

**ico-D + wREGA**

**ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION:  
THE STATE OF DESIGN  
IN MALAYSIA**

**REDISCOVERY:  
ico-D DESIGN WEEK IN  
SARAWAK, 2012**

Roundtable Discussion: The State of Design in Malaysia  
Rediscovery: ico-D Design Week in Sarawak, 2012

Date: Wednesday, 17 October 2012  
Time: 9:30am to 12:37pm  
Venue: Swinburne University (Sarawak Campus)

Chaired by:  
Prof. Helmut Lueckenhausen, Pro Vice-Chancellor and CE,  
Swinburne University of Technology, Sarawak

Attended by:  
Russell Kennedy (Immediate Past President, ico-D), Australia  
Kyle Kim (Board Member, ico-D), South Korea  
Karuna Pillay (Project Manager, ico-D), South Africa  
David Lancashire (Chair of the Indigo Advisory Group), Australia  
Frida Larios (Ambassador, Indigo), USA  
Zelda Harrison (Ambassador, Indigo), USA  
Tony Ward (Ambassador, Indigo), Australia  
Zachary Ong (President, wREGA), Malaysia  
Goh Suk Keat, Michael (Immediate Past President, wREGA), Malaysia  
Vivian Toh (Vice President, wREGA), Malaysia  
Tan Guat Ling (Honorary Secretary, wREGA), Malaysia  
Muhamad Razif Nasruddin (Committee, wREGA), Malaysia  
Chew Chang Guan (Sarawak Convention Bureau), Malaysia  
Gregory Wee (Swinburne University of Technology, Sarawak), Malaysia  
Ahmad Azuar Zainuddin (Swinburne University of Technology, Sarawak), Malaysia  
Prof. Debiprasad Dash (Professor and Dean, Swinburne University of Technology, Sarawak), Malaysia  
Prof. Dr. Hj. Khairul Aidil Azlin Abd. Rahman (University Malaysia Sarawak, Pereka representative), Malaysia

Photographed by:  
Zarul Nazli Zulkhurnain (Make Condition Design), Malaysia  
Harith Riza Rasid (Make Condition Design), Malaysia

Designed by:  
Zarul Nazli Zulkhurnain

Authors:  
Zachary Ong  
Ng Foong Wai

Research:  
Dr. Debbie Gan  
Irina Muis

Prepared by the Graphic Design Association of Malaysia (wREGA)  
©2012, the Graphic Design Association of Malaysia





The by-invitation roundtable discussion was chaired by Prof. Helmut Lueckenhausen and attended by board members of ico-D, Indigo Ambassadors, business and design educators, design associations and the executive committee members of wREGA. It is a discourse on issues preventing Design from being a key contributor to a nation's overall growth, and what could be the solutions to these problems – skewed towards the context of the Malaysian landscape. The intention of this discourse is to gain insight from ico-D in empowering the Malaysian design industry with the professional teamwork from wREGA to create a dossier to the Prime Minister of Malaysia on the importance of Design for the country.

Foreword by Dato' Johan Ariff

# The Design Dilemma

For a person, who lives the better part of his life in design, I should know of its ubiquity, impact and interpretative nuances, that have sparked change – opening doors to new ideas, and those yet to be born – enriching lives and lifestyles. In subtle ways, it displays its usefulness, even though not many realize its presence. To quote a line from my book, yet to be published, 'design does its bit in subdued elegance, though living in the shadows of its own existence'.

Much is taken for granted. And one should know that nothing gets by without design intervention and participation. It's all around us. See it, feel it, and sense it. Unknowingly and instinctively, one reacts to its utilitarian goodness, and because design is addictive, you can't get enough of it, in your everyday life.

As design appeals in different ways, it must be clarified that it is also a specialized functionality, existing in an unbounded regime of processes – industrial, architectural, engineering, interior, fashion etc. It does not always manifest itself in isolation, but rather in a state of participatory and collaborative adjunct to a system of processes, bringing about unique and diverse functionalities, oftentimes pursuing their own creative agendas, defining their own pathways, interests and goals.

This short dossier deals with design I'm familiar with, within my parameter of involvement and understanding, which essentially comprises brand consultancy, graphic, industrial, publication and exhibition design. Since diverse design functionalities share common attributes and expressions, I would only touch on them superficially, in a peripheral sense.

To begin with, Malaysia is well endowed with good taste and living, inherently matched by abundance of design diversities. In this respect, design plays a pivotal role in the enlightenment of the spirit of its people; living lives in harmony and peace. An ideal place, because design likes the arts, thrives profusely in such a sanctuary and space, to motivate thinking and innovation.

In its quest to excel in design, amongst other things, Malaysia needs to see itself in relative and definitive plain with other progressive countries, in particular the likes of Norway, Denmark, and Finland, if it chooses to advance its ambitions to be a design-driven country. With a tiny population of five million each, they have amassed tremendous reputations of their own in design innovations and superiority – in many aspects of their normal life, to be the best and richest in per capita income, amongst industrialized Europe, especially in product designing and development – churning out world famous brands – Bang & Olufsen audio systems, whose series of unique designs have consistently made to the altars of the famed Museum of Modern Art (MoMa), New York, Hasselblad camera, the best in its range, reminiscent of cosmonauts and the dramatic moon shots, the veritable safety Volvo and the supersonic Saab, and those modern contemporary furniture designed by Arne Jacobsen. Not least, the Nokia phone, a leading pioneer in cellular technology, to mention a few, that continues to excel for the world's market share. Malaysia is on the threshold of the first-world community stage by 2020, amongst developed countries of the world. And, as industrialization and manufacturing peak, Malaysia would need to have a determined pool of prolific designers, in all disciplines, to meet innovative challenges, to fulfill its high ambitions.

Looking back, I was external examiner in the early seventies at the Mara Institute of Technology, to invigilate its first batch of 'eleven' final year students, in Graphic Design, not counting those in the Fine Arts, Industrial and Fashion Design. With enhanced development in computer-aided sciences and heightened design education today, Malaysia is well on its way to have a sound population of forward-looking designers to embrace Malaysia's design needs, especially in industrial design.

Interestingly and by contrast, the earning potential in the design profession is lucrative, and of late, has notched up to a higher income level in business Malaysia, which would directly encourage more to lean on design education in the future. Design, as a profession, would continue to be sought after, and with the proliferation of design institutions in the country, growth of design is assured.

It must be remembered also, that design is an urban thing, because the young in the cities are well exposed to the vagaries of forms, colour, media and bright lights and so on, to respond to as they grow up, as opposed to the rural young who have to cope up with and adapt to the sudden change, visual values of designed forms unlike craft-arts. The latter need to be inculcated with new thinking to be in step with unexpected changes. Schools of higher learning must be sensitive to these expectations.

Today, most designers are recruited to fill job-slots, in specific industries and markets. Others, more independent-minded, would go into small practices of their own, presumably having gone through some extra curricular training in basic business know-how, cost accounting, time management, production and delivery systems, apart from their pursued courses. The extra courses mentioned should form part of the larger required curriculum, in the final year, to include English as a subject of great importance. Without which, they may face hard times or even failure to survive.

I also believe that designers, irrespective from where they hail, local or from abroad, should be interned on short stints, not only at graphic studios or advertising agencies, but assembly plants, factories, printers, and fabricators to gain valuable insights and knowledge, or even sent on short trips abroad. This would be a great moral booster, and confidence builder.

When I started my business in the seventies, the country was abuzz with industrialization and privatizations. My entry into the design business was timely and opportune. Most top civil servants were seconded or transferred to run Government linked corporations, like HICOM, PROTON, EON and other privatized bodies, which also impacted great influence on the industrialization-drive in Malaysia, further.

The demeanor I noticed of these newly appointed heads, then, despite their previous highly ranked positions, was one of genuine civility, completely absent of condescension, when discussing corporate identity and brand development, and annual reports etc with me. It was indeed a great pleasure working with them. Board members were open to views at presentations, and participated in lively exchanges. At no time did I feel threatened or patronized. Their attitudes were one of keen disposition toward problem solving, and the desire to muster new skills for themselves, and their focus was centered on their new operational exigencies.



Following are some contradictory pointers drawn from observations and experiences found today:

1. Thing's changed. Meeting with CEOs is next to impossibility, contrary to what I used to experience. Let alone making presentations. One has to deal with their corporate personnel, whose office would decide on the acceptability of your work before delivering it to their superiors, on your behalf, and in your absence. Strange megalomania it is, that is setting in, in some pockets of companies – to deliberately downplay and derail the importance of designers. And more often than not, design is deprived of the status it deserves. It's worth the while to note that design, can best thrive in an environment that venerates its existence.
2. There is the veiled attempt to denigrate the design practice in some quarters. Designers today have to tender for jobs under a new category as 'contractors'. Strange as it may seem, corporations (at least I know of one) assume that designers have a similar professional standing as contractors.  
  
It must be stressed that design is not a business, but a 'practice', recognized internationally. As a practitioner, the designer should be in the same league as the lawyer, accountant, architect and engineer.
3. A new 'registration' modality has also emerged, in at least one corporation, in which a designer has to be listed as 'contractor' or 'events operator', or 'advertising agent', before he could qualify himself to tender for a 'design' job – be it graphic, publication, industrial or exhibition design. This is an absurdity of the highest order. It casts an ignorant opinion of the profession, whose personnel had to undergo degreed courses, in local or overseas universities and colleges, to deserve this sort of treatment. Without realizing its practicing nature, it may be possible that the tender department of a company considers prudent to bunch up the design profession with others, mentioned above, to make light of their work, but fails miserably to take cognizance of its specialized functions. This is not acceptable.
4. The other point of contention is that tenders on design jobs are conveniently silent on compensations or rejection fee. It goes to show that they are completely in the dark, as to designers' deep creative involvements, and especially in the amount of time taken to prepare for these tender submissions. One wonders at why companies are allowed to take advantage of and exploit designers with impunity, when all these are 'closed but not open tenders', addressed to a select few qualified designers, to participate in the first place. Rejection fee is an indication of appreciation, for work done by designers who spent long hours preparing for the bid, but without success. Unfortunately, only one would succeed.

