

## Singapore Design Week 2024

# Celebrating creativity

This year's festival aims to show that design is accessible to – and can make an impact on – everyone



**Chantal Sajan**  
Senior Correspondent

In a June prelude on social media platforms, the DesignSingapore Council (DSG) unveiled its People of Design campaign, which was adopted as the theme of Singapore Design Week (SDW) 2024.

The festival, which debuted in 2005, is on from Sept 26 to Oct 6 with more than 80 events across three “design districts”: Bras Basah-Bugis, Marina and Orchard.

It is organised by DSG, which represents Singapore at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) Creative Cities Network. Singapore joined the network in 2015.

During the People of Design campaign, the council spotlighted Mr Abdul Nasser, owner of Basheer Graphic Books at Bras Basah Complex. He has, for the last three decades, run his bookstore as a nexus for talent – from advertising agency illustrators before the advent of the internet to architects to design students.

Mr Nasser is not design-trained. But through his books, the 60-year-old has inspired generations of creatives such as President's Design Award 2020 recipient Kelley Cheng, who appeared in a People of Design campaign video to talk about the impact the bookstore had on her.

This is the message DSG wants to send – that innovators can come in all shapes and sizes, defying the stereotype that design is only for designers or about aesthetics. Rather, it is a tool for positive

change, accessible to everyone.

The festival is also getting bigger. Although the number of activities is about the same as in 2023 – 80 exhibitions, forums and events – the 2024 line-up has an expanded format and greater reach.

More than 127,000 visitors attended SDW in 2023.

The Bras Basah-Bugis – People Of Design Showcase Series is curated by Mr Hans Tan, founder of Hans Tan Studio and an associate professor in the industrial design division at the National University of Singapore. The series is in collaboration with various designers and features 10 showcases in the district.

Part of the district explores the empowering nature of design by placing it in the hands of people from diverse walks of life.

Over at the Marina design district – an expanded area that includes Marina Central and Marina Bay – Mr Nathan Yong, founder of Nathan Yong Design, and a team of designers are bringing to life the theme of Neufolk: Bridging Tradition And Future In Design.

Neufolk combines “neu”, meaning “newcomer”, with “folk”, symbolising everyday people and traditional society.

Mr Yong feels that it is crucial for brands to continuously reinvent themselves in today's fast-paced, internet-driven world.

As part of the Reimagining Retail Experiences showcase at Neufolk in the Marina district, he and his collaborators paired design firm Aaah Studio with HaveFun Karaoke to come up with fresh concepts like a content creation booth with props, targeted at the younger crowd.

“This establishes the multitude of possibilities of a karaoke room, not just for singing, but also as a safe space for relaxation, enjoyment, studying and more,” says Mr Yong, who is also co-founder of home-grown furniture store Grafunkt.

“It's about creating an engaging, trendy and photogenic environment that dominates social media and appeals to both young and old.”

The last stop, the Orchard district, is presented by creative leads Mervin Tan and Cheryl Sim from

local design studio Plus Collaboratives as Re-Route: Orchard.

The showcase highlights businesses such as Far East Plaza's Clancy Boutique Alteration Centre and Shashlik Restaurant alongside new and trendy spots.

The 2024 festival also features content aligned with SDW's three pillars: Design Futures, Design Marketplace and Design Impact.

Design Futures will explore tomorrow's design. Part of this pillar is the festival's mainstay – the Design Futures Forum – which will be held over two days, compared with the one-day affair in 2023.

Mr Hans Tan says emerging technologies, sustainability and care are core segments of the Design Futures pillar, which influenced his approach.

The showcase is curated according to four “tracks”, each focused on a distinct theme: Emerging Technology, Care, Sustainability and Culture.

It features the work of participants from diverse backgrounds – from primary school pupils to senior citizens – who developed their creativity as part of a design experiment through workshops conducted by four design educators.

“This experiment in democratising design highlights that design sensibilities are accessible to all and can enrich various contexts,” Mr Tan adds.

Design Marketplace will showcase lifestyle trends from around the world through the works of South-east Asia's fast-growing design community.

Find – Design Fair Asia, billed as South-east Asia's premier trade show and design fair, presents its third edition at Marina Bay Sands from Sept 26 to 28.

For 2024, the Design Impact pillar aims to inspire with design solutions that tackle society's most pressing concerns, such as the rapid pace of technological advancements and sustainability.

A key event of this pillar is The Future Impact 2: Homecoming Showcase, which features works that use new technologies, rethink production methods and improve functionality.

Ms Dawn Lim, DSG's executive director, says the festival is a celebration of design and creativity.

“Through igniting fresh perspectives, fostering collaboration and showcasing the transformative power of design, we hope the festival will spark creative confidence in visitors and inspire everyone to see themselves as designers in their own unique ways,” she says.



The whimsical, playground-like Nostalgia Play exhibit at Far East Plaza is part of Re-Route: Orchard, a Singapore Design Week showcase. ST PHOTOS: GAVIN FOO

### OLD MEETS NEW IN ORCHARD ROAD

Orchard Road may be known for its snazzy shops and designer boutiques, but it is also home to many small businesses.

The juxtaposition between old and new is showcased in Re-Route: Orchard (RR:OR), the brainchild of designers Mervin Tan and Cheryl Sim of multidisciplinary design studio Plus Collaboratives.

The duo spent more than nine months researching place-

making – the collaborative process by which urban planners and residents shape public places – in Orchard Road.

