



A PASSION AND A LOFTY AMBITION

The world of interior design encompassing creative concepts and building customer-happy solutions is a highly challenging but personally rewarding field. In a conversation with Top 10 of Malaysia, Zessie Li, an established local interior designer and owner of Yuan Design, tells about her journey since 1994 within the local interior industry, her source of inspiration and her plans for the future.

THE INTERIOR design industry has become popular in recent years with the yearnings for sophisticated and elegant lifestyles. Commercial and residential owners have come to rely on the expertise of interior designers in fulfilling their dream home designs be it modern, traditional, English or an eclectic mixture.

Being creative and making rooms look pretty and comfortable based on a minimalist ultra-modern style is the forte of Zessie Li, the founder and owner of Yuan Design. “I have always had a passion for rearranging furniture and decorating rooms. Maybe my penchant for details and ensuring everything is perfect comes from my lecturer father,” laughs Li. Coming from Singapore, the rest of the family consists of a mother and siblings involved in the fashion industry. “As for the name, ‘Yuan,’ it symbolises the synergy between my Chinese name, Hui Yuan, and the resiliency of the yuan currency,” explains Li on the origins of her signature brand name. The Yuan brand that resonates creativity complemented by pragmatism was visibly prominent in the persona of its owner, the vicinity of the office surroundings and amongst employees.

Subsequent to gaining hands-on experience in renovation works involving laminated flooring and certification in interior design, Li entered the Malaysian interior design industry in 1998 based on the recommendations of customers. “On establishing ourselves within the local housing market, we gained the confidence to open an office in 2004,” adds Li.

The growth of Yuan Design can be traced to the expansion of its offices originating from the rented premises of a shop lot to a bigger sized bungalow. “We further expanded in 2016 with the purchase and remodelling of two bungalows strategically located within an upcoming commercial area of Petaling Jaya. Additionally, our factory in Sungai Buloh provides bespoke solutions enabling us to meet customers’ niche requirements be it materials or design,” elaborates Li.

“I do feel a sense of accomplishment on my achievements,” says Li, “I owe it to the support given by my customers who have become friends and are a

source of recommendations.” There is a high focus on meeting customer expectations. “I want my customers to be eager to go back home to a comforting and relaxing atmosphere,” says Li. From a singular renovation service that has grown into an established interior design one-stop house providing the whole gamut of design and build services showcases the potentials of successful entrepreneurships such as Yuan Design.

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“My passion for design and the work involved is my main source of inspiration that drives me towards success. The attention to detail in space planning, design concepts, material selection, costing and ensuring perfection in project management are my trademarks,” says Li with a determined smile.

“My main hobby consists of exercise and yoga as I need good health and a clear mind to be able to service my customers,” says Li, “I work out six days a week combined with yoga.” Working hours extend from eight in the morning to late at night or even overnight.

The design and factory teams consist of 15 and 80 staff respectively. “Work is allocated based on talent capabilities and feedback,” says Li on her management style. With an estimated 30 projects on hand, Li emphasized the need for teamwork and a conducive environment for the generation of ideas and solutions.

“We want to continue to keep up with the modern trends and provide our customers with the latest materials and best customer service,” says Li.

Li’s advice for new entrants into the industry is patience, building trust and commitment to delivery schedules. “Resolve all problems and do not run away from it,” she says.