

STARCK CONTRAST

What's a Singapore designer to do when Singaporeans would splurge on a Philippe Starck design but spurn a homegrown one? Perhaps our spread might help you change your mind



Tay Suan Chiang

DESIGN-conscious home owner Karen Ng did not hesitate to pay \$25,000 for a B&B Italia sofa and \$20,000 for a Ceccotti daybed when furnishing her Kim Seng Road apartment. But she will not spend a cent on made-in-Singapore furnishings.

"European designs are of better quality. Locally designed furniture is not as refined," sniffs Ms Ng, 32. Her sentiments are common.

"Singaporeans believe that foreign-designed and overseas-made products are superior to local ones," says Ms Sabrina Long, head of interior design at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa).

It is a mindset that design schools and local furniture companies want to change.

The challenges

THE first step is creating an awareness about what the country's design students can do.

So, institutions offering design courses hold annual exhibitions of projects by graduating students.

There are currently five bodies that teach design in some form — Nafa, Lasalle-SIA College of the Arts, Temasek Polytechnic, National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University.

Schools mostly teach interior design, but students have the option of doing exhibition design, interior design or furniture design majors. Alternatively, they can opt for industrial design or product design.

Depending on the course, students are awarded diplomas in interior design or bachelor of fine arts degrees.

Nafa and NUS, for example, held their exhibitions in May. These shows are free, open to the public and an opportunity for companies to hire the students or manufacture their designs.

Design graduates Life! spoke to say this has been useful in getting them noticed.

Nafa student Liew Min Yann, 23, who displayed a sleek aluminium work table at the May exhibition, says two companies have expressed an interest in producing her piece, while other design firms have inquired about hiring her.

Continued on facing page