

Designers of the Year



Designer Hans Tan (above) and his Striped Ming collection (right).
PHOTOS: GUO JIE/STUDIO PERIPHERY



Taking a step back to gain a new perspective

The colourful circles on designer Hans Tan's Spotted Nyonya collection of vessels seem like abstract polka dots close up.

But take a step back and you will notice that they are part of a larger Peranakan pattern.

Sometimes, distance helps a person appreciate the familiar in a new light.

That has been Tan's story. He left Singapore more than a decade ago to pursue a master's degree in Industrial, Interior, Identity Design at the Design Academy Eindhoven in the Netherlands and returned with a renewed desire to focus on local heritage in his work.

"I was influenced by the artists and designers in Europe, by their sense of always reacting to their surroundings and presenting design in

a contemporary manner," says Tan, 38, who won this year's President's Design Award for Designer of the Year.

He adds that Japanese craftsmen, too, are "first and foremost appreciated by their community" before expanding their spheres of influence.

After completing his master's at Eindhoven, where he graduated cum laude in 2007, he returned to Singapore even though he had offers to stay in the Netherlands.

For the first few years after founding his eponymous studio, it was not profitable and he was "extremely poor". But his belief that one should "stay authentically local and the world will come" has begun to pay off.

He won the Design of the Year

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HANSTAN

award for Spotted Nyonya in 2012 and for the Pour table in 2015.

His works are held in permanent public collections such as at the National Collection of Singapore; M+ Museum for Visual Culture, Hong Kong; and Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum in New York.

Pointing to his Singapore Blue project, a white vase with a blue marker pen attached to it that invites viewers to draw their own patterns on the porcelain, he says: "What is Singapore design? Something designed by a Singaporean... Perhaps in Singapore, being extremely young and transitory, it's not about having a fixed pattern."

He graduated from the National University of Singapore with a Bachelor of Arts in Industrial Design in

2005. He is now assistant professor at the university's Division of Industrial Design, where he has also won awards for excellence in teaching.

The local design industry is burgeoning. "Every big corporation, bank, has a design team that designs their interfaces, their queueing systems," he says.

But because it is now easier for young designers to find well-paying jobs in corporations, this might mean fewer of them end up pursuing truly creative work.

He adds: "In my time, when we graduated, we didn't have a lot of opportunities. A lot of my peers started their own practices.

"I hope more designers in Singapore will become entrepreneurs... (with) their own brand of independent thinking."