5. On a pitch against Landor of the US, JDA successfully won the MAS's commission to redesign its entire corporate and visual identity programme, livery designs and provide inputs to MAS offices worldwide. That was 25 years ago.

We were again invited to pitch for a redevelopment of MAS Identity Exercise last year (2011) to tweak on some areas of its identity systems, without changing basic signature equities, especially the Logo.

JDA was one of the two firms shortlisted. Soon after, as we came to know, the whole Board involved was sacked, and replaced with a new one. To our horror, the project was completely abandoned, without notifying us of their decision, but to spite it all, they glaringly applied some of JDA's substantive inputs on their new aircraft, to effect change to the livery. Using the same Logo, but it's now inverted, and by so doing it the angled configuration of the Logo designed runs counter to the sheered angles of the leading edges of the fin tails of the different types of aircraft types –Boeing and Airbus. For the Airbus, the Logo colour is blue, instead of red and blue, which makes a mockery of the concept for uniformity and brand acceptability of a product line under one airline.

How could we in the practice reconcile ourselves to the fact that a major national airline could hijack our ideas, without even contacting us or referring the matter to us in the first place? JDA sought a meeting with MAS, to no avail.

The Government goes around penalizing people for infringement of copyrights on software etc, by imposing heavy penalties to that effect. I think its time the Government took serious action on companies that infringe the rights of local design firms and others in the country.

I could cite at least two more companies, including banks, which flouted on copyrights. They simply saw fit to disregard basic integrity. There ought to be an avenue by which we can bring our grouses to.

6. Petronas is another case in point. Johan Design Associates was the creator of the ubiquitous Logo and its equities, and author of its total corporate and visual systems, compiled in two huge Standards Manuals, and in two massive exercises, under two chairmanships, over the years. Early petrol station prototypes, product brands, and exhibitions in several countries of the world, and for F1 Sauber and BMW tie-ups, for 8 years running, and many other jobs all over the world, bore our mark. We worked with Petronas for 39 years, through six Chairmen and CEOs, and enjoyed privy to some of its close assignments. Tun Azizan, the late Chairman, even openly remarked 'what we'd do without JDA'.

Lately, the Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Najib Razak declared that Petronas had notched up the ladder to an impressive 64th place in the Fortune 500. Just as timely, Yahoo reported that the current 'Brand Worth of Petronas Logo' stands at USD 6,068 Billion.

On 11th June 2013, it's reported in the press that the Petronas Logo and its Logotype have been 'refreshed'. What they failed to say was that vital elements of the Logo and the Logotype were tampered with. We were not informed of this neither were we invited to participate in this special exercise. It was executed by a local company whose head office is based in the US. Why not us, a local outfit which created it? The question is 'Why change at all', and for what reason? The changes are so trivial that we would be happy to do it for free, if so required! Even a tweak on the Logo and its other elements, could translate into a massive waste of millions of ringgit, just to bring the new Logo into line, with anticipated replacement exercises, at all levels of its manifestations.

7. On a different note, industrial design is often confused for 'invention'. One understands that invention precedes industrial design. But it is the latter that breathes life onto invented products, by dressing them up, colouring and shaping them into practical ergonomics, overcoming their original appearances of rawness. Here is where an industrial designer is at his best, providing expertise to enhance their looks, integrity and marketability. I have worked with top industrial designers on projects in Europe to understand intimately of product design transitions, and appreciate the incalculable worth of industrial design as follow-ups to inventions.

Inventors, like dreamers, have an infinite luxury of time, unlike industrial designers, who are more realistic and professionally attuned to business. In addition to what I already mentioned earlier, the latter need 'godfathers', investors and perhaps even venture capitalists to help them through. To empower promising young industrial designers with practical ideas to achieve our industrial success, as they do all over the world.

The above is a summary of reflections on what's happening in Malaysia's business today, in relation to design generally. It's time we realized that many things cannot simply be taken for granted, and that there's need for reciprocity of understanding between engaging parties concerned, whereby a high standard of ethics and integrity (forget copyrights, attitudes and all) can be sustained for our mutual gains. The future is bright for design in the industry, and this can only be possible if its growth path is given the due attention it deserves, to help drive industrialization in Malaysia.

## **Dato' Johan Ariff**

**Creative Director, CEO  
Johan Design Associates, Malaysia**

**14th June 2013**



Message by wREGA President

## Design and Malaysia in 2050

Many established educational institutions worldwide agree that the skills required for the 21st century is creativity and collaboration, in large part due to the advent of internet and fast moving technology. We are witnessing now the power of designers in this Golden Age of Design: most successful startups, companies and conglomerates in the United States, United Kingdom, and in the rest of the world place design and designers as an immediate if not a supreme priority.

To compete with the rest of the world, it is now time that the government seize the opportunity to leverage on the creative might of designers and enable the design economy to propel the country closer towards attaining its high income nation by 2020 and beyond.

By 2050, Malaysia must already be able to stand proud as a nation that produces world class designers: by designing great design policies, sound design education and fostering demand for good design for the benefit of the economy.

This work must begin now.

**Zachary Ong**

President 2012 - present  
Pertubuhan Wakaf Reka Grafik, Malaysia  
wREGA

Message by Malaysian Design Council  
(Majlis Rekabentuk Malaysia, MRM)  
Chairman



## Design is vital for Malaysia

We live in exciting times.

The explosion of world population is unprecedented. Births outnumber deaths. The constant discovery of new drugs means a longer lifespan. The empowerment of women, an educated workforce, modern lifestyles and cross border human mobility have all changed our demographic profile. In addition to that, urbanization, modernization, technology advancement and globalization have made inroads into the global scenario, benefiting some and stifling others.

Design can assist social reforms. Through strategic application of design, living in rural and urban environment takes a different dimension. Design can transform society and provide space for concepts and innovative thinking.

We live in difficult times.

The natural world is under threat. The current world population of 7 billion people today marks an extraordinary acceleration from a mere two billion people in 1930 to three billion in 1960, four billion in 1975, five billion in 1987, six billion in 1999 and 7 billion in 2011. Imagine the world having 9.2 billion people or more by 2050. Where would all meat, fish, water, energy, plastic, metal, wood and other daily human need come from?

The indigenous people who live in the natural world are under threat.

Design can help the world through design solutions.

Design is not a peripheral issue anymore.

Design is vital for the country, the world and human survival.

**Prof. Dato' Dr. Ahmad Hj. Zainuddin**

Chairman  
Malaysia Design Council,  
Majlis Rekabentuk Malaysia (MRM)  
Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation



Pertubuhan Wakaf Reka Grafik Malaysia (wREGA) or Graphic Design Association of Malaysia, was officially registered on 15 January 2001.

It is the only official authority on Graphic Design in Malaysia. We are recognised by ico-D (International Council of Communication Design), a non-governmental, non-political professional body with consultative status with UNESCO, UNIDO and WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organisation).

## About wREGA

**Graphic design practitioners are architects of change on various levels. They contribute to, dictate and influence global cultures; intellectual capital; human values; personal preferences; material needs; economic activity; regional development; and last but not least; our living environment. wREGA acts as the professional body to disseminate information, to provide resources, to encourage exchange, to contribute, to educate, and to inspire. Our real mission is to promote and encourage the best practice of professional graphic designing for the benefits of the creators, the users, the industry and the society.**

## What We Do

### *Design professionals and students*

Encourage professional practice and promote design excellence.

Activities includes: awards recognition, recognition of outstanding contributions, exhibitions; establish benchmark standards; organise talks, forum, and workshops to advance knowledge and creative skills.

### *Clients and users*

To improve the utilisation and management of design. Activities includes: organise talks and forums; provide case studies of business success through effective graphic design; encourage development of strong local brands.

### *Public and other professions*

Create awareness of the value of graphic design and its profession.

Activities includes: exhibitions and articles on design.

### *Educators and advocates*

Provide industry expectations and current trends.

Activities includes: setting up a Task Force on Education-Industry Relations.

### *Suppliers and industry partners*

Partnering for mutual benefit and gain through joint projects and promotion.

### *Government authority*

Consultative role in commerce, environment and society; helping to prepare for a knowledge-based economy.

### *Global audience*

Asian gateway to and from the world.

Activities includes: promotion of Malaysian talents in international design events.



# ico-D

International  
Council of Design

leading creatively

ico-D is the world body for professional communication design. It is a non-profit, non-partisan, member-based network of independent organisations and stakeholders working within the multidisciplinary scope of communication design and expanded media. Founded in 1963, ico-D actively promotes the value of design practice, thinking, education, research and policy, representing more than 200 organisations in 67 countries and regions globally.

As a partner of the International Design Alliance (IDA), ico-D's members believe in interdisciplinary collaboration and the effectiveness of a collective voice to represent the design industry.

## About ico-D

**While taking into account institutional, cultural and social differences throughout the world, ico-D serves the worldwide community by aiming to:**

- **Be the non-partisan and non-governmental representative and advisory international body for communication design**
- **Represent the interests of professional communication designers in a responsible manner, within the broader design community**

- **Facilitate cooperation amongst organisations of designers and allied institutions, especially in promotion of the vision, mission and objectives of the International Design Alliance**
- **Define and increase awareness of professional standards and best practices governing communication design practice**
- **Foster recognition and respect of design by individuals, clients, and society at large, as a valued and vital profession**
- **Advance the best interests of humanity and the ecology through design**
- **Support the development of communication design education (theory, practice, and research)**
- **Facilitate knowledge management**
- **The Council's vision, mission and core values are manifested through initiatives to use design as a medium for progressive change.**

## What We Do

# Defining the Profession

Throughout the 2005-2007 term, the ico-D Executive Board and Secretariat undertook a major policy review of ico-D's core documents. One of the most significant outcomes was an update to the definition of the profession. The new definition both broadens our understanding of the areas of practice and reflects the global shift from focussing on design as the production of an artifact to design as a strategic process that enables communication in a visual format.

