

Singapore designs go to Milan

Works by Singapore-based companies and those inspired by ubiquitous items in the country were on display at the recent Milan Design Week

Toh Wen Li

From turtle-shaped poufs to an exhibition of pieces by Singapore and Kyoto students inspired by each other's city, Singapore-based designers made a splash at this year's Milan Design Week with varied offerings.

This year's event drew more than 1,800 exhibitors from around the world and more than 400,000 visitors. There were some 10 Singapore-based designers and groups among the crowds of design enthusiasts who descended on the Italian city to showcase their works.

At the centre of Milan Design Week every year is the prestigious Salone del Mobile furniture fair, which was in its 57th edition and ran from April 17 to 22. Aside from the Salone, there were numerous satellite fairs, exhibitions and talks.

Swimming onto the design week scene this year was 11-month-old design studio ModuDesigners.

The Singapore-based firm came up with Turtles, a set of bowl-shaped rockers for young children that can be stacked together to become seats.

The poufs, which are upholstered with fabric from Jalan Besar-based design studio Onlewo, are "fun" and not traditional, says ModuDesigners' co-founder and creative director Eleonora Massaccesi, 36.

Meanwhile, at the Exchanged Forms exhibition, 17 students from the National University of Singapore's Design Incubation Centre and the Kyoto Institute of Technology created works inspired by photos of the other's city.

These ranged from a flowerpot by Ms Aika Nishiyama, inspired by the shape and colours of MRT seats, to lamps by Ms Cheryl Ho, inspired by light filtering through Japanese windows.

There was also a bench by Mr Kanta Nakano, decked with prints of images from Singapore supermarket shelves, and a vase by Ms Lee Hsiao Fong, paying homage to the Japanese uchiwa fan.

Singapore-based design studio Lanzavecchia + Wai, a regular at Milan Design Week, presented a selection of commissioned works. These were the Clockwork sideboard, Pebble vanity table and desk as well as the Pinch series of mirrors, made to seem elastic with the help of geometric frames.

Mr Hunn Wai, 37, the studio's creative director and co-founder, says that Pebble, which has no hard edges, was inspired by the first mirror to be discovered by humans: a pool of water.

The furniture fair has been "a great barometer of where the furniture industry is heading", he says, adding that one of the takeaways from his time in Milan was "the idea of how workspaces are becoming more home-like".

He was impressed by the ash and striped rosewood chairs by Italian plastic furniture company Kartell, as well as an exhibition by tech giant Sony on how hidden sensor technology could be used in homes.

Other Singapore designers at Milan were Ms Olivia Lee, who showed a collection of interactive children's



(From left) Lanzavecchia + Wai's Pebble vanity table, ModuDesigners' Turtles rockers-cum-seats and Mr Gabriel Tan's Stove Chairs. PHOTOS: CRAFTSMEN, LIVING DIVANI, MARK YONG



furniture at the fair's Satellite section; Mr Gabriel Tan, who created a series of durable, compact Stove Chairs; and Wohabeing, with furniture from the Ulu Indoor and Bintan collections. Creative firm Lopelab also showcased images from the Singapore Urban Design Festival it organised in March.

Ms Lee, Mr Tan and Wohabeing also had products at the Wallpaper* Handmade exhibition, having been invited – alongside fellow established Singapore-based designers Studio Juju, Stolen and Theseus Chan – to create designs based on the theme of Wellness + Wonder.

Among their creations were a ritualistic cleansing plinth, a reflexology wall and path, and a hybrid shower-bath.

Also on display was the tongue-in-cheek Squeezzy Lamp, fashioned by industrial design graduate Edmund Zhang, 26, who won Wallpaper* Handmade's Next Generation Singapore Designer award.

Next year's Salone del Mobile will take place from April 9 to 14.

tohwenli@sph.com.sg



The Exchanged Forms exhibition featured works such as Singapore designers Cheryl Ho's lamps (above), inspired by light filtering through Japanese windows, and Lee Hsiao Fong's vase (below right), which pays homage to the Japanese uchiwa fan; and Japanese designer Kanta Nakano's bench (below left), decked with prints of images from Singapore supermarket shelves. PHOTOS: KYOTO DESIGN LAB, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

