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Let's talk about fine furniture

International fair brings exporters and manufacturers together

By YASMIN AHMAD KAMIL
and TRECIA TAN

THE Malaysian International Furniture Fair 2014 (MIFF) celebrated its 20th anniversary in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday.

Organised by UBM Malaysia, the annual event from March 4 to 8, showcases more than 500 furniture manufacturers and exporters with 13 countries participating.

MIFF was launched by International Trade and Industry Ministry deputy secretary-general, Mohd Ridzal Sheriff, who represented Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed.

Also present were MIFF chairman Datuk Dr Tan Chin Huat, UBM Asia president and CEO Jime Essink and UBM Asia managing director Muthiah Gandhi.

"The trade show covers over 80,000 sq m at two venues — the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) and Matrade Exhibition and Conference Centre in Jalan Duta," said Dr Tan at the launch.

Essink said MIFF has built a strong presence by delivering effective services to exhibitors and buyers, creating real business opportunities and providing a gateway into fast-growing emerging markets.

"Kuala Lumpur is a great place to do business," he said, adding that one of the main challenges for global organisers such as UBM Asia was the shortage of exhibition space and state-of-the-art infrastructure with broadband connections for exhibitors and visitors.

The trade show has grown from 152 local exhibitors and 2,500

overseas buyers in 1995 to 500 local and international exhibitors and over 6,000 overseas buyers, globally.

One of the highlights of the event is the industry seminars, with topics like the shaping of Malaysian design for the global market, the latest on intellectual property for the furniture industry in Malaysia, the award-winning US-patented high temperature drying technology for rubberwood by the Forest Research Institute Malaysia and green technology products.

"MIFF provides a strategic platform for furniture businesses, contract buyers, international chain stores, hoteliers, architects and interior decorators to meet and source for their requirements and establish business networks," said Mohd Ridzal.

He added that the Malaysian furniture industry was highly export-oriented, with exports last year reaching RM7.4bil in value terms.

"Malaysia is currently ranked eight among furniture exporters in the world and the furniture industry remains one of the major contributors to the Malaysian economy.

"In 2013, MIFF generated export sales of up to US\$854mil. As such, the MIFF is an important platform in contributing to the export of Malaysian furniture."

Office furniture supplier, Safari Office System Sdn Bhd chairman

Safari Yong said his company, which supplies office furniture has

been a loyal exhibitor at MIFF for the past 20 years due to the positive response received as a result of their participation.

"This is one of the best fairs in the region.

"We are not here just to sell but aim to promote our brand as well," he said.

Mieco Marketing Sdn Bhd general manager of sales and marketing Jun Loo said his company has also been exhibiting at MIFF for the past 20 years due to the positive response received.

The company, which supplies various materials, uses MIFF as a platform to build their business and meet customers.

"We don't always have a direct link to customers. We use events like these as a meeting point for international and domestic customers," he explained.

"It's my first time here but my company has been sending representatives to visit this fair every year since 2006.

"We keep coming back because the price of furniture here is better. It's too expensive to produce furniture in our country," said Norwegian Borghild Betten Talgo.

"I have visited exhibitions in other countries before but Malaysia is the best in terms of the service provided, communication and business integrity," said MIFF visitor Martha Yaccoub, who has visited the fair for 10 years.

The Australian added that "what you see is what you get", as fairs in other countries may not always deliver what was ordered.

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"The exhibition is fine but I'm hoping to see more innovative designs next year," said Irish visitor Thomas Small, who first visited MIFF in 2008.

"The first time I visited the fair was 10 years ago and since then, I've been coming back once every two years jto check out if there is anything new on offer," said

Australian native Peter Walkom. *The Star* is the media partner of the event. For details on the fair, visit www.miff.com.my.



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- 1 Safari Yong says his company has been an exhibitor at MIFF for the past 20 years.
- 2 The trade show has significantly grown since 1995, with more than 6,000 overseas buyers now.
- 3 Ridzal trying out a chair at one of the booths after launching the MIFF.
- 4 Ridzal (second from left) presenting a memento to Star Publications deputy group chief editor Leanne Goh (third from left) during the opening ceremony at PWTC. Looking on are Essink (left) and Datuk Dr Tan.