### *Communication design*

**Communication design is an intellectual, technical and creative activity concerned not simply with the production of images but with the analysis, organisation and methods of presentation of visual solutions to communication problems.**

### *Communication designer*

**One who has the sensibility, skill and experience and/or training professionally to create designs or images for reproduction by any means of visual communication, and who may be concerned with graphic design; illustration; typography; calligraphy; surface design for packaging; or the design of patterns, books, advertising and publicity material; broadcast, interactive or environmental design; or any form of visual communication.**

## International Affiliations

**As the representative international body for the communication design profession, ico-D maintains an active affiliation with several international associations. Through this affiliation, ico-D advocates for the interests of all communication designers.**



International Association of Universities and Colleges of Art, Design and Media - is a global association serving art and design education and research. It is a forum for partnership and transfer of knowledge and best practices. Cumulus aims to build and maintain a dynamic and flexible academic forum to bring together top level educational institutions from all parts of the world. Cumulus collaborates not only with institutions and organisations from the field of art, design and media, it also strongly encourages co-operation with industry and business.



IFRRO works to increase on an international basis the lawful use of copyright works and eliminate unauthorised copying by promoting efficient Collective Management of rights through RROs. IFRRO facilitates co-operation among RROs as well as with and among authors, creators, publishers and their associations. Through this work and its persistent fight against copyright infringement, piracy and other forms of unauthorised use of published works IFRRO stimulates creativity, diversity and investment in cultural goods as a useful tool for rights holders, consumers, the economy and society as a whole. IFRRO represents creators and publishers alike and provides internationally a common platform for them to foster the establishment of appropriate legal frameworks for the protection and use of their works. ico-D contributes to the working group on visual material.



ISO is a network of the national standards institutes of 157 countries, on the basis of one member per country, with a Central Secretariat in Geneva, Switzerland, that coordinates the system.

ISO is a non-governmental organisation: its members are not, as is the case in the United Nations system, delegations of national governments. Nevertheless, ISO occupies a special position between the public and private sectors.

ISO is able to act as a bridging organisation in which a consensus can be reached on solutions that meet both the requirements of business and the broader needs of society, such as the needs of stakeholder groups like consumers and users.

ico-D is in liaison with the technical subcommittees TC 145/SC 1.



UNESCO is working to create the conditions for genuine dialogue based upon respect for shared values and the dignity of each civilization and culture. This role is critical, particularly in the face of terrorism, which constitutes an attack against humanity. The world urgently requires global visions of sustainable development based upon observance of human rights, mutual respect and the alleviation of poverty, all of which lie at the heart of UNESCO's mission and activities.

ico-D is a member of UNESCO's Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity, which explores new ways to turn creativity in developing countries into sustainable cultural industries. It aims to promote cultural diversity, support economic development and encourage job creation in a range of fields including music, publishing, cinema, crafts and the performing arts.



UNIDO is the United Nations' specialised industrial agency, mandated to promote industrial development and international industrial cooperation.

UNIDO develops and implements its programmes in active partnership with complementary UN organizations as well as with selected public and private development actors.



WIPO is a specialised agency of the United Nations. It is dedicated to developing a balanced and accessible international intellectual property (IP) system, which rewards creativity, stimulates innovation and contributes to economic development while safeguarding the public interest.

## Definitions

# Graphic Designer

**One who has the artistic sensibility, skill and experience and/or training professionally to create designs or images for reproduction by any means of visual communication, and who may be concerned with illustration; typography; calligraphy; surface design for packaging; or the design of patterns, books, advertising and publicity material, or any form of visual communication.**

*Articles of Association of the International Council of Graphic Design Associations, September 18, 1984*



# Graphic Design Process

**The graphic design process is a problem solving process, one that requires substantial creativity, innovation and technical expertise.**

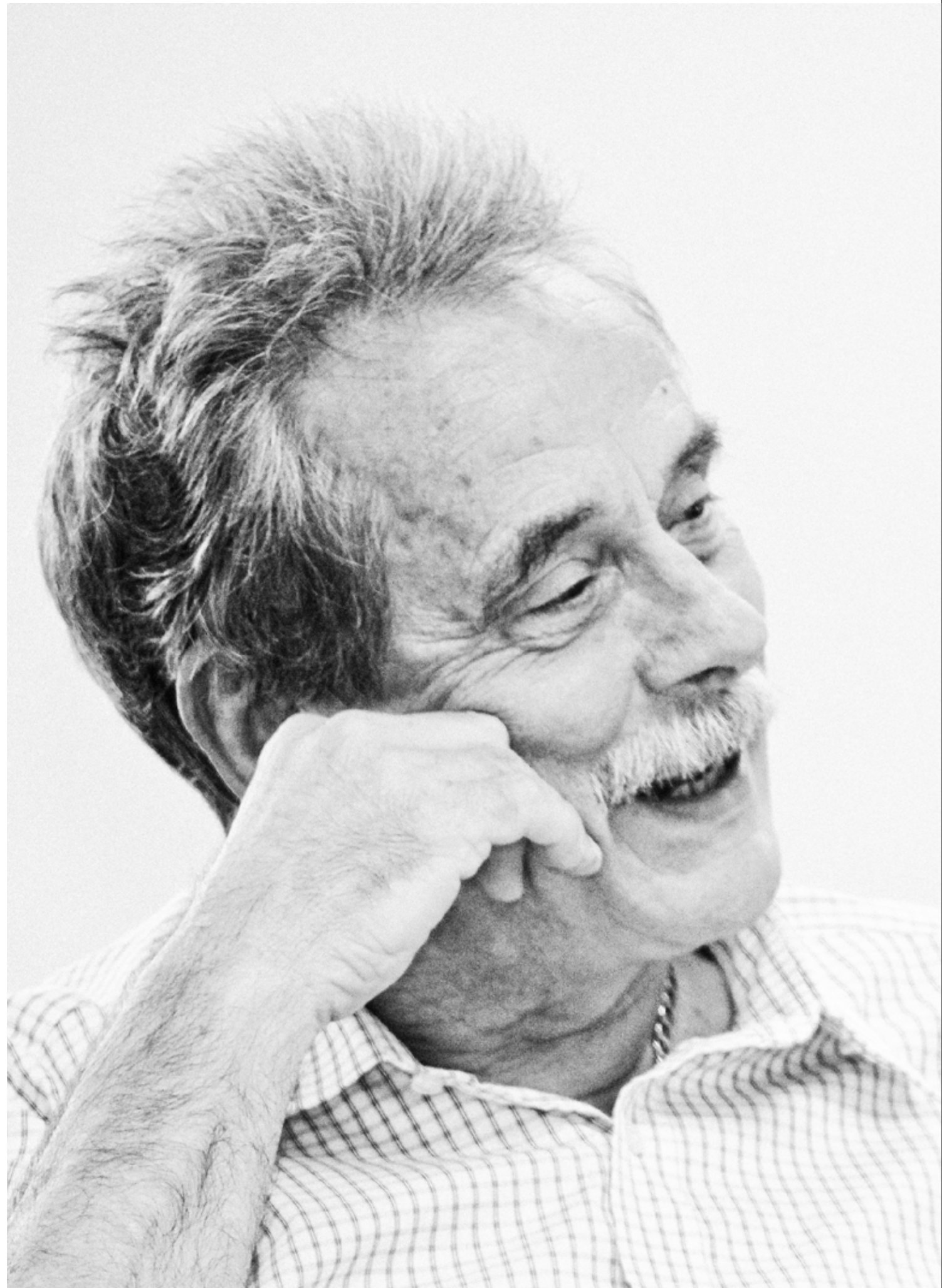
**An understanding of a client's product or service and goals, their competitors and the target audience is translated into a visual solution created from the manipulation, combination and utilization of shape, color, imagery, typography and space.**

*Australian Graphic Design Association (AGDA),  
Profile/Purpose*

# Graphic Design

**Graphic Design is an interdisciplinary, problem-solving activity which combines visual sensitivity with skill and knowledge in areas of communications, technology and business. Graphic design practitioners specialize in the structuring and organizing of visual information to aid communication and orientation.**

*Australian Graphic Design Association (AGDA),  
Profile/Purpose*



A preamble to the discourse  
on the definition of Design.

**What is the definition  
of 'design'?**

**What do we mean  
by 'design'?**

**Tony Ward**  
Indigo Ambassador



# Introduction

Malaysia is a country of big ambitions and the potential to achieve them. According to the WEF Global Competitiveness Report for 2013-14, Malaysia, along with 22 other countries, is transitioning from an efficiency-driven economy into a more resilient and productive innovation-driven economy. (World Economic Forum, 2013) It is the aspiration of all nations to provide for equitable and sustainable development. Yet, there are complex challenges on the path ahead.

A rapidly growing population, a stratum of greying demographics, climate change, international conflict, widening wealth inequality, and an energy crisis, to name a few. Rather bleak, we would think. However, in every problem lies an opportunity. We would like to champion the field of design to strengthen the arsenal of Malaysia's capabilities to face these challenges, discover new opportunities, and ultimately to achieve its aspirations through a holistic design strategy.

