

From making a mark at the Milan Furniture Fair to getting a mention in magazines, Industry+ is helping Asian designers create waves in the scene



Natasha Ann Zachariah
Design Reporter

Barely a year after its debut, Singapore-based design production company Industry+ is on a high, having scored several coups.

At last month's Salone Internazionale del Mobile di Milano, also known as the Milan Furniture Fair, the company displayed a 25-piece set of stools, chairs, tables and shelves made from volcanic ash, bamboo and wood.

Called the Tokyo Tribal Collection, it drew eyeballs – and praise – for its collaboration with celebrated Japanese studio nendo.

The studio's principal designer Oki Sato is this year's Designer of the Year at the prestigious Parisian lifestyle and design fair, Maison&Objet. Nendo has also previously worked with big brands such as Italian design house Cappellini and fashion labels such as Tods and Cos.

The compact furniture pieces combined multiple uses. For example, a side table also functions as a small rattan basket to hold knick-knacks, while a bar stool has a bowl-like basket between its legs.

Architecture and design magazine Domus wrote: "Through such details, these pieces seem to meld the concepts of 'furniture' and 'miscellaneous interior goods' into one, in contrast to more conventional concepts of interior design that clearly place greater importance on the former."

To add another feather to Industry+'s cap, a work from its debut collection with eight Singapore designers was featured on the cover of taste-making design magazine Wallpaper*.

The product, Mirror 14.1, was made by Ministry of Design founder Colin Seah. It is a round mirror with a copper-like finish and has a small "dog ear" – a fold on the top left corner. The 7.5kg piece was featured alongside works by designers from America, South Korea and Poland.

Industry+ started out as an idea to champion Asian design. It began by working with Singapore



ADD APPEAL

designers. It is now branching out to other countries and working with Japanese and Filipino designers.

It was founded by Mr P.C. Ee, creative director of Exit Studio, and Mr Yoichi Nakamura, 58, founder of prominent design production company E&Y, which has worked with big names such as British designer Tom Dixon. E&Y's works are also exhibited at the Design Museum London and Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Aside from commissioning and collaborating with designers, Industry+ also curates and hosts exhibitions.

Mr Ee, 43, says of Industry+'s genesis: "Yoichi approached me with this idea of discovering Asian talent and to explore the manufacturing abilities which are available only in Asia. We wanted to see what surprises we would get from designers who are heavily influenced by Western design, but still have this subconscious Asian expression when they design."

It surprises were what they were looking for, they were duly impressed when they saw the pieces by eight handpicked, contemporary Singapore designers who included Studio Jujū, Outofstock and Koichiro Ikebuchi of Singapore-based Atelier Ikebuchi.



Industry+'s founders Yoichi Nakamura (far left) and P.C. Ee (left). ST PHOTO: TIFFANY GOH

rocks on its base, and the Float Table, which was cast out of resin and petrified lotus leaves.

Phunk Studio's Jackson Tan made the Dream Bench, a lightweight concrete piece which spells the word "dream".

Mr Ee says: "People wanted to buy pieces on the

spot even though they didn't know who we were, what we were about or who was behind the works."

Outofstock's designer Wendy Chua, 30, says she leapt at the opportunity to work with Industry+.

"When you hear what they want to do with designers, it makes you want to be part of the first

group of people to make this happen," she says.

"Yoichi knows about making waves. After spending time in the 1990s in London looking for new trends, he thinks the next best thing is in Singapore."

Riding on that crest of their first collection, Mr Ee and Mr Nakamura branched out and roped in more Asian designers such as Japanese designers Gen Suzuki and Ryoosuke Fukusada.

They snagged the collaboration with nendo and the pieces were prominently displayed at nendo's solo one-year retrospective exhibition in Milan for the five-day furniture fair.

Nendo's Oki Sato immediately said yes to working with Industry+ when he was approached, despite an already heavy production schedule.

Mr Ee says: "Nendo coming on board showed that the studio was willing to work with us and that it liked the philosophy behind what we're trying to do."

Industry+'s second year in business is already starting to look busy.

New collaborations are in the works and it is planning to show some work from the label at the upcoming Maison&Objet in September in Paris. Mr Ee is hoping to start another collection with local designers.

