

Local *flavour*

The authenticity debate has the tendency to become mired in complexity, but two **MALAYSIAN** architect-designers are taking a practical approach. **STUDIO BIKIN**'s retail arm, Kedai Bikin asks: Why fake it when we can make it?

TEXT NARELLE YABUKA (ORIGINAL), NICKY LOBO (ADAPTION) | PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF STUDIO BIKIN





With the exception of sole practitioners, it is uncommon to come across architectural design studios that are directed solely by women. Kuala Lumpur-based Studio Bikin is one of those rare cases. It is helmed by Farah Azizan and Adela Askandar, both of whom studied architecture and worked in the UK before returning to Malaysia in the 2000s.

The studio takes its name from a Malay word that means 'make'. "We believe architecture and design has a lot to do with the craft and skill of putting materials together," says Farah. In fact, the pair established Studio Bikin as a means to push their interest in craft and detail.

They have a strong belief in the inherent quality of the individual and handcrafted, whether in an architectural or furniture content. "There is a cooking term in Malay, *air tangan*, which literally translates as 'water of the hand'," they explain. "This describes the character of the dish [as opposed to the ingredients or the method]. For instance, you and I are given the same set of ingredients and instructions to make a cake, and we make it

accordingly. Yet somehow our cakes will taste different because of that little flick of the wrist I employ when swirling the cake batter, or that dash of confidence you bring through many years of baking that makes your cake taste that little bit different from mine. The analogy can be applied to design and construction, or making, as well. The difference is the transfer of character and essence of that person into the final product that we find interesting. Essentially it is what differentiates the work between each of us in this global design cauldron and gives us all identity."

The design and sale of furniture has been a consuming direction for the primarily architectural studio, encapsulating an extension of built form at the human scale. The store Kedai Bikin was opened in Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur, with the intention of cultivating an appreciation of local crafts and locally made and designed products - "[including those by] the *pasar malam* [night market] chair makers, rattan uncles and *kayu ukir pakciks* [wood carving uncles] out there," quips Farah. "We felt that in Malaysia there was not a properly curated platform to showcase the local design talent that is growing in the scene here. And we

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were tired of seeing Chinese-manufactured copies of Scandinavian modernist chairs flooding the Asian interior market," she says. The tagline for Kedai Bikin is: 'Why fake it when we can make it'.

"Malaysians have generally not warmed up to the idea of paying for a local designer chair yet," comments Adela, "although they are willing to fork out double the price of our bespoke chairs for an imported chair or brand. However, we are sticking to our prices as firstly, we need to make it sustainable for us (as designers and makers); and secondly, we feel that you are really not paying that much for the amount of effort that goes into each product."

That said, the pair are optimistic about growing the local design culture. "There is a decent pool of resources that are still untapped here in terms of traditional crafts, trades and design," suggests Farah. They believe these elements of culture can be re-appropriated to the current mode of living through to the next generation in years to come.

■ Studio Bikin | studiobikin.com

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