It is beyond the scope of this document to provide the strategy as such. Further research into the design industry in Malaysia is currently hindered by the lack of cohesive data. Therefore, this paper aggregates the information available globally and enables us to learn from practices and trends. wREGA has also collated written accounts by our most successful design professionals on their international experience in the design industry. From this study, we can list down the general characteristics of such design strategy as below:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. We need to generate a demand for good design  | 2. There must be a proactive design partnership between the academic, private and public sectors   |
| 3. The Government plays an important role of promoting design through being patrons of good design, as well as generating programmes that will promote good design to both businesses and the public | 4. We need to invest in building the design capacity through design education and research, building communities of design practitioners; and creating a national infrastructure to support design as well bridging design with other industries |





Commenting on the new and emerging role of ico-D as a world body for communication design.

**Design is about adding value to every aspect of our lives. ico-D is about delivering that message to government and key stakeholders. Designers need to work more closely with non-designers because they are often the decision makers.**

**Russell John Kennedy**

Immediate Past President  
2011–2013, ico-D



# The Economic Case for Design

---

Design is defined as the method by which ideas become concrete. Design ranges across a variety of different scales from products to buildings to entire cities. It encapsulates both the traditional design disciplines of architecture, urban design, landscape architecture and industrial design, and also emerging ones such as multimedia design and service design.

Heidegger, a German philosopher, has observed that good design is inconspicuous. While bad design sticks out like a sore thumb, good design fades into the background of our daily lives. The humble table is a relatively stabilized design through its countless iteration and improvements. However, the socio-economical values of our times inspire changes into table design, through the use of new materials, engineering techniques, or craftsmanship. Design plays a differentiating role in the production of table. IKEA, now ranked top 50 in Forbes list of World's Most Valuable Brand has in only a span of 60 years, transformed the global landscape of furniture production. It is now a ubiquitous household name. Its success is no accident, but through the effort of integrating design into its operational and production processes. (Forbes, 2013)

While far from substantive, there is early empirical evidence on the economic contribution of design, researched by countries such as UK, Singapore, South Korea, and Denmark. According to United Nations, the total world trade in creative goods and services, in 2011 was a record of \$624 billion (RM2 trillion), while, developing-countries averaged 12.1 per cent annual growth in exports of creative goods in that same time period. (UNESCO, 2013)

In United Kingdom, an in-depth 'Value of Design Survey' of 503 businesses conducted by the Design Council shows that for every £100 a design alert business spends on design increases its turnover by £225. (Design Council, 2011) As further evidence of the economic value of design, the UK Design Council has tracked the progress of 63 firms that have been using "high-quality" design since 1994 in what is called the UK Design Index. Over the last decade, these companies have outperformed the London Stock Exchange's FTSE Index by 200%. (Design Council, 2007) Similarly, A 2003 survey of 820 companies by Denmark similarly found out that the companies that employed design achieve growth revenues that are 22% higher than companies that did not. (National Agency for Enterprise and Housing, 2003)

In 2001, Singapore conducted a study on the economic impact of product and visual communication design activities of 3500 design establishments. It is discovered that the economic spin-offs from design were much higher than other industries. It is higher than computers, banking services, or even petrochemical refining. Design production integrates multiple industries, and therefore is one of the best ways to enhance and create new value in any industry even for economies in different tiers. (Ministry of Communications and Information, 2013)

As a case study, the success of South Korea presents one of the strongest evidence that design-centric investments and policies led by the government will help to accelerate growth. The Korean government credits the success of its manufacturing industry, including global players Samsung and LG, to the investment in design. Prior to 1960, South Korea was ravaged by the Korean War which left its citizens impoverished and famished. At that time, its exports averaged \$33 million (RM107 million) a year, and represented only 13% of its imports which averaged at \$250 million (RM814 million). In order to lift the country out of poverty, General Park Chung Hee launched economic development plans that will signify its transition from agriculture based economy to manufacturing and now advanced design services. (Design Management Insititute, 2004)

South Korea crafted a design policy in which the first five-year-plan for industrial design promotion (1993-1997) rapidly boosted the expansion of design firms in Korea. However, the challenge arising from the Asian Financial Crisis was for fundamental innovation in Korea's design strategy, to promote quality in design, and not just quantity, in order to boost exports. Following that, the second five-year-plan was then launched improve the overall quality of Korean design, including efforts to raise public awareness about design, establishing infrastructure such as the Korean Design Centre, enhancing design education, encouraging industries to employ design, and also hosting international events that promote the Korean brand. By having design at the top of its national agenda, South Korea engineered its own economic and cultural dominance. (Design Management Institute, 2004)





Adding a business perspective on why businesses do not use design as a valuable differentiator.

**It is purely the strategic logic of a business that determines if it will, or will not, value design. There are two broad strategies to succeed in business: cost leadership and product leadership.**

**Debiprasad Dash**

Professor and Dean,  
Faculty of Business and Design,  
Swinburne University of Technology,  
Sarawak, Malaysia



**Designers should be regarded as Professionals, and not be placed in the Talent category by the government.**

**Professor Dr. Hj. Khairul Aidil  
Azlin Abd. Rahman**

Pereka Representative,  
University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS),  
Sarawak, Malaysia

Commenting on key changes that needs to happen at governmental level to cause major shift in salaries earned by designers.





# Towards A Design Strategy

---

There needs to be a concerted effort from all sectors to invest in a design strategy. The role of the public sector is extremely crucial in this regard. Design is practised by businesses which have little resources to engage in research and development desired for progressing our design capabilities. Government assistance is also required to catalyse a culture of research to address critical design issues such as sustainability in and through design.

Moreover, as reported by the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (APFC), issues such as sustainability are a public good, not a source of profit. Therefore they require urgent and long-term investment that does not attract typical venture capital. (MacLeod et. al., 2007)

As a holistic framework towards design development, various countries have produced their own design strategies. Developing countries are also creating such design strategies to model the examples of advanced economies. The common elements of such strategies include creating a holistic design policy, investing in a design infrastructure, engaging with SMEs, supporting design education and training, and promoting design

awareness through branding and marketing. Some of the examples, as researched by APFC (2007) is listed below:

In 2003, the government of New Zealand announced it would invest over C\$10 million (RM30 million) in a five-year strategy to disseminate information about design, assist businesses to make better use of design and improve the quality of design education.

In 2002 the government of Taiwan announced a Cultural and Creative Industries Development Plan as part of its Challenge 2008: Taiwan Development Plan with a goal of using innovation, design and branding as a means of upgrading and enhancing Taiwanese business.

India has prepared a National Design Strategy that was approved in February of 2007. It will address education, use of design by SMEs, intellectual property, branding and design exports.

Singapore has developed and begun implementing the DesignSingapore Initiative, its first national collaborative design strategy. The main objective of the five-year strategy, initiated in 2003, is to build a foundation for a strong design culture in Singapore. Direct annual investment in the design strategy is nearly SD\$10 million (RM26 million). This funding is expected to provide a return on investment by leveraging private spending. For example, the SD\$3 million (RM7.8 million) that the government invested in the Singapore design festival attracted total business spending of four times that amount for a total budget of over SD\$12 million (RM31 million).

The Republic of Korea has one of the most comprehensive national design strategies of any nation. When Korean goods became less competitive in the 1990s due to price, the government's Committee for Globalization Policy began to develop its national design agenda. Korea has implemented five-year plans in design to put the country's design industries on a par with those of developed countries, with dramatically increased employment opportunities for designers and a general increase in design awareness by the general public. The goal underlying this strategy has been to improve the competitiveness and brand reputation of Korea's major export firms through better design.

Various governments are already implementing actions and programmes identified in their design policies to accelerate the capacity of design to enhance competitiveness and solve problems. We must learn from the best of these existing practices while seeking to understand our own design industry as well as the challenges it faces.

**In today's business climate, it's critical for Designers to distinguish themselves by demonstrating "added-value". The Designer's "added-value" is defined by more than flawless execution and pleasing aesthetics, it also implies the ability to actively contribute to the shape and direction of the Project.**

**Zelda Harrison**

**Indigo Ambassador**

In order to effectively highlight the true of value of design to Malaysian policy makers, local Designers must demonstrate their capacity as visionaries. They need to speak the policymaker's language, understand context, and directly address their concerns. This capacity to envision and anticipate larger issues and scenarios is what distinguishes a "visionary" designer from a "functionary" designer.

Relating to the matured state of design economy in the United States where they have identified two distinct roles of a designer; visionaries vs. functionaries.







**There is a revolution happening on educating thinkers, not to educate skill based at the end of chain, rather, as visionaries.**

**Professor Helmut Lueckenhausen**

Pro-Vice Chancellor and CE  
Swinburne University of Technology,  
Sarawak, Malaysia

Commenting on his role as Convenor of Cumulus Leaders Forum, the International Association of Universities and Colleges of Art, Design and Media.



# Birth of a Design Nation

---

Leading countries of innovation acknowledges the contribution of branding as an economic enabler and leverages design at both a national and corporate level. Branding a nation complements the main industries that drive the country's economic wellbeing, and aligns the nation with a shared vision and identity. For example, the reputation of German engineering is a mark of assurance for its companies' exports, such as BMW. It is little known that close to 70% of each vehicle bearing the BMW brand is designed and manufactured by a global network of suppliers such as Magna International. (MacLeod et. al., 2007)

Korea's design policies has enhanced Korean companies such as LG, Samsung, and Kia becoming household brands. India's emerging National Design Policy also aims to position 'Designed in India' as catchphrase for quality and utility. (Government of India, 2011) In each example, the governments invest strategically in national and international branding and marketing strategies in order to achieve these goals.

