

Duo hope to hit pay dirt with sustainable alternative to clay

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When interior design graduate Jodie Monteiro, 24, sought a more sustainable alternative to clay, she did not imagine she would one day start her own company.

The LaSalle College of the Arts graduate came up with the idea to create an alternative to clay – a material commonly used by artists for pottery and ceramics – after signing up for a competition to earn extra credits towards graduating.

Energised by the creative process and thrill of competing, Ms Monteiro decided to hone her product design and business acumen by joining a programme called Programme for LaSalle Creative Entrepreneurs (Place), which provided her with courses on how to become a creative entrepreneur.

At Place, she met LaSalle lecturer Clara Fernandes, whom she credits for kick-starting her journey towards becoming an entrepreneur and encouraging her to take part in more competitions to meet more creatives like herself.

At a competition last November, Ms Monteiro met Mr Ong Kok

Chung, 26, an environmental engineering undergraduate at the National University of Singapore (NUS), who shared a similar passion in creating sustainable products.

The pair set up Fertilclay, which Ms Monteiro hopes will one day become a social enterprise. The company's alternative clay product is made of food waste such as ground-up eggshells and nut husks.

"Kok Chung value-adds in the scientific progress and development of our product, where he understands supply chains and how materials are processed and treated, helping me piece together the picture of how we can input Fertilclay into different industries," said Ms Monteiro.

Last month, the duo went to Princeton University for TigerLaunch – the largest student-run entrepreneurship competition in the United States.

They had been selected to represent Asia after edging out 15 teams in TigerLaunch's regional competition, said Mr Ong, who graduates from NUS this month.

While Fertilclay did not place in the top three, the duo – who were travelling overseas for the first



Ms Jodie Monteiro and Mr Ong Kok Chung at Princeton University last month, where they took part in the largest student-run entrepreneurship competition in the United States. PHOTO: FERTICLAY

time – said the experience was “simply mind-blowing”.

Many of the participants – some of whom had more than 10 years of experience – were graduate students who already had specific industry experience in pitching ideas in sectors such as healthcare, insurance and e-commerce, Mr Ong said.

Besides meeting fellow entrepreneurs, he added, the team also connected with some of the world's largest growth capital investors whom they hope to enlist as mentors for their fledgling company.

He and Ms Monteiro plan to continue taking part in creative design competitions to build their brand among potential investors and refine their alternative clay prototype.

Ms Monteiro said: “While others may see recycling as a hassle or inconvenience, I see it as one of the most rewarding ways of giving back to the earth.”

She added that ultimately, her goal is to create a profitable business that can be used as a vehicle for social good not just in Singapore, but also in South-east Asia.

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