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JUST three years ago, Jeffrey Yang started his business of converting salvaged timber into furniture pieces in Kampung Baru Subang, Shah Alam.

Today, his work has garnered attention both locally and abroad for being creative and kind to nature.

One of the designs, the River Symphony dining table, won the Innovative Product Award at a recent home design and interior exhibition.

Entrepreneur Insight magazine named Yang one of its 100 Most Influential Young Entrepreneurs 2017 while his company, Art of Tree, is one of the recipients of the SME100 Award 2017 organised by *SME Magazine*.

"Through our work, we want to create a paradigm shift. Hard wood is considered exotic but we want to move it from being exotic to artistic and design-centric," says Yang, creative director, when met for an interview recently.

The award-winning River Symphony is inspired by another piece called River Table by American woodworker Greg Pearson, a well-received design that features a blue piece of glass running through the table.

River Symphony utilises resin instead of glass in a similar manner, resulting in a strong fusion between the wood and resin.

"By using resin, we are able to capture the essence of the imperfections in the wood and turn them into a masterpiece," explains Yang.

The company first started incorporating clear resin into its designs about two years ago.

"Resin is a very stable material. It can freeze the inner parts of the tree. For example, if there are tree barks or roots within, they will be captured and preserved and we can see the wood's natural beauty," he says.

"With salvaged trees, the supply is inconsistent and sometimes, we do not get large pieces. For a dining table, we need a tree part with a diameter of at least 1m and above.

"In the River Symphony design, we used a smaller tree with a diameter of about one and a half feet (0.45m), styled and cut it, before we put the pieces back together again using the resin to make a 1m-wide table," explains Yang.

"We named it the River Symphony because if you look at it from the top, it looks like a river and land topography," he says, adding that the table features a powder-coated steel base.

The company's work of repurposing salvaged trees also got the attention of the **Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM)**, which contacted Art of Tree a few months back to discuss collaboration possibilities.

In FRIM, there are around 200 trees marked for removal due to termite infestation or having been struck by lightning. The tree species include tembusu, acacia, cengal and jelutong.

"Some of these trees will have cavities inside. Traditionally, they would be sold to timber buyers but due to the imperfections, they will not have much value. When FRIM saw what we could do with these types of wood, it triggered their interest and they invited us for a discussion on how to salvage their trees," says Yang.

Art of Tree also works closely with sawmills to source wood.

"These trees are from the urban areas and are chopped down due to safety reasons, soil erosion, ter-



The award-winning River Symphony dining table by Art of Tree made from salvaged tree parts and resin — Photos: AZHAR MAHFUF/The Star

Art of salvation

One company is starting the trend of turning discarded timber into artistic, functional furniture.



A set of coffee tables designed by Art of Tree made from salvaged tree parts.



Woo, managing director of Art of Tree, hopes that more furniture manufacturers will consider salvaged trees first before chopping down trees or importing timber.



Creative director Yang says trees in city areas which are chopped down for various reasons are usually discarded and incinerated, leaving behind a hefty carbon footprint.

mite infestation, development, or after being struck by lightning.

"Traditionally, these trees are discarded and incinerated, which leaves behind a hefty carbon footprint. So now we are working with the sawmills that obtain the tree parts from town councils and cut them up into slabs. We procure the slabs from sawmills and turn them into works of art."

Business partner Joey Woo, who is also Yang's wife, says they fully support the trend of using salvaged trees to make furniture.

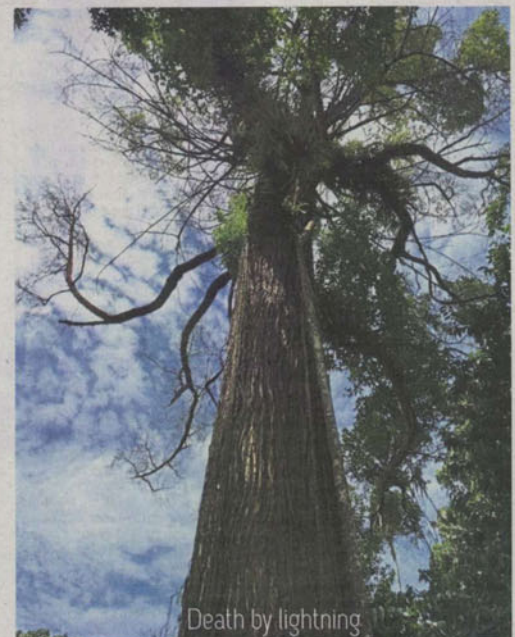
"What we hope is that more furniture manufacturers will consider salvaged trees first before chopping down trees or importing timber. When (ecoconscious) customers choose timber furniture, they love it but are hesitant to buy because

they think we are cutting down trees or the wood is derived from illegal logging.

"We have to change customers' mindsets by creating more awareness about salvaged timber and conservation," says Woo, adding that many people also seem to mistakenly think imported timber is of better quality than local wood.

"In the future, we plan to use part of the proceeds from our sales to participate in forest rehabilitation projects, to make it a full circle."

Art of Tree coffee tables start at RM1,000, dining tables at RM5,000. The range of furniture also includes artistic pieces in addition to consoles, side tables, chairs and benches. For more information, go to artoftree.my.



A tree struck by lightning earmarked for removal at FRIM — Art of Tree