National design awards serve to strengthen the profession by recognizing good design. Japan Institute of Design Promotion have created the 'Good Design Award' in 1957 to recognize and promote well-designed products, with the main award criteria stated as 'whether or not product can bless and enrich society and people's lives through its design.' Winning brands and products can be promoted with the 'G Mark' attached. Its positive effects have been recorded through a survey, with a clear understanding from the public that the mark represents excellence in function and performance. Korea and Taiwan have now adopted the Good Design Award. (G-Mark, 2014)

A Good Design mark increases confidence in a product or company and subsequently enhances its development and sales. In a 2005 study of South Korea's design programmes, it is discovered that Good Design product sales increase an average of 22 times than those without the mark. South Korea also make deliberate efforts to confer the Korea Design Award to companies and individuals who contribute to its design industry, hence increasing the prestige of practitioners and the industry as a whole. (MacLeod et. al., 2007)

In 2005, Singapore inaugurated the President's Design Awards, which focus on the recognition of excellence. Singapore's strategy includes the identification and development of iconic Singapore in all areas of design. In the words of DesignSingapore Council:

"The President's Design Award recipients are the standard bearers for design excellence, models for future generations of designers to match and exceed. As these standards permeate into the consciousness of society, they bring about a greater general awareness and appreciation of quality design." (2014)

In Malaysia, there are already commendable efforts by both public and private institutions that confer their own awards in recognition of good design. Further support will be needed to encourage the number of submissions to such competitions and awards. Some of the notable design awards and competitions are:

1. Malaysian Design Council (MRM) – Malaysia Good Design Mark (MGDM)
2. Malaysian Institute of Architects (PAM) – PAM Awards, PAM Gold Medal
3. Malaysian Institute of Interior Designers (MIID) – MIDA Awards
4. Institute of Landscape Architects Malaysia (ILAM) – Malaysia Landscape Architecture Awards
5. Association of Accredited Advertising Agents of Malaysia (4As) – Kancil Awards

Malaysians are not lacking in pride when it comes to our country. When Datuk Lee Chong Wei competes with Lin Dan, the entire nation watches with abated breath, supporting and praying for the World No.1 badminton player. As with Datuk Lee Chong Wei, Datuk Mohammad Nor Khalid (Lat), Yasmin Ahmad, and Dato' Jimmy Choo are significant cultural icons who stand as unifying factors in the country. They have contributed to the national brand by elevating the field of design to world class standards. We need to craft a design vision that moves Malaysia forward, for Malaysia to become a trusted name in the international design industry.



**In Seoul,  
the economy  
has to change  
from construction  
business into  
something new.  
We had to bring  
design to promote  
the economy back  
to Seoul.**

**Kyle Kim**

Board Member, ico-D

Referencing what took  
South Korea to move  
into the direction  
of Design to revive  
its economy.





# Education

---

Not only can the export of designed products help grow a country's economy, mature design knowledge will translate research into value, and catapult economies into high-value innovation-driven economy. Here, we pull together a few education initiatives by leading design-centric countries.

Singapore and South Korea are leaders in education, consistently improving their education standards even at the top. It is thus of little surprise that they take a proactive stance in emphasising design education in both public and private institutions to educate a skilled design workforce. The aim of these highly competitive countries is to establish themselves as the hub for design and innovation excellence.

Armed with a Designed in Singapore agenda, Singapore has introduced new design courses in their leading universities to drive innovation, including Nanyang Technological University, National University of Singapore, and the recently opened Singapore University of Technology and Design, developed in collaboration with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

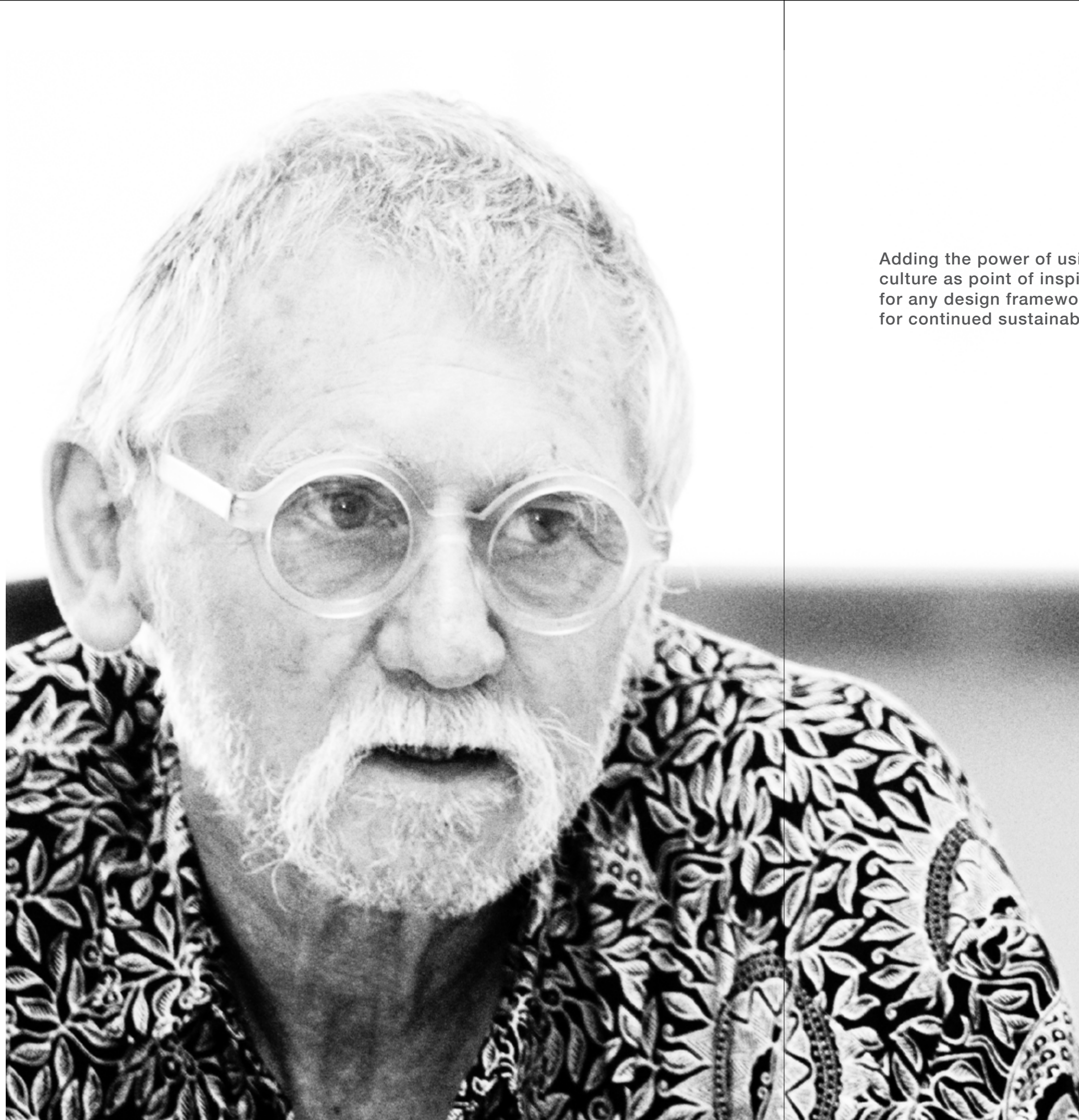
In Korea, there has been a huge growth in post-secondary education infrastructure and enrolment over the past forty years. Universities more than doubled from 70 in 1965 to 163 in 2002, while the amount of colleges grew from 48 in 1965 to 159 in 2002. There are estimated 230 institutions delivering design education in Korea. Not taking into account architecture, there is close to 64,000 students of design at Korean colleges, 49,000 at Korean universities and 6,500 students enrolled in graduate design programmes.

In total, there are now more than 100,000 students in Korea studying design, with the largest portion of those studying graphic design. (MacLeod et. al., 2007) This shows a highly admirable growth in design education in Singapore and Korea. However, they pale in comparison to the expansions in China.

Bloomberg Businessweek published an article in the middle of the last decade with the headlines 'Designed in China'. This signifies a progressive shift from manufacturing, or 'Made in China' to innovation, 'Designed in China'. In order to facilitate the shift, design is on the rise in universities as the country's education responds to the industrial need for design talents and researchers. (2006) Five years ago, China graduated only 1,500 industrial designers annually. Today, it produces 10,000 through its 400 schools offering design courses. These 400 institutions represent a 2,000% increase in the number of Chinese design schools since 1980. (MacLeod et. al., 2007)

Malaysia also has a large number of public and private post-secondary institutions offering design courses. There is an indication that there is a significant demand for design and the attractiveness of this profession to youths. Hence, it is crucial that the government acts as a custodian of good design standards and supports world-class design education for the betterment of the country.

Education without a doubt represents the spine of a nation's design capacity. It provides the single most important element of the success of the industry, its people. Singapore, Korea, and China are taking a holistic design strategy, by not only promoting design businesses, but also ensuring a supply of design talents to run these businesses.



Adding the power of using  
culture as point of inspiration  
for any design frameworks  
for continued sustainability.

**We must create and  
design from within  
culture, otherwise  
it will not sustain.**

**David Lancashire**

Chair of the Indigo Advisory Group



Responding to the role  
of wREGA as a professional  
body and what needs to be  
done for Malaysia.

**To make design more  
recognized in this country,  
we must not reject the  
idea of collaborating with  
the government. We need  
to work together to invent  
new policies and blueprint  
for a national design  
development.**

**Zachary Ong**

President 2012 - present  
wREGA Malaysia





# Of Our Design Talents

Having outlined the various design strategies undertaken globally, our next step is to ensure that we have a skilled design workforce who can support these strategies. In an effort to gain insights into Malaysia's design profession, we interviewed a panel of design practitioners who have experienced working overseas, to draw a comparative view between their home country and host country. Listed below are the questions we have asked, in addition to gathering basic information about their backgrounds:

1. Describe the Professional reasons for working (or have worked) abroad.
2. From your experience, is Design important for Malaysia in aspects of education, commerce, economic and governance? Please elaborate.
3. In your opinion, what is Malaysia lacking in terms of Design? What are the solutions to these lacking?
4. What would be the ideal personal/professional circumstances to happen in the Malaysian Design industry to draw you back to work in Malaysia?