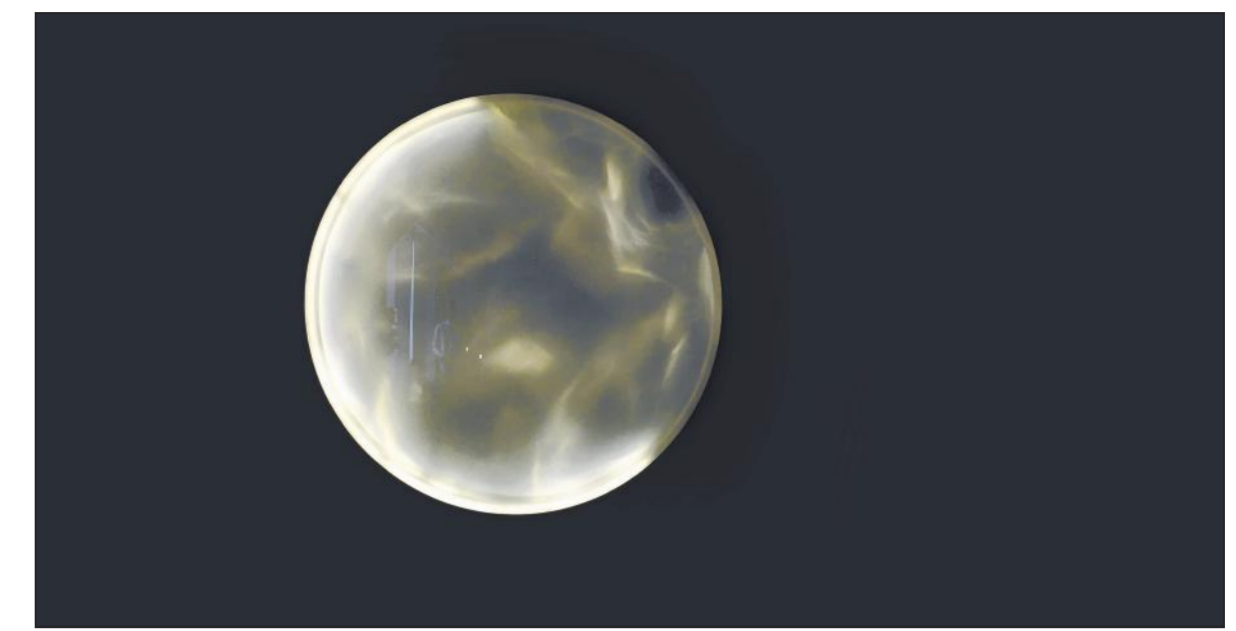
Studio Jujū's co-founder Timo Wong, 33, foresees that Industry+ will be in the spotlight for a while. Together with his design partner Priscilla Lui, 32, Studio Jujū has worked on three projects with Industry+ to date.

He says Industry+ is bringing designers in the region closer together.

"Rather than segmenting design by countries as it happens now, it will be interesting to find out what a collective Asian design looks like," he adds.

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Lin, Atelier Ikebuchi's low table, has a surface that resembles the scales of a dragon.



Outofstock's Luna Light (above), which won the company an Outstanding Talent of the Year Award at last year's Asia Talents competition. PHOTO: OUTFOSTOCK



Designer Hans Tan's Spring Tray (above) uses 3-D printed springs to create a bowl that supports the weight of fruits without bruising them.

Ministry of Design founder Colin Seah's Mirror 14.1 (left) was featured on the cover of design magazine Wallpaper*. PHOTOS: INDUSTRY+

Milan Design Week

Home-grown designers make a splash

Natasha Ann Zachariah

Being one of the premier furniture showcases in the world, Milan Design Week may be a tough place to crack for newcomers.

This year's event, which ran from April 14 to 19 in the Italian city, saw hundreds of satellite exhibitions while A-list brands such as Poliform and Kartell showed off new designs.

But among the big names, a collective from Singapore called The Alchemists managed to make a splash with its works. Its exhibition was part of the Triennale di Milano, a prestigious design museum in the city that is also one of the major satellite venues of the main furniture fair.

The Alchemists organisers say 24,000 people visited their show in that time. The showcase was initiated and presented by Industry+ and supported by grants from the DesignSingapore Council.

The exhibition also drew coverage from international and local media, with industrial design magazine Core77 picking five designers from the collection as names to watch.

Both the Italian newspaper La Repubblica and culture magazine Modallita: Demode picked the exhibition as highlights of the Milan Design Week.

The Alchemists comprises 15 local designers, ranging from recent National University of Singapore industrial design graduate Afzal Inram to established names such as Mr Melvin Ong of design studio Desinere.

The works in the show were curated by Stefano Casciani, an Italian editor, industrial consultant and designer, and award-winning Singapore designer Patrick Chia, after the designers attended a three-day lecture and workshop series last year.

