

Furniture: A vibrant industry in the making

The local property market boom has generated spillover benefits to the furniture industry as enthusiastic home owners demand newer and better-designed products for their dream home.

Besides meeting domestic demand, Singapore's furniture industry has export potential

too. And, to differentiate itself from the rest of the world, the industry is launching a local furniture industry branding programme. Initiated by the industry body for furniture companies, Singapore Furniture Industries Council (SFIC) — with the support of SPRING Singapore (the agency tasked with helping small- and medium-

sized enterprises grow) and International Enterprise Singapore (which helps Singapore companies expand their overseas wing) — the branding programme will be launched on March 9 in conjunction with the International Furniture Fair Singapore/Asean Furniture Show 2008.

Starting this week, we'll be looking at how

some of the Singapore furniture companies — have carved a niche in the local and international markets with their creativity, quality and progressive furniture collections, and business solutions. We kick off with two companies that strive to bring energy and originality to their products and relationships.

Air Division

Living on Air

Air Division specialises in designer furniture for the bedroom, dining room and living room areas.

The company sells its products under four key brands, catering to different lifestyles. They are: Air — an elegant and modern designer collection of mostly stainless steel pieces created for functionality and simplicity; *Funktion* — creative and quirky pieces with a touch of funk and pizzazz for the trendy yet thrifty; *Plank* — a selection of teak, walnut and American oak pieces for warmth and homeliness; and *Royce* — ultra-luxurious creations that use high-quality Spanish leather and are customised for the high-end market.

"Our designs are made to be a little bit of everything for everybody," says Christopher Soh, marketing communications manager at Air Division.

Through experience, meticulous research, continued interaction with target markets and thorough analysis of customers' needs, Air Division's team of designers puts emphasis on providing "comfort, quality and appeal to customers", Soh tells *The Edge Singapore*. "Our business rationale is not to go over the top and to remain simple with our designs, as well as provide and maintain rigorous standards of excellence in our products and business ethics."

Air Division, which boasts an annual turnover of \$3.5 million, was founded in 1999 by

a small group of designers who desired high-quality designer furniture for the discerning consumer.

The company operates three retail outlets in Singapore, with its 6,000 sq ft flagship boutique located at the Sophia Flats on Wilkie Road. It also opened a franchise store in Indonesia last year.

Air Division aims to launch more franchises within the region, ultimately to become an "Asian brand chain store of designer furniture" within major Asian cities.

The company is expanding its export business and will venture into the contract market in the near future. "It is an opportune time for our company and for the industry," Soh says. "There is a pretty good local market out there and we are confident Air Division, together with the industry as a whole, will be successful."

"The government's efforts to market Singapore as a furniture hub has made tremendous progress through the years," says Soh. "We applaud the efforts taken in launching the industry onto a global platform," he says. "Having one unified voice, rather than a few individual whimpers, will certainly aid in the move towards a positive long-term result, and Air Division is indeed privileged to be part of any strategic initiative to help the growth of the industry on all fronts."



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THELIFESHOP

Leading the new Asian revolution

Since it was founded in 1994, THELIFESHOP has been an industry leader in what it calls "the new Asian revolution" in raising awareness for Asian designs in the furniture industry globally.

CEO Susie Tay says the company has instilled elements from the mystic yet vivid traditions of oriental China; the quiet and clean lines of "Zen minimalism" from Japan; the sensuality, spice and splendour of ethnic India; and the earthy, rustic charms of IndoChina.

To differentiate itself from the competition, THELIFESHOP constantly improves on its design, with the goal of enhancing the quality, essence and meaning of life through these lifestyle creations, says Tay passionately.

"Each creation carries a story," she says, "Each creation portrays its creator's personality and soul. We would like to see our creations passed down from generation to generation, with their very own story."

Since its debut, the company's creations have received rave reviews and many have gone on to pick up international awards. These include the elegantly Asian and vibrantly coloured EZ 70's Love Seat, the iSh Lamp and the Lady M Sofa.

Another winner is the company's mascot and fashion icon, the Lady Chin, which represents a "caring mother, romantic dreamer and vivacious lover of life" that Tay says is THELIFESHOP personified. It made its first international appearance in Paris as a cushion design in 1999 and was selected by Elle Decor Paris as a recommended original design.

Adding to THELIFESHOP's success is LIFEbaby store. Inspired by Tay's daily interactions with customers, LIFEbaby made its debut in 2001 as the first total "lifestyle store for cool little people" in Singapore. The store carries stylish miniature furniture designed with signature grey-cemented interiors, New Age garments, toys and other accessories with Asian motifs for children aged



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between three months and nine years.

THELIFESHOP typically pulls in revenues of \$5 million per annum and is run by a workforce of 25, including a team of four talented designers led personally by Tay, a trained architect.

"Our long-term goal is to establish THELIFESHOP not only as a homegrown brand but to export our creations and the concept of those creations," says Tay, who also aspires to bring the essence of THELIFESHOP into society by changing the landscape of old folks' and children's homes in the country.

"The outlook for the local furniture industry is looking good," she says. "With added government support, we can go beyond the Singapore shores and take on the world. We aspire to work towards designs and creations that are distinctive of professional Singapore designers. We are very positive and appreciative of the efforts being taken by the government in launching the Singapore furniture brand to the world."

THELIFESHOP's furniture and accessories are currently available in over 30 countries, including Australia, Germany, Israel, Japan, Malaysia, the UK and the US. Its local head office and flagship gallery is located at the Balastier Warehouse on Jalan Ampas, while LIFEbaby has outlets in both VivoCity and Raffles City.



Catch the launch of a **New identity** for our **Singapore Furniture Industry!**

Find out more at the **International Furniture Fair Singapore/ ASEAN Furniture Show 2008**

9-12 March 2008 Singapore Expo, 1 Expo Drive