# Dr. Zainurul Rahman, Ph. D

Senior Lecturer, CEO  
Department of Graphic Design and Visual Communication,  
School of the Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang

Full Name Zainurul Aniza,  
Abd Rahman

Date of birth 19 September 1975

Place of birth Georgetown,  
Penang

Marital status Married

No. of children 1

Dr. Zainurul is a practicing communication designer and a senior lecturer at the Department of Graphic Design and Visual Communication at the School of the Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia since May 2012. She started her carrier as a designer in Penang in 1993 as a Display artist at Park Royal hotel before continue practicing into different areas of design (such as graphic design, communication design, etc.) and branding. Her experiences are from local Malaysian design artefacts to the international branding strategies and communication through fifteen years teaching, consulting and practicing graphic design in Malaysia and Australia. Her online research journal [www.malaysianidentity.com](http://www.malaysianidentity.com) and [www.nurulrahman.com](http://www.nurulrahman.com) tells stories about design in different societies, culture and environments. Since Nov 2012, Dr. Zainurul was appointed as the Head department of Graphic Design and Visual Communication at the School of the Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia and also a design manager at the School's design studio, U-Design Lab. Her practices involve connecting design in multiply disciplinary and make connections with the community and finding ways to implements design thinking in facilitating Malaysian ways of doing.

*What aspects of Design are you passionate about?  
Please elaborate.*

Design is part of everyday life, as it should be. It is the aspect of innovation and the process of design that captures my passion.

*Describe your highest accomplishment(s) as a Designer.*

My highest accomplishment as a designer is when I was in my final year of my bachelors study where the team of ten junior designers that I supervised won multiple awards. One of them was ITEX 2001 Design – we won a prize for a specially designed booth. It was a great accomplishment to work and collaborate with others in the project.

*Describe the Professional reasons for working  
(or have worked) abroad.*

I had 6 years of experience working in Melbourne, Australia. That adds to the 8 years of working and practicing design in Malaysia. The professional reasons that attracted me to work abroad are

1. The acknowledgement of design as part of any decision making process,
2. Design is not only about money, it is also about educating, about giving back to the community.

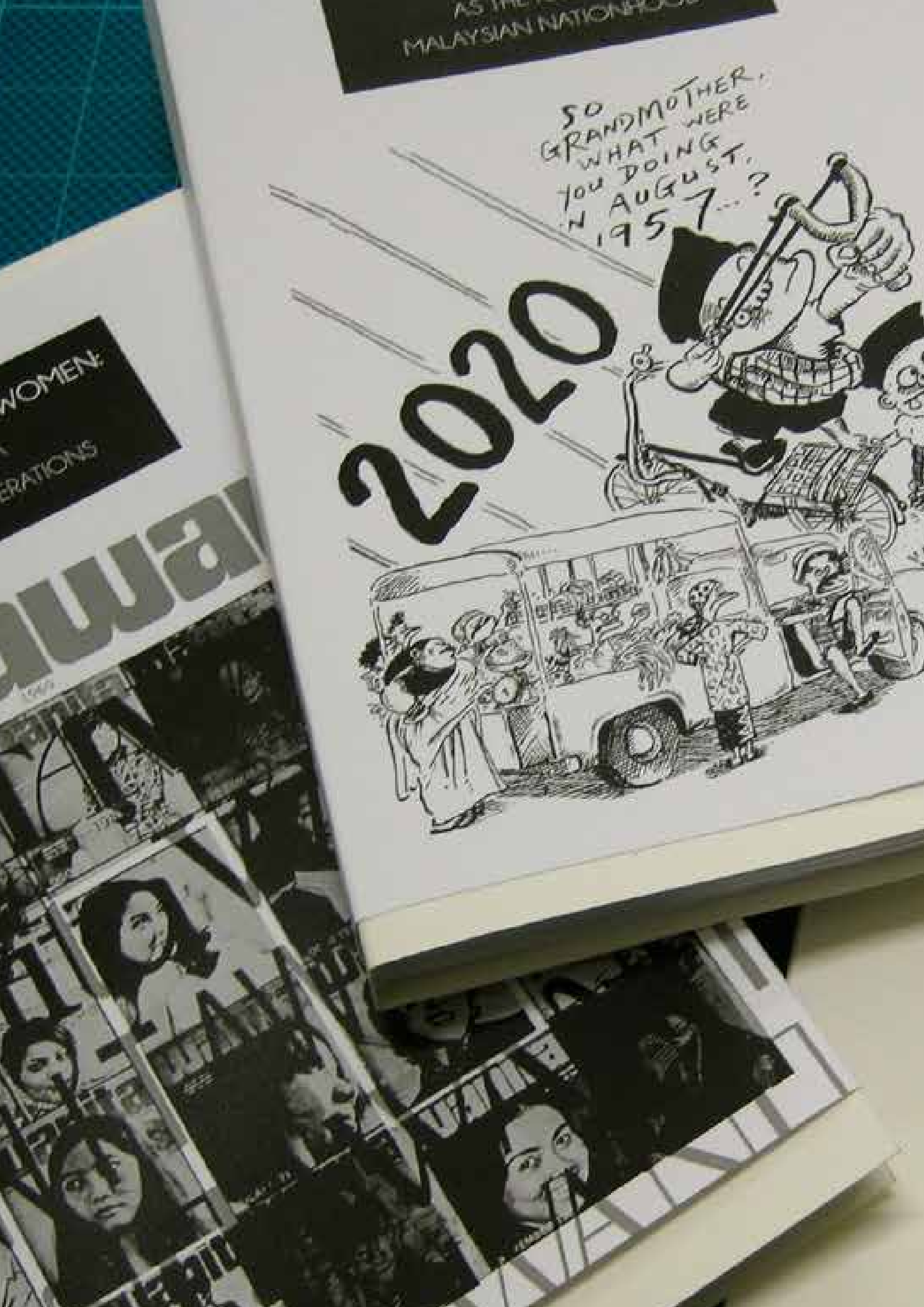
Most designers were involved in any NGO's giving free services and consultation. These are the things that is lacking in Malaysia.

*From your experience, is Design important for Malaysia in aspects of education, commerce, economic and governance? Please elaborate.*

Definitely. Design should not be considered as one discipline but should be considered as part of everyday life. It can facilitate the critical thinking and improves our society ways of doing. Victor Papanek in his cult book 'Design for the Real World' stated that,

"All men [sic] are designers. All that we do, almost all the time, is design, for design is basic to all human activity. The planning and patterning of any act towards a desired, foreseeable end constitutes the design process. Any attempt to separate design to make it a thing by itself, works counter to the fact that design is the primary underlying matric of life (1972:3).

That said, design need to be guided and thought, so that it can be utilized in several areas such as education, commerce, economic, governance and many more.



Proposed Logo Design for Mac Guffin Band.

Vintage, Modern with a touch of Femininity.  
20 April 2012 designed by Nurul Rahman



CD and Logo design for Mac Griffin (French group) April 2012.



*In your opinion, what is Malaysia lacking in terms of Design? What are the solutions to these lacking?*

I believe that Malaysians have always been a designer. We just need to identify the role and conscious of the process and existing of design in our day-to-day life. What seems to be the problem here is that we ignore the fact that designing is what our ancestors have been using to improve ways of life. My example to that is, how did we come up designing several tools for hunting and fishing? Or even tools for farming. Some of these tools are not the standard tools that you can find in any part of the world. Take bubu (a bamboo based fish trap that we put in the river to catch fish). That process required design thinking, and of course innovation. Yes it was for survival but yet we managed to design the tools to simplify our life.

*What would be the ideal personal/professional circumstances to happen in the Malaysian Design industry to draw you back to work in Malaysia?*

The ideal circumstances that will be able to draw me back to Malaysia is the support from the Malaysian government not only to acknowledge the importance of design in everyday life but to insert design processes and to add competent designers as part of any decision making process in relation to visual communication.





# Din Amri

Creative Director,  
Mereka.net

Full Name Rasidin Amri

Date of birth 19 October 1972

Place of birth Batu Pahat,  
Johor

Marital status Married

No. of children 2

In over a decade and a half I've done design work for top dogs and under dogs in Europe, Asia, Middle East and Australasia - in B2B, B2C, for profits, education and for charity. I have won awards, raised profiles, broken new barriers and expanded market shares for the clients I worked with. In Kuala Lumpur, I led and nurtured an award winning design team that now filled up senior creative roles in various agencies in Malaysia, China, Australia and New Zealand. I have also worked at several DesignWeek top 20 Digital Agency in London and Manchester. I now lead the brand creation, design direction, interaction and usability for financial technology company in South Manchester and help the company push new products and expand market share in America, Brazil and Australia.

---

*What aspects of Design are you passionate about?  
Please elaborate.*

Greasing the wheels of commerce with taste and style.

---

*Describe your highest accomplishment(s) as a Designer.*

For my recent accomplishment. Hitting number 3 at building the brand and services for Quintessential - from scratch to voted as Sunday Times TechTrack 100 and leading the UK's fastest growing financial technology company.

---

*Describe the Professional reasons for working  
(or have worked) abroad.*

Broaden my horizon. To gain new experiences.

