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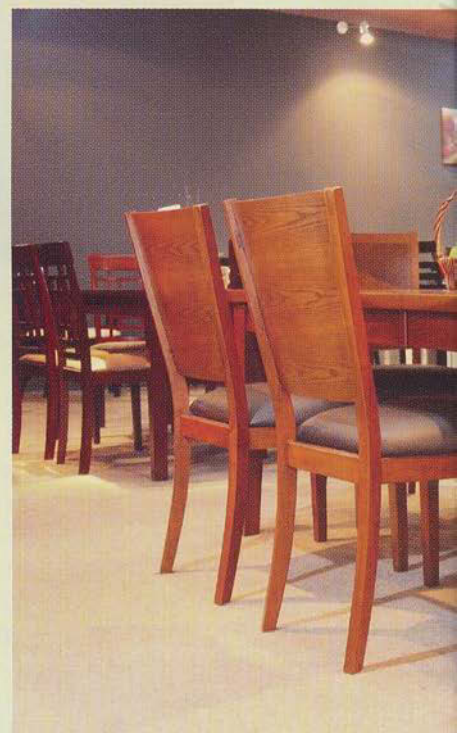
Exhibitors shine at MIFF 2011



Exhibitors *shine* as flock to



Omega Sofa



Aik Chee.



HGR publisher Ian Hughes was once again invited to judge the exhibitions at this year's MIFF.

This year's Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF 2011) was once again held in that nation's capital city Kuala Lumpur from 1-5 March.

And having being once again invited to the fair as one of the selected international judges, I was in a unique position to evaluate the products and other merchandise displayed, and compare them with last year and other years. Moreover, it was inevitable that one also checked the popularity of the show by studying the numbers of visitors, both local and international and comparing those too with 2010 figures.

There can be no question that MIFF historically has been a massive attraction for companies in South East Asia. And the buyers have followed.

Under the visionary leadership of founder and managing director Dato Tan Chin Huat, MIFF has become a byword for efficiency, organisation and market leadership. Nevertheless and undeterred by the high standards set by MIFF, other international furniture fairs in the region (Singapore, Thailand, now Shanghai) have also helped draw attention to the fact that south east Asia has evolved into a dynamic and increasingly important furniture manufacturing zone of general excellence and one to be reckoned with.

And the other competitive Asian fairs have decided that

international buyers

MIFF 2011



Benel office chairs

**"MIFF has become
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leadership"**

if Malaysia can do it and in so doing become a mecca for discriminating buyers of furniture, then so can they. Also the fact of MIFF and its success has undoubtedly served to boost and encourage the local manufacturing sector.

Now these are critically important issues – success breeds success and as MIFF's popularity and viability has grown over the years, it has undoubtedly become the target of competitors. Which is not a bad thing in any industry. Competition is the surest guarantee of quality, service and excellence and MIFF boasts these qualities in abundance.

2011, however, indicated perhaps a certain staleness. Yes, the exhibitors were there, albeit in smaller numbers and with a few notable absentees, but the quality of design did not seem to have developed significantly. Indeed disappointingly, with one or two rare exceptions, manufacturers seemed to believe that offering what had been successful in previous years would be good enough to show again. Buyers seemed to agree that they had seen much of what was on offer before and a general air of 'déjà vu' was strongly discernible.

This observation was confirmed at the formal prizegiving for the top designs when the chief judge reiterated his and





Vesarei



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“Organisers must examine every option available to eliminate any staleness”

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his team's disappointment. And the product presentation in exhibitors' booths echoed the feeling that things were standing still. There was no real advance in thinking about how best to display products being exhibited to draw attention and to market to visitors.

Having said all this, let me make it plain that we spoke to many, many visitors who enjoyed their visit to MIFF once again and did satisfactory business. Indeed, over the years it has become plain that most visitors and buyers find what they are looking for – if not everything.

The theme and one which MIFF has played a strong role in disseminating is the emphasis on 'going green'. The irresistible trend globally is to produce environmentally friendly products and MIFF has sought to actively encourage local manufacturers (and others) about the critical importance of meeting green standards. So highly visible on many stands was furniture made from aged oil palm wood and even rice husks – previously regarded as useless materials. The innovative use of these materials will undoubtedly increase as more and more manufacturers learn how best to utilise them.

Nevertheless many companies have still not caught on and are using components that are anything but environmentally friendly, but we have little doubt that the educational process already put in place – combined with the demands of the market – will sort that particular problem out.

This year MIFF occupied space of over 80 000 square metres over two venues and with well over 500 exhibitors, it remains a huge magnet for buyers, and indeed, prospective exhibitors. Whether it be sofas, lounge furniture, bedroom furniture and



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beds, dining room furniture, outdoor furniture, office furniture, children's and incidental furniture, it was all there.

And this year MIFF created the IDEATION award to promote design amongst students. Essentially, this is a competition held among students and young designers to identify emerging talents and to promote the furniture industry as a rewarding career option.

Qualities organisers were looking for were aesthetics, uniqueness, functionality, safety, environmental sustainability and global market appeal. Over 220 entries were received mostly from 13 institutions such as design schools, colleges and polytechnics and 11 of these entries made the finals.

The judges chose the designs that best reflected the new urbanism, innovations and sustainability. An interesting aspect of this competition was that the designs were actually prototyped in partnership with selected manufacturers to establish their usability. And of course a side effect was to bring these young designers into contact with top manufacturers as potential partners or employees.

So MIFF 2011 has to be adjudged a success once again, but there can be little doubt that if the show is to continue to grow and attract more exhibitors, and successfully compete in a highly competitive exhibitions environment in south east Asia, the organisers must examine every option available to eliminate any staleness and reintroduce a genuine and lasting excitement amongst exhibitors and buyers. ■

MIFF 2011 Furniture Excellence award winners



Dining category – Shibasaki Inc



Sofa category – TAZ Corporation SB (Gold award winner)



Bedroom & Bedding category – New PK Furniture Decor SB (Gold award winner)



Outdoor category – Woodview Products SB



Occasional category – NRT Cascadia Home Products SB