The collective's name, The Alchemists, is a nod to the avant-garde Italian movement Studio Alchimia, founded in 1976 by architect Alessandro Guerriero, who was looking to kickstart a tired, clichéd design scene. Pivotal figures of the group were Alessandro Mendini and Ettore Sottsass Jr, both Italian designers and architects.

Rebelling against what was considered good taste at that time, they used cheaper materials and bright colours and the designs were often irregularly shaped.

Taking cues from the original game-changers, The Alchemists, too, pushed boundaries with interesting techniques and materials. It worked on the theme of transmutation.

For example, designer Hans Tan's Pour side table was made by pouring various coloured resin individually so that they do not mix, while creating a seamless look for the table top.

Aura Tropicale by design studio Outofstock is a pour-like diffuser made from a repurposed ceramic filter used in filtering exhaust fumes in cars, motorcycles and trucks. Using osmosis, the filter is coloured with green and purple hues, while the

scent of lemongrass oil is slowly released when it trickles down the filter.

Mr Chia says the exhibits showed an international audience that Singaporean designers could push boundaries.

"Each designer had his own unique identity, but when it all came together, it was a coherent design language," he says. "The challenge is to go back to Milan and put out something of the same quality for the next few years."

It was also an eye-opener for the younger designers in the team who got a chance to exhibit their works to an international audience.

Ms Olivia Lee, 30, who put on a collection of design tools based on the Golden Ratio, a mathematical principle, says her work resonated with design aficionados who visited the show. She says the visitors complimented the show as "a breath of fresh air and one of the things in Milan that was new and experimental".

She adds: "People noted that it was distinctly Singapore – smart yet humble."

While many of the designers had visited the fair as students, getting to show their own work was a different ballgame.

Mr Afzal, 25, who visited Milan Design Week two years ago, says the highlight was seeing people play with his board game installation.

He adds: "It's given me some confidence to go out and push for projects and to try new things."



4 Textile Transmutations

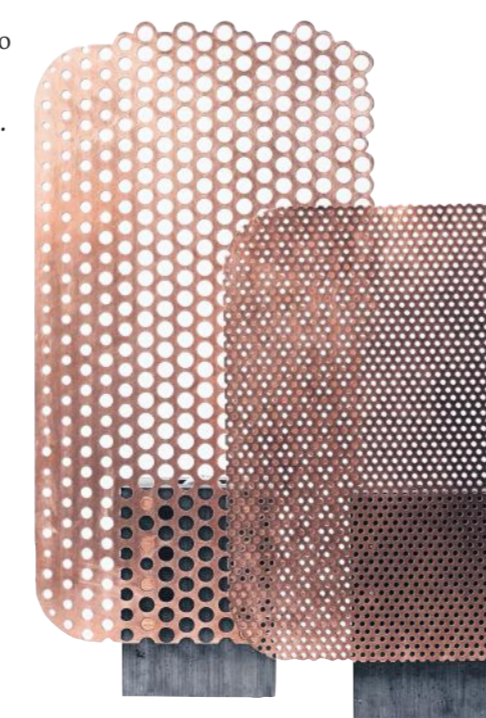
(above) by Tiffany Loy

Unsexy acrylic is transformed into chic clothing in this design by Ms Loy, who is trained in industrial design and prototyping. Using a heat-setting technique, she used acrylic moulds to create textures on the polyester fabric. She made a dress and a jacket in blue and red.

5 Plexus Lamps (right)

by Kiera Lin

These contemporary honeycomb-like lamps, made with materials such as copper and resin, play with the notion of layers. As the light passes through the perforation on the screens, various forms are created. Ms Lin, a recent industrial design graduate from the National University of Singapore, was inspired by traditional Chinese screens.



PHOTOS: KARYN LIM, LES RACONTEURS; OLIVIA LEE, TIFFANY LOY, KIERA LIM

A mix of past and present

Viewpoint

Julie Lasky

The graffiti in Milan's historic centre cursed capitalism and urged the smashing of store windows. But it may as well have said "No Parking", for all the impact such anti-materialist sentiments had on this well-dressed city, luxuriating in design during the recent Milan Furniture Fair.

The aura was giddy and for good reason. The mid-April weather was unseasonably warm; Prime Minister Matteo Renzi of Italy had just declared the furniture fair a symbol of his country's much needed economic recovery; and Milan was preparing to host a world's fair devoted to food and nutrition in less than three weeks.