---

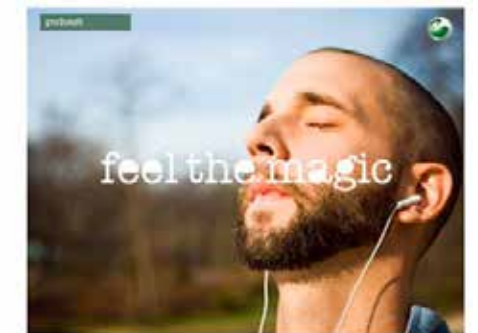
*From your experience, is Design important for Malaysia  
in aspects of education, commerce, economic and  
governance? Please elaborate.*

As the world is becoming more globalised and information sharing becoming more instantaneous – a well designed commodity, products, messages, content is becoming more crucial. Audiences and buyers are presented with more options that was not available to the earlier generation. In my days, we used to buy expensive books to get inspiration of what is current and latest from abroad. Now there are many free resources available online that replaces thick expensive books. Some of the most talented and successful current senior creative's in Kuala Lumpur that I hired DID NOT come from a design school. Anyone with a copy of bootleg Photoshop and Illustrator and hundred of hours of online tutorials can produce better design piece than 'design graduates'. I see this happening here in UK too. The more they do, the better they get at it.





SOLEBAY MUSIC



*In your opinion, what is Malaysia lacking in terms of Design? What are the solutions to these lacking?*

Malaysia today in terms of design appreciation and acceptance among the wider rakyat is leaps and bounds from where it was 10-15 years ago. Again, as the world is opening up and access of what is great and current globally is instantaneous the cream of designer will always come on top. There will always be the top 1% or 5% of designers that will make Malaysia proud. As for the rest, they will still play their role in keeping the rest of the commerce going.

*What would be the ideal personal/professional circumstances to happen in the Malaysian Design industry to draw you back to work in Malaysia?*

It is in the plan that I will be using Malaysia as the base for my technology startup! Stay tuned.





# Kay Khoo

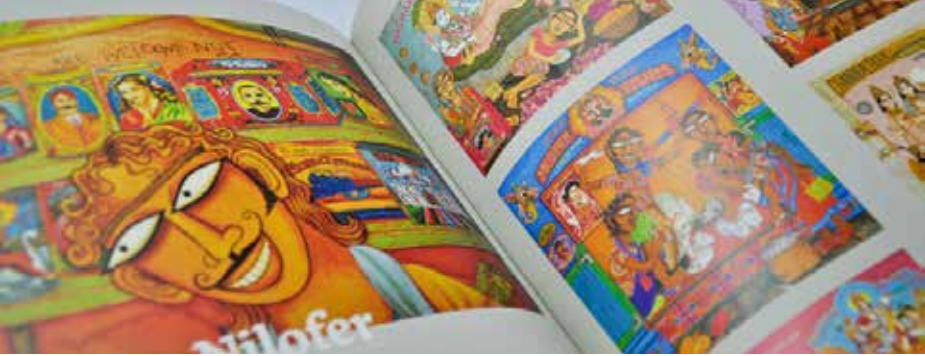
Creative Director  
Addikt.nl and Kyoorius

Full Name Khoo Kay Hong  
Date of birth 7 March 1972  
Place of birth Penang  
Marital status Married  
No. of children 2

19 years ago, Kay Khoo stumbled upon the world of layout and typography while volunteering with University of Alberta's students' newspaper. Intrigued by the power of visual communications, he joined the design industry upon graduation, armed with a degree in economics and without a portfolio to show. He went on to work with several design studios, before establishing Figtree Design in 2005.

Together with his team of collaborators, Kay has taken on a diverse range of projects, from identity systems, publications to complex web portals. Current projects include redesigning FIAT's flagship showrooms to coincide with their re-entry to India.

While he has worked with an extensive list of clients throughout his career, for the recent years, his main efforts were working with associations and corporates which directly influence the creative community. In Malaysia, he has been working closely with 4As since 2005, and helped launched Malaysia Most Valuable Brands Awards (MMVB). Figtree Design also handles the communications design for Malaysian Advertisers Association and Malaysian Media Awards (Media Specialists Association). On the regional level, Kay works with Asian Federation of Advertising Associations (AFAA), the organisers of Adfest. In 2006, he co-founded Kyoorius (India). From Kyoorius, numerous projects were launched, including the widely circulated design industry magazine - Kyoorius Magazine, and the popular annual design conference, Kyoorius Designyatra.



What aspects of Design are you passionate about?  
Please elaborate.

I am interested in using creativity to solve communication problems, and using design as one of the tools available.

Design, without a doubt, is a powerful tool to reduce complex communication challenges to simple narratives that are accessible by the masses.

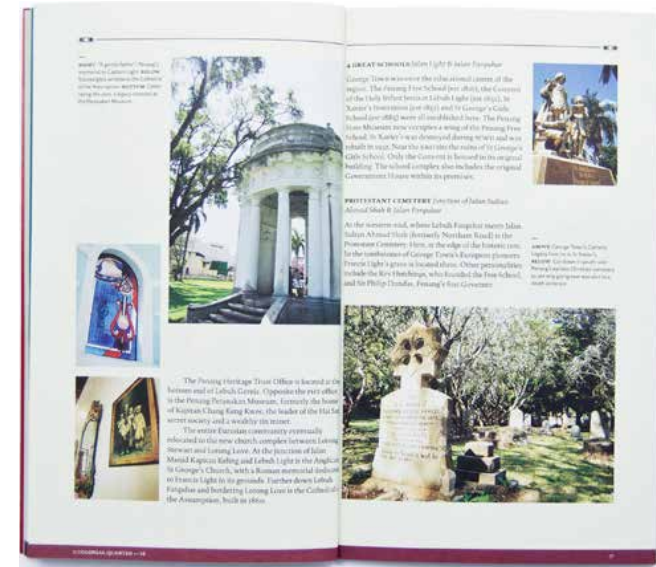
The bigger picture is however to leverage on creative thinking, together with systematical analysis and strategic planning, and then using design as a tool, before considering utilizing any (or all) of platforms available - print, digital, space.

Describe your highest accomplishment(s) as a Designer.

Giving Malaysia its highest accomplishment(s) as a Designer. mentation by creating the Kancil Awards Annual in 2005, and the online-archives in kancilawards.com (2006). Both platforms are now the best available resources for researching on Malaysia's advertising works and the people behind well-known campaigns.

Launching Kyoorius Designyatra in 2006, which has become the biggest design conference in India, and one of the largest in the world, consistently being recommended within the design industry as one of the conferences to go to. Launching Kyoorius Magazine, which is now one of the most respected creative industry magazine in India, and also an in demand magazine for foreign companies wanting to tap on and enter the India's design market.





*Describe the Professional reasons for working (or have worked) abroad.*

Growing market: India is booming, and India is changing. Local clients generally are not just spending, but spending to reinvent / innovate so as to break away from the clutter. Foreign clients are spending to gain faster entry into the India market. There's an abundance of work to be done. Comparatively, Malaysia is stagnant.

Relatively low income, deteriorating margins within the creative industry, and the inflation that drives up the cost-of-living in Malaysia. Together with the quality of education, and social crimes.

Opportunities to work with a larger network - on daily basis, I work with creative people from everywhere around the globe. India is a magnet for talents, Malaysia drives away talents.

*From your experience, is Design important for Malaysia in aspects of education, commerce, economic and governance? Please elaborate.*

What is more important is creative thinking, which greatly overlaps with design. Creativity provides the foundation for break-through solutions, design brings the solutions to life. Whether it is education or commerce, the saddest situation would be to see organizations not progressing. It could be because of complacency, or could be because of circumstances (resources, skillset), but ultimately, progress is possible with creativity. One first need to think differently, before designing a new education programme, for instance, a new business model or a new strategy.






---

*In your opinion, what is Malaysia lacking in terms of Design? What are the solutions to these lacking?*

Malaysia is too results-oriented. We encourage people to work hard, to work effectively. We encourage children to study hard, to achieve results. We measure results according to predefined objectives and targets. What we don't do enough is to encourage people to think differently - to explore alternative ways to achieve end results. We don't encourage people to question whether the predefined targets are actually good targets at all. We just do, because we have to achieve.

That's the same with design. We set briefs, we set goals, and we design with purpose of achieving goals. What we don't do enough is to question the briefs and ask whether the goals are good enough. We are obsessed about the process and the details of designing, but often lose sight of greater things that could have been. Too many missed opportunities.

Solutions? For first - start with education. Move away from results-oriented, to more self-initiated works. For design education (or other tertiary education) – emphasize more on encouraging thoughts than rewarding results. For corporates - incentive schemes / support for new ideas. For professional creatives - evaluate and reward good ideas, make them tangible IPs that form a great collection of resources for the future.

---

*What would be the ideal personal/professional circumstances to happen in the Malaysian Design industry to draw you back to work in Malaysia?*

Change in business climate - when corporations realize its not just about marketing and promotions, and ROIs are based on sales. This happens when there's a real growth in the nation's economy and companies start investing in the future by initiating longer-term projects (For example, experience centers, education programmes, social outreach initiatives, etc). Change in fees structure - when design consultancy services could be considered as professional services (such as legal practice, medical, or accounting) and a minimum fee structure is in place.

(Personal): Change in the quality of education. I have two growing kids. I want good education, and Malaysia is simply not good enough.





# Mel Lim

Principal, Creative Director  
MLD

Full Name Mel Lim

Date of birth 24 September 1977

Place of birth Penang

Marital status Married

No. of children 1

Mel Lim cares to design a better world. She knows that begins with the individual and a commitment to holding fast to one's dreams, wherever they may lead. This award-winning, Malaysian-born design leader received her foundation design diploma from the London Institute's Central Saint Martins College of Arts and Design and then moved across the world to attend the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California where she graduated with highest distinction, earning a Bachelor's of Science in Environmental Design. Mel helps lead the industry in exploring how to use design methodologies in business innovation. Intent on actively shaping a better world, she is committed to understanding the processes of designing brands, and the ways they impact businesses and customers, both socially and environmentally.

