

Article
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Furniture Design Competition: Bangkok Design Camp

There are a lot of initiatives and competitions for young designers in ASEAN countries these days, but here is one with a difference. There are no winners but the prize is huge! The Bangkok Design Camp completed in March this year demonstrated the potential design talent in young Thais and surprised them all.

The surprise? A personal discussion and photo shoot with H.E. Kristie A. Kenney, Ambassador of the USA in Thailand. The unspoken Prize? Extensive publicity to the Thai media and furniture industry and an impressive start to a design portfolio.



The American Ambassador (2nd left) with one of the designers with (L) Nuntawan Sakuntanaga, Director General Dept of Export Promotion, Ministry of Commerce, Thailand and (R) John Chan, Regional Director, American Hardwood Export Council - Southeast Asia & Greater China



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The now annual Bangkok Design Camp project is a collaboration between the Thai Furniture Industries Association (TFA), King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang (KMITL), the American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC) and The United State Department of Agriculture (USDA), Embassy of the United States Bangkok, Thailand. It drew huge attention from visitors and the media at the Thai International Furniture Fair (TIFF). The project provides University graduating students an opportunity to experience the furniture product design process in a real-world environment under the guidance of experienced professionals, and encourages them to design furniture products that are not only aesthetic to look at, but are also highly functional and can be produced for real-life commercial use. It also demonstrates the aesthetics and possibilities of American hardwoods in new designs.

New Designs for Small Spaces

This year the theme was all about designing furniture for small spaces in recognition of the fact that many people these days live in ever smaller apartments and houses as the cost of land and construction rises. The participants were mentored by furniture designer Mr. Promote Kitjamnongpan, Advisor to the TFA and Managing Director of Maxfine, who had many years of designing furniture especially for the American market. "They learned a lot in a short time", he said.

The overall objectives of the camp are to create experiential learning opportunity for Thai students from various institutions and universities in product design to learn from experts in the field of furniture design and manufacturing and to encourage the participants to work as a team in developing designs. It also provides opportunities for the members of the TFA to take part in professional furniture design development and to promote the benefit of using American hardwoods for furniture manufacturing in a collaboration between academia and business. For the participants there are additional benefits: in learning about design and the furniture industry, the furniture design processes, marketing knowledge and the manufacturing process as well as developing their creativity and design skills.

The phased Camp included lecture and seminar sessions for two days given by Thai professionals and factory visits to at Parawood and the Podium Holding group. A special workshop of four days was held at "Camp" - Diamond Place Hotel:



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Rungsit-Pathumthani. Then followed a half-day lecture by two international experts invited by AHEC. The final phase was a display of completed prototypes at the TIFF in March in Bangkok. A post-exhibition promotion is also to be announced.

A Unique Partnership

Unique to this Design Camp was the role of so many players. AHEC, as coordinators was able to solicit the donation of American hardwoods from industry to support the project and also invited U.S. hardwood speakers to talk about U.S. hardwood grades and applications and wood design. One of the problems for so many similar initiatives for young designers is the difficulty of finding professional prototyping facilities, which is so essential to the whole process. In this case nine firms in Thailand undertook the task and worked from their plants with the participants to produce prototypes for exhibition - a valuable contribution. Always behind the scenes is the dynamic Mr. Jirawat Tangkijngamwong, Secretary General of TFA and Deputy MD of Deesawat Industries Co. with his huge energy and knowledge of the Thai furniture industry.



Participants of the Bangkok Design Camp at the TIFF in March with VIPs including the American Ambassador to Thailand



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Ten teams each with three participants from ten institutions and universities were selected to take part in the Design Camp program coordinated by AHEC, and involved Professor Boonsanong Ratanasoontragul (Dean of the Faculty), Mr. Torvong Puipantavong, Mr. Pwinn Rujikieatkhamjorn, Mr. Pasit Leeniva and Mr. Surachet Chaiuppala. Special guest lecturer was Mr. Jirawat Tangkijngamwong, Secretary General of TFA and Deputy MD of Deesawat Industries Co., Ltd.

The reception, very well attended by industry leaders and the media, was held on a dedicated stand displaying the finished designs, was addressed by the Deputy Minister of Trade Mr. Alongkorn and responded to by H.E. Kristie A. Kenney, Ambassador of the USA. AHEC's Regional Director for Southeast Asia & Greater China Mr. John Chan also addressed the reception.



Mr. John Chan, Regional Director of American Hardwood Export Council - Southeast Asia & Greater China, also addressed the reception on behalf of AHEC, here with Mr. Jirawat Tangkijngamwong, Secretary General of TFA and Deputy MD of Deesawat Industries Co., Ltd.



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(Left to Right) Nuntawan Sakuntanaga, Director General Dept of Export Promotion, John Chan, Director Greater China and SE Asia AHEC, H.E. Kristie A. Kenney U.S Ambassador to Thailand and Deputy Trade Minister Alongkorn



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H.E. The American Ambassador, Kristie A. Kenney, with one of the designs in American hardwood



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Mr. Promote Kitjamnongpan, Advisor to the TFA and Managing Director of Maxfine



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Design Camp students at work

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