

FLIP & Reverse it!

What happens when students are presented with a plain wooden chair and told to transform it into a functional work of art? REDZMAN RAHMAT finds out.



Albert Qi and Megan He, both 24, from Inspiration Design School, conceptualised and created the Wing

Chair, a unique seater that is incredibly functional and aesthetically pleasing.

Initially, the duo wanted to create a chair that could be folded into a box. However, they soon realised that it will not look pleasant aesthetically. So, they based their idea on liberation and freedom, aiming to design something that breaks all conventional preconceptions of how a chair is.

Explains Albert, "The initial concept is based on the wings

of a bird - it flies in the sky and symbolises freedom. We designed the chair to look like wings and then gave it the flexibility of a bird."

Thus, the Wing Chair was created: a clean, sleek design, with a milky-white base and a soft-patterned fabric upholstery. To create the transformable seat, Shizi and Yifang experimented with designs, using swivels and stainless steel to support the backs of the chair. It took a lot of hard work and dedication.

The duo took two weeks to complete the chair. According to Albert, they would have tried to include more formations, if given more time.

This amazingly adaptable piece can be transformed into four different types of chairs: a lounge chaise, an interlaced back-to-back chair, a side-by-side seat for two, and a folded portable form.

Thus the brilliance behind the chair can be summed in its unique ability to fit the needs of the people using it.



Francis Allan Barretto Sy, 20; Zhang Chen, 22; Marcella Wan, 25; and Edmund Wang, 25, all from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, joined the FLIP! Challenge

as they wanted to apply what they had learnt in school onto the project, and as Edmund explains, "to expose ourselves to the design world."

The furniture design students' initial idea was to create a chair that "grows out of a pot". Then they had a brainwave. Says Marcella, "Why use a pot when we can just use the grass to create the illusion that it's supporting the chair?"

The end result is the Nature Chair that conveys the beauty and strength of Mother Nature. The chair's uniqueness is in its integration with nature.

The arms and legs of the chair have been removed, and replaced with a single steel leg that balances and supports the seat. The base is then covered with three types of plastic grass.

The final look is an illusion of sitting amid a landscape of 'flowing long shrubs' - the chair's leg is a mirrored surface that lends to the camouflage, creating the impression of a chair supported by nature itself.

"When people look at our design, the first thing they do is look for the legs, which is what we want!" expresses Francis enthusiastically.

For this group of four, the FLIP! Challenge was also an opportunity to establish industry contacts for a future in furniture design, while gaining experience for themselves. As they said, "We met a lot of people and made a lot of industry contacts. That's more important than winning a silver award."



The finalists' works will be exhibited at the design-led International Furniture Fair Singapore 2006/23rd ASEAN Furniture Show from 1 to 5 March 2006 at the Singapore Expo.

While this situation may stump any ordinary person, the 54 groups of design students gleefully let loose and applied their artistic leanings to the task.

The participants had to work within the constraints of the chair. While they could take the chair apart and reassemble it or turn it into something completely different, it still has to retain its primary function as a seat. Eventually, 15 entries made it to the finals.

There were some interesting and provocative ideas, ranging from the sensible (a chair that occupies the attention of children), to the deviant (a chair that forces you to sit on it sideways), the artistic (a chair that represents the *De Stijl* art movement), and to the downright bizarre (a chair styled after the *harajuku* culture in Japan).

A total of three top prizes and three merit awards were given out, and we speak to the Silver and Gold winners of the second FLIP! Challenge.