materiality should take centre stage for people to appreciate.”



After graduating in industrial design from RMIT University in Melbourne, Mr Lim moved to Milan, Italy, in 2003 to work with Ms Patricia Utriquola, one of the most sought-after designers in the world. His goal was to learn from the best and take deep dives into what constitutes world-class design.

“We pivoted to designing for virtual spaces,” says Ms Ng, who studied 3D design as part of her degree programme at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa) where she majored in furniture design in 2014.

One of Fraction’s strengths is in exhibition booth designs, and making the switch from physical exhibitions to online platforms was a strategic pivot. “We partnered IT specialists to deliver virtual exhibitions and trade shows. Since last year, our flagship offerings are the design and implementation of online trade shows and exhibitions and other virtual event organisers.”

“Thanks to the pandemic, my team and I have added a fourth quality to the Singaporean design DNA: resilience.”

Furniture will get smaller, but more sophisticated

JARROD LIM, JARROD LIM DESIGN
324 Joo Chiat Road

The pandemic has turned the phrase “live, work, play” on its head, says Mr Jarrod Lim, founder of the eponymous Singapore-based design atelier he started in 2007.

“One design trend is furniture that supports not only working from home, but also a more bohemian attitude as more people get ready for vaccinated travel lanes,” says Mr Lim, 43, who grew up in Melbourne, Australia, with his Singaporean Peranakan father and Australian mother.

“Also, we may have realised that our jobs are less important to us than we originally thought.” He says more people are buying desks and office furniture for the home, or furniture with both an office and a lifestyle function, such as adaptable dining tables.

“Restaurants forced to have tables spaced further apart may opt for smaller tables, which may also require smaller chairs. Hotel lobbies may also have to be redesigned to help spread people further apart.”

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Designer Jarrod Lim’s most recent work is the Butler line (left) for home-grown furniture brand Jottergoods. PHOTO: JARROD LIM DESIGN



Rocking back to childhood memories with these chairs

CHAN WAI LIM, TRIGGER DESIGN STUDIO
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Design must have a good story to tell and touch the heart of the user. This is the dictum that drives the works of Ms Chan Wai Lim, founder of home-grown firm Trigger Design Studio.

The 47-year-old industrial designer’s love of visual narratives has helped her bag some of the most prestigious awards in global and local design competitions. This includes the Best of Consumer Electronics Show Awards in the United States in 2008 and the President’s Design Award for Design of the Year in 2012, for her all-in-one PC concept for American computer giant Dell Global.

Ms Chan founded Trigger Design in 2015 and has been commissioned to produce a mind-boggling range of projects, including creating designs for lifestyle products, furniture, public healthcare devices, baby gear and toys.

But she really would rather talk about her rockers. “One of her latest furniture designs is called ‘Steal Play’, a collaboration with India’s lifestyle home and decor brand Arttd’inox. She is reworking her rocking animals

“The simple aesthetic of stainless steel is ideal for the tradition of rocking horse-play, which evokes a magical journey for children,” says Ms Chan. The stainless steel iterations are currently in production in India and are available through pre-orders.

“I want to share my memories of a simpler time when we played with handcrafted toys and were closer to nature. I believe design can also trigger positive social change and improve lives besides being a boon for business.”

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Rocking back to childhood memories with these chairs

(below) design which she first presented in 2018 for the SingaPlural design exhibition.

The original design featured three pieces of rocking furniture for children that were inspired by Ms Chan’s kampung childhood on a Sembawang farm during the 1970s. The rockers were made of Heveatech, a type of recycled wood that is weatherproof and termite-resistant.

But this time around, she is working with stainless steel instead of wood. “The kinetic movement of the rocking chairs allows for an immersive play experience for children of all ages,” says Ms Chan, who graduated from Temasek Polytechnic with a diploma in product and industrial design in 1999.

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PHOTOS: KEVIN LIM, ETCH&BOLTS, TRIGGER DESIGN STUDIO