It promotes an intimate connection by focusing on the physical, cultural and social identities that define a place and facilitate its evolving relevance.

The inspiration for RR:OR came from the urban design concept of adaptive reuse – repurposing instead of demolishing structures.

Ms Sim, 36, co-founder and design director of Plus Collaboratives, which specialises in

spatial, graphic and experiential design, says people today seek more out of a place than just attractions.

Now, they want an emotional connection and to identify with a location.

Through site-mapping studies of Orchard Road, the duo explore how adaptive reuse helps in the appreciation of old places, while also allowing for a new relevance that elevates a place's value.

They came up with more than 30 attractions – including 13 installations, eight hidden retail gems,



An artist's impression of the Neufolk Design Pavilion at Marina Central. PHOTO: NATHAN YONG DESIGN

chantal@sph.com.sg

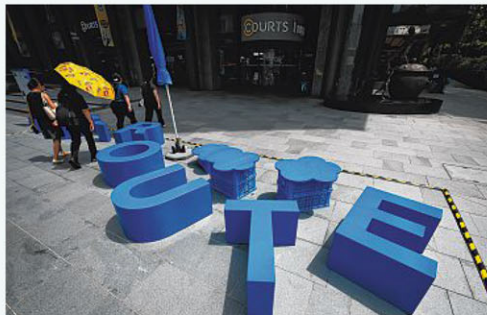




Re-think, a retail showcase of local brands, at Design Orchard.



The mini-park installation Pocket Park: Pause And Play at Orchard Fountain Corner.



Seats formed with the word Re-route opposite Design Orchard.



Timeless Tales, an exhibition of local artists' illustrations in the style of advertising posters, outside Mandarin Gallery.

and 16 talks and workshops – which can be explored on RR:OR's website (reroutefest.com). The site will include a downloadable digital map which will be available during SDW. "This process of renewed relevance was interesting, especially in a commercial belt like Orchard Road, where the allure is always what's new or trendy," says Ms Sim. "We wanted to look at a range of opposites such as the relationship between the familiar and the new, what's on the surface and what's

in-depth, and trend versus culture." Understanding the factors that make up a place – such as the importance of trends, commercial interests and tourism – helped flesh out a concept that examined how Orchard Road became unique in creating these juxtaposing relationships, she says. "A simple example is how you can shop at international luxury brands such as Gucci and Chanel, and then sashay into a 20-year-old family chicken rice stall in a time-honoured mall such as Lucky

Plaza," adds Mr Tan, 42, who is Plus Collaboratives' co-founder and creative director. He says RR:OR is centred on adaptability and its ability to re-imagine the possibilities for relevance, and the installations demonstrate how adaptive reuse works for designers and festival visitors. These include adding established family businesses to the line-up of places to discover, such as Clancy Boutique Alteration Centre, which has occupied its space in Far East Plaza since 1994.

In the same shopping centre is Shashlik Restaurant, a Russo-Hainanese heritage gem which was opened in April 1986 by Hainanese chefs who worked in Russian eatery Troika Restaurant before it closed. Mr Tan says RR:OR explores multiple ways to adapt and build upon a place and its characteristics. "It is not clear if Orchard Road has a distinct community. So, with our design activations, we try to create a focus that moves attention away from just the main street."



Designer Emeline Ong's The Pastille Collection comprises (from left) the Low Blue Milk Table, Bubblegum Pink Table and Lilac Round Table. PHOTO: ISAAC LIM YI JIE

### YOUNG DESIGNER'S HANDMADE FURNITURE

Emerging designer Emeline Ong, 26, debuted her collection of three handcrafted monolithic tables in Milan in April and is preparing to unveil the collection at Singapore Design Week.



To create the Bubblegum Pink Table, Ms Ong meticulously compresses the mixture into the mould.

The Pastille Collection, in colours like lilac and bubblegum pink, mixes pulverised paper pulp, water and plaster, moulding the amorphous mixture into furniture which is baked in her home dehydrator.

Common household tools such as a blender, a paper shredder and a stick were also used in the process.

To get around the constraints of making large-scale moulds with a consumer-grade 3D home printer, she uses a split-mould design, segmenting each mould. This method imbues each piece with graphic lines, which form due to the excess material where the different moulds meet.

In Milan, Ms Ong's tables were singled out for mention by some of the industry's most respected names.

Japanese design journalist and exhibition director Tsuchida Takahiro was all praise on his Instagram page, calling the tables his "personal No. 1" at the SaloneSatellite, which focuses on young talent at Milan Design Week.

Design writer Anna Casotti wrote in industry magazine IFDM that Ms Ong sees the world through an eccentric lens combining wonder and functionality.

Ms Ong says her furniture collection explores the interplay between custom moulds and a composite paper pulp mixture, revealing distinct seams made during the demoulding process, where the moulds meet due to excess material.

This process creates visible layers in the tables, reflecting the painstaking process of handcrafting each piece.

"I wanted to create pieces while being close to the making process, which meant using readily available materials and tools," says Ms Ong, who graduated in 2023 with a bachelor's degree in industrial design from the National University of Singapore.

"As the mixture was layered, it gave rise to an unexpected brutal finish, which I embraced."

Her collection is available at local online art gallery The Artling, as part of Emerge@Find, DSG's showcase of South-east Asian contemporary design.

The sale of works from Emerge@Find is part of a new partnership between DSG and the online art gallery to expand commercialisation opportunities for designers.

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