

Life

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Singer Niall Horan says the boys "talk all the time"
D14

HONDA CIVIC TYPE R HOT HATCH
More than a boy racer fantasy
D18



THAI FLAIR

Shoppers have new choices of stylish furniture and home accessories designed by young Thais. A Thai whimsy is often seen in the wares, which hold their own against international brands and are moderately priced too. **Natasha Ann Zachariah** reports.
D4&5



In a Race to make robotics sexy

Black walls and sleek lighting create a futuristic look at the Robotics Application Centre of Excellence



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Natasha Ann Zachariah

Is it a movie set for a film about robots or a sci-fi-themed dance club?

That is the question some confused visitors might have when they first drop in at the seven-month-old Robotics Application Centre of Excellence (Race).

Taking a lift to the second floor of a nondescript industrial building in Yishun Industrial Park A, you first

see a lobby with black panelled walls and white illuminated lines cutting across them.

Push past an oversized swing door and a futuristic room is revealed. The walls and ceilings are covered with a web of hand-cut hollow aluminium tubes, arranged at different angles and randomly interspersed with LED light tubes.

In nooks carved out around the fringes of the space, robots are displayed on customised stands. These collaborative robots are de-

Robots are displayed at the Race centre (above and above right) for visitors to test them out before buying. PHOTOS:

EDWARD HENDRICKS



signed and built to work with humans and each has a different task.

A pick-and-place robot with a vision camera comes with a long, levered arm that can move objects from one spot to another. Then there is a robot that can pick up pens and get them laser-engraved.

This 2,615 sq ft centre is the "showroom" of local precision engineering company PBA Group.

Elsewhere in the company's headquarters, you can find research laboratories, manufacturing areas and workshops.

At the showroom, customers,

for engineers who want to learn to use the latest products.

The centre's dramatically technocool look is the result of a three-month facelift done by award-winning multi-disciplinary studio Ministry of Design. It cost about \$300,000 to renovate.

Mr Colin Seah, 45, the firm's founder and director of design, said his aim was to "make robotics look sexy".

Using hollow tubes mounted and cut on-site, the firm arranged them at different angles to create a 3D geometric pattern that makes the

Ministry of Design is known for its hospitality projects such as the Coo boutique hostel in Tiong Bahru and Loke Thye Kee Residences in Penang.

This is the first time it is designing a robotics facility.

Mr Seah says: "Working on a new genre is what attracted us to the project. With our hotels, we try and design a property to be hip and trendy. Why can't that be for a robotics facility too?"

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