And yet this free-for-all had an edge of desperate energy that was reflected in the aesthetic waywardness of the designs. The 1990s were back, for sure, in cheeky chairs and vases with awkward proportions and strange colour combinations. But so were the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, not to mention guest appearances from the age of Art Deco.

Many objects, including hallucinatory carpets and 3-D-printed lamps, called attention to their lavish materials and seductive forms, manipulated through state-of-the-art technology. But what was often lacking from these statement pieces was coherent thought.

"It resembles what happens in wartime: technology and materials are moving forward and the designers are following them," said Ms Galit Gaon, chief curator of the Design Museum Holon in Israel, who was in Milan scouting for material for exhibitions. "I feel like everything is stalling. We are waiting for something to happen."

Even so, there were many pleasures to be found in the riotous medleys of decorative surfaces and historical references.

A particular high point was Eucroce, a biennial lighting show that revealed progress in the art of turning lamps into lyrical sculpture.

And with Expo Milano 2015 around the corner, food was a certifiable design inspiration. Even before its opening yesterday, the expo was bringing its subject of food into conversations about design.

A vivid point of intersection was the Triennale Design Museum, where the exhibition Arts And Foods: Rituals Since 1851 took up almost every square foot.

The Chandelier Enroulée, a biennial lighting show that runs alongside the furniture fair, was the most visionary of platforms. Filling three halls, it offered technology-driven concepts that often would not see the commercial market for a few years. Particularly fetching was Les Danseuses, a whirling skirted lamp by Atelier Oi for Artemide, whose action is based on the physics of hurricanes.

Designers looking back willy-nilly for inspiration sometimes flatten design history, going so far as to braid historical references together in single objects. India Mahdavi's cement tiles for Bisazza, for instance, combined 1970s motifs with 1950s hues.

The temporal smorgasbord may explain the several homages this year, in products used by Kartell, Cappellini and others, to Memphis, a short-lived Italian design movement that was all about random historical recycling, lively surfaces and comical exaggerations. It may have been less a trend at the fair than a mascot.

Every year at the fair, there is a tug of war between modernist simplicity and decorative exuberance. The increasing precision of computer-controlled tools allows for greater refinements on both sides.

But this year, the maximalists seemed to pull with particular vigour and highly ornamented surfaces and shapes were everywhere. Textile patterns were adapted to furniture, wallpaper featured super-realistic objects and colours popped in happy explosions.



La Cova (above), a human-sized nest by Italian designer Gianni Ruffi for Poltrona1972, was brought back by Italian furniture company Gufram. PHOTO: NEW YORK TIMES

Five interesting designs

1 Transformation Bags (right)

by Karyn Lim

These flat-packed bags are perfect for anyone worried about not having enough space.

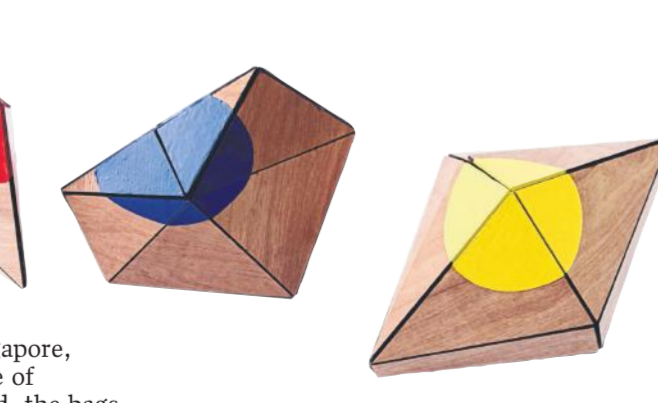
Ms Lim, who is studying industrial design at the National University of Singapore, created them from a semi-flexible membrane made of plywood pieces and fabric. When the bags are filled, the bags take up various geometric shapes such as a diamond.

2 Les Raconteurs (The Storytellers, right)

by Afzal Inram

Mr Afzal, a recent industrial design graduate from National University of Singapore, based his design on some old drawings unearthed from a dig in Burkina Faso to create a Scrabble-like interactive installation.

Users can line up the blocks, on which the squiggles are printed, to form their own "words".



3 Instruments Of Beauty (Divine Tools, above)

by Olivia Lee

If you need help finding the golden ratio, this industrial designer, a Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design graduate, created nine tools to help you do that. The mathematical principle is said to be the formula for beauty originating from ancient Greece.

Not only are the tools, which include a protractor and ruler, built with the golden ratio, but they also allow the user to apply the golden ratio in their drawings and measurements. They are made with etched and polished brass.

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