

Design connects people - MIFF Mantra for growth

2018 was a watershed year for the Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF) held in Kuala Lumpur every year.

Celebrating its 24th edition, not only did it sell out its traditional home base at the Putra World Trade Centre but also expanded dramatically into the brand new custom built Malaysian International Trade & Exhibition Centre (MITEC), exceeding all expectations of the organisers. And that is saying something considering that in 2017 MIFF racked up sales of US\$940 million and must surely flirt with the billion dollar mark very soon. Compared to last year MIFF 2018 was a full 25% bigger which meant that there were more furniture halls, larger international showcases, much improved booth designs and a much greater number of new product launches.

As has been customary for the past decade HGR publisher Ian Hughes was invited by the organisers to perform duty as one of five international judges. Judges hailed from Belgium, Bulgaria, Turkey, Australia and of course South Africa. This international selection reflected the broad international character of the show. Additionally, international judges from Romania, Germany, Australia, China and the UK were invited to set the criteria for furniture design and similarly play a critical role in the ongoing success of MIFF. IN 2018 MIFF sold 100 000 m2 of

exhibition floor space and incorporated the inspiring theme Design Connects People as their mantra. In other words MIFF would not simply focus on the furniture but also on the people, the designers. And this they succeeded in doing brilliantly.

The thinking behind that was clear. It was to highlight design quality and to promote design as a strategy for innovation and to further boost future growth and exports. This year there were 625 exhibitors from 13 countries including Malaysia, China, USA, Australia, Taiwan, Indonesia, South Korea, India, Japan, Singapore, Thailand and Turkey, representing a 13.6% increase on 2017, whilst visitors and buyers emanated from 134 countries. According to Mr MK Gandhi of UBM Asia that increased buyer registration was drawn particularly from the UK, USA, China, Japan, Australia, Korea, Indonesia, UAE, Germany, Italy, Mauritius, Nigeria and South Africa. The total of buyers and visitors was just under 20 000 which was a significant 5% increase on last year. That fact is a simple illustration of MIFF's growing global pull. It is undoubtedly the largest furniture show in South East Asia and according to the local organisers UBM Malaysia, in the 'top 10 worldwide'.

A major highlight of MIFF 2018 was the participation for the second year running of the Guangdong Furniture Accessories and Home Furnishing Exhibition as a component part of MIFF. This was co-hosted by the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (Guandong) along with UBM Asia. This year 100

Guandong based Chinese enterprises exhibited at MIFF clearly encouraged by the successes of the previous year. For buyers this large and growing Chinese presence must have been a real boon adding genuine value to their visit and providing an additional compelling reason to return.

Another highlight of MIFF 2018 worth mentioning – and in keeping with the Design Connects People mantra – was the four different design showcases presented by Millennials@Design. This project underlines the importance that MIFF is placing on design to boost sales and growth and involves young designers collaborating with experienced mentors. Their brief was simple – to echo as closely as possible to the Design Connects People theme.

Participants were drawn from previous MIFF design finalists and past winners, former architecture students, finalists in other furniture design competitions and from design talents from neglected East Malaysia (including Sabah). According to Chinese design

legend Philip Yap who mentored one of the groups".....we're not only creating a platform that allows young designers and furniture manufacturers to collaborate, we're also teaching them to understand that before designing anything they need to enrich their knowledge of the industry."

He said: 'Most Malaysian made furniture is produced for export, so designers must have a global perspective and understand world furniture styles as well as the demands



and trends of a global market." A strong further encouragement for these young designers was the Millennials @ Design gallery. This will be a permanent showcase at future editions of MIFF and will give these designers the encouragement and the opportunity to showcase their product designs.

All in all MIFF 2018 was another triumph and everybody we spoke to emphasised the fact that they had done the business they came to do. Other first time visitors reported their 'complete surprise' at the sheer quality of the MIFF experience., and their delight at the effort the organisers had taken to ensure that their visit to MIFF and Kuala Lumpur was both memorable and enjoyable. 'We will return", they promised. MIFF 2019 will celebrate its 25th anniversary and will be held from 8 March to 11 March 2019.

