

REVIEW

MIFF'S EVOLUTION NEARS

Back in March, the Malaysian Furniture Fair (MIFF) signalled the start of another annual Far East exhibition buyer circuit. Characterised by a solid value-to-middle-end offer, MIFF attracts attention from local and international buyers keen to do business with the country's manufacturers – and next year's event is primed to further pique global interest. Paul Farley reports ...

“The modern exhibition facility promises to give MIFF a new lease of life when the exhibition returns next year”

This edition – the 23rd to date – features 543 exhibitors across Kuala Lumpur's PWTC and MECC venues, and is projected to attract some 20,000 visitors from 140 countries.

A return to its traditional early dateline immediately makes MIFF a more attractive proposition to international buyers looking to subsequently attend one or more of the region's numerous neighbouring events.

Many seek evidence of manufacturing capability rather than finished product. Rubberwood, metal and panelboard constructions continue to dominate the cabinet content, the styles generally a little too removed from European tastes. That said, Malaysia's manufacturers are generally willing to adapt to meet demand – the upholstery on show this

year, for example, shows real signs of evolution.

Malaysia's Minister of Plantation Industries and Commodities, Datuk Seri Mah Siew Keong, delivers the keynote address at the show's opening ceremony, in which he notes that Malaysian furniture is exported to over 160 countries, and that the country's sizeable exports grew by 4.2% in 2016.

MIFF is the country's principal platform for these furniture exports, bringing together a sizeable complement of domestic and contract furniture and accessories.

As one of the returning judges of the show's Furniture Excellence Awards, I encounter a broad selection of many of the show's best new launches, and witness everything from a movement

UBM Malaysia expected 20,000 visitors to attend this year's MIFF



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towards furnishing smaller spaces such as apartments, to strong woodworking capabilities, sofamaking skills, and the inventive employment of decors, foils and veneers.

The household product is bolstered by office solutions, outdoor ranges and hospitality furnishings, as well as tasteful accessories and bold children’s furniture.

In the event, the Furniture Excellence Award sees Mokenzo Design take the top spot in the Household Furniture category for Venice, a complete apartment furnishing concept. Oasis Furniture Industries’ Lolla, a playful seating concept, wins the Office Furniture category, while the Judges’ Commendation Award goes to Deese Furniture’s attractive Elly sofa.

The standard of entry is generally higher than last year’s, but something is still lacking. There’s been little change to the exhibitor line-up since the addition of the Muar Furniture Association’s members in 2013, and those yearning for variety might find repeat visits a little disappointing.

It feels to me that creative design remains a watchword and an ambition rather than a defining factor, and the venues’ labyrinthine layout continues to baffle new visitors.

Despite these faults, MIFF’s future is bright. In 2018 the new MITEC venue will finally replace the MECC in fulfilling the show’s offsite demands. Its completion long overdue, the modern exhibition

facility promises to give MIFF a new lease of life when the exhibition returns from 8–11th March next year.

MIFF’s organiser, UBM Malaysia, expects the show’s overall floorspace to grow by 28% to 100,000m², and for MITEC to lure a greater number of international exhibitors. Running with the strapline Design Connects People, MIFF 2018 will continue to prioritise transactional opportunity, but aims to reach greater heights of design, communication and quality.

It will feature MIFF Timber Mart – a new spotlight on wood that aims to emphasise the wealth of species available in Malaysia – plus an expanded design presentation entitled designRena, which will draw on seven years of the show’s Furniture Design Competition (FDC) to present a hall dedicated to some of Malaysia’s strongest lifestyle concepts.

MIFF founder and chairman Dato’ Dr Tan Chin Huat is looking forward to the development, commenting: “Our exhibitors are investing more in R&D to come up with their own design and new products, creating more value for their business and potential customers.”

MIFF has developed by degrees over recent years, slowly building its breadth of offer, overall experience and design credibility, but the promise of significant evolution at the 2018 edition has the potential to elevate the show to new heights of professionalism.

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The show is renowned as a transactional event