Mel has more than 15 years of international experience in project management, user experience design, and brand development. She has worked with top architectural and design firms in the United States, and since establishing her own firm in 2003 has been consulting and designing for top Fortune 100 companies and others, including Comcast, UGG/Deckers, and Axure. Mel's work, which can be seen in London, Tokyo, Copenhagen, and all the way to the UAE, has won numerous awards including the Creativity Annual, PRINT, W3, IMA, American Institute of Architects (AIA) LA, The Webby, and has been featured in more than 500 magazines and blogs worldwide including New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, C Magazine, Lucky Magazine, Riviera, Interiors, and DMI-Design Management Review.

Mel is an active member of America's Design Management Institute and contributes articles on design thinking, client management, and business innovation. She gives lectures and workshops worldwide on entrepreneurship, design strategy, and sustainability. In 2012 she hosted the first DMI Night Out in San Diego, attended by more than 130 designers, principals, and business owners. She also traveled to Taiwan and held a two-day workshop on UX Design & Design Management in Taipei and a day-long conference on Designing Life and Brands through Aspirational Thinking in Taichung. In 2013 she will speak in April at the RE: Design Conference in Silicon Valley, in May at the Web Visions conference in Portland, and in October she has been invited to be part of the Global Advisory Council for The World Brand Congress 2013 being held in Taj Lands End, Mumbai.



*What aspects of Design are you passionate about?  
Please elaborate.*

I am passionate about using design methodologies and principles to solve challenges, help brands and businesses design experiences that shape stories of culture, while quietly making a better world.

*Describe your highest accomplishment(s) as a Designer.*

90% of my studio's work is award-winning. To continue to maintain that record, year after year has been both remarkable and rewarding. It validates our ability to compete in such a competitive landscape as it continues to prove that we are able to innovate and produce highly creative work albeit my studio's size of only 5 team members.

In the last few years, my leadership role in design reached international audience. Not only was I contributing in terms of articles, webinars and workshops in the topics of design and brand management, but I've been sought after by elite organizations to speak at their global events.

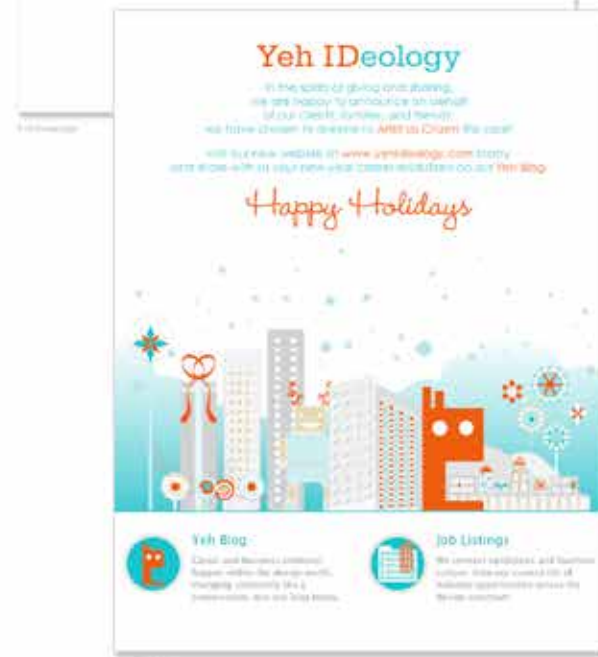
Last year, CPC (China Productivity Center) invited me to host a 2-day workshop and lecture in Taiwan. They wanted me to teach them UX design methodologies and principles used in the West to create more value for designers in the East.

Last month, The World Brand Congress invited me to be part of the Global Advisory Council.

Just this 2013 alone, I'm already booked for 4 prestigious speaking engagements, where I'm in the company of Fortune 100 CEOs, and design leaders around the globe.



© 2014 Yeh IDEology



© 2014 Yeh IDEology



© 2014 Yeh IDEology



© 2014 Yeh IDEology



© 2014 Yeh IDEology



© 2014 Yeh IDEology

*Describe the Professional reasons for working (or have worked) abroad.*

I came to the US when I was 19. Despite the economic hardship faced in 1997, and my parents inability to continue supporting my tertiary education, I had never thought of returning home to Malaysia. I knew that if I had wanted to become a great world known designer, I would have to find a way to graduate and build my career here in the US.

Despite my lack of knowledge and experience in American history and brands, business etiquettes and cultures, I was able to grow my career slowly but surely, navigating through corporate politics while learning about design management and become the industry leader today all through merit.

The US is truly what immigrants call the land of the free. It didn't matter who my parents were, what color I was, what type of education I had, this country allowed me to build the dreams I had envisioned, based on productivity and hard work.





*From your experience, is Design important for Malaysia in aspects of education, commerce, economic and governance? Please elaborate.*

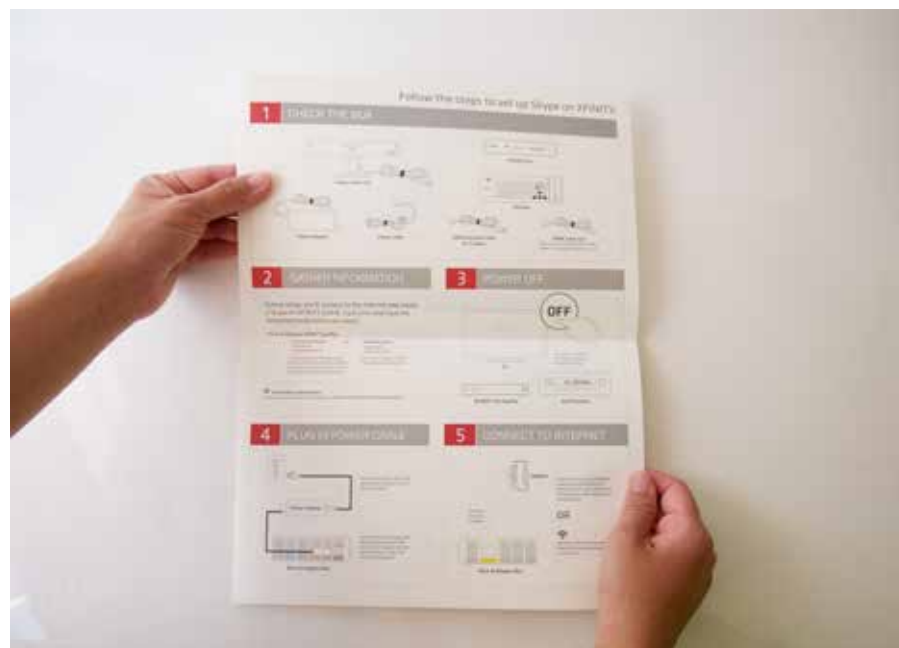
Design is important in any country and it is especially important for Malaysia. My late father and I had this discussion back in 2010; about instilling creative thinking in primary and secondary education, and how important it is to produce thinkers in the next new economy. Even engineers, scientists are encouraged to learn from designers and artists, to nurture the ability to create and explore, to rapid prototype, to have the flexibility to think beyond constraints.

In this new economy, everyone aspires to lead, to create the next big thing. Here in the US, the country recognizes that if we continue to emphasize on vocational skills and systematic thinking, it will not be able to compete in a global market. There has been a lot of push in design education in post-graduate courses through out the US, and Canada. Basically, there is an urgency to bridge the gap between design and business: to train MBA's to think like designers and vice versa.

There is also a huge maker movement in the US, where children as early as elementary school (ages 5-11) explore arts, crafts, engineering, and science using the DIY (Do-It-Yourself) mindset.

In addition, in the US, there has been a big push on Design Entrepreneurship. These new breed of successful entrepreneurs, to name a few, have founded Pinterest, Kickstarter, Airbnb and the founders have one thing in common. They are all designers and have created tech startups with positive social impact.





---

*In your opinion, what is Malaysia lacking in terms of Design? What are the solutions to these lacking?*

I have been away from Malaysia for almost 2 decades, thus my knowledge of its current design movement is very limited.

Nonetheless, based on input from current clients and friends in Malaysia/ Singapore, whom are seeking our advice in brand positioning and UX design, we conclude that in the micro sense of things, designers are still designing for the client and NOT the users/customers. User centered design principles almost do no exist in the entire design process.

In the macro sense, I think businesses and corporations still view design as an afterthought. Many large corporations here in the US, have already embraced design as part of its innovation process ie. GE, P&G. Design is now being used to solve large challenging and complex business problems.

In order to move to this stage, Malaysia has to produce a new breed of designers with the caliber to lead, in the business and technology world.

---

*What would be the ideal personal/professional circumstances to happen in the Malaysian Design industry to draw you back to work in Malaysia?*

My family is now in the US. My husband and I have built a great business here for ourselves and a nice lifestyle for our son.

Many of our Malaysian leads are still questioning the validity of the work we do; whether it's strategy or creative work. I have no time to pursue those leads nor do I want to invest the time in pursuing them, while I have many great clients here in the US, that are coveting and paying premium dollars for our services.

Nonetheless, like any other new project or client, we would be interested in taking on challenging global projects, if opportunities are met with the right logistics.



**Overall, the interviewed design professionals shared a common belief that design is of importance to a country's development and that Malaysia has a high potential of growth in design capacity. However, a few areas that Malaysia lacks are design appreciation, quality design education, design leadership, and professional opportunities. This gives us a good indication of areas to investigate with further design research.**

# The Recommendations

1. **Conduct a thorough research on design capabilities of Malaysia**

**Various substantial research needs to be conducted in order to take stock on current conditions of the design industries particularly focused on enabling the design economy. This will later support the formation of the following recommendations.**

2. **Create a National Design Blueprint**

**Primarily centred on design to achieve a high income nation by the year 2020 with sound and concrete plan leading up to 2050.**

3. **Develop and enforce new design policies**

**Enabling and effective policies needs to be deployed to foster Malaysia's design economy, particularly those that has direct impact and raise the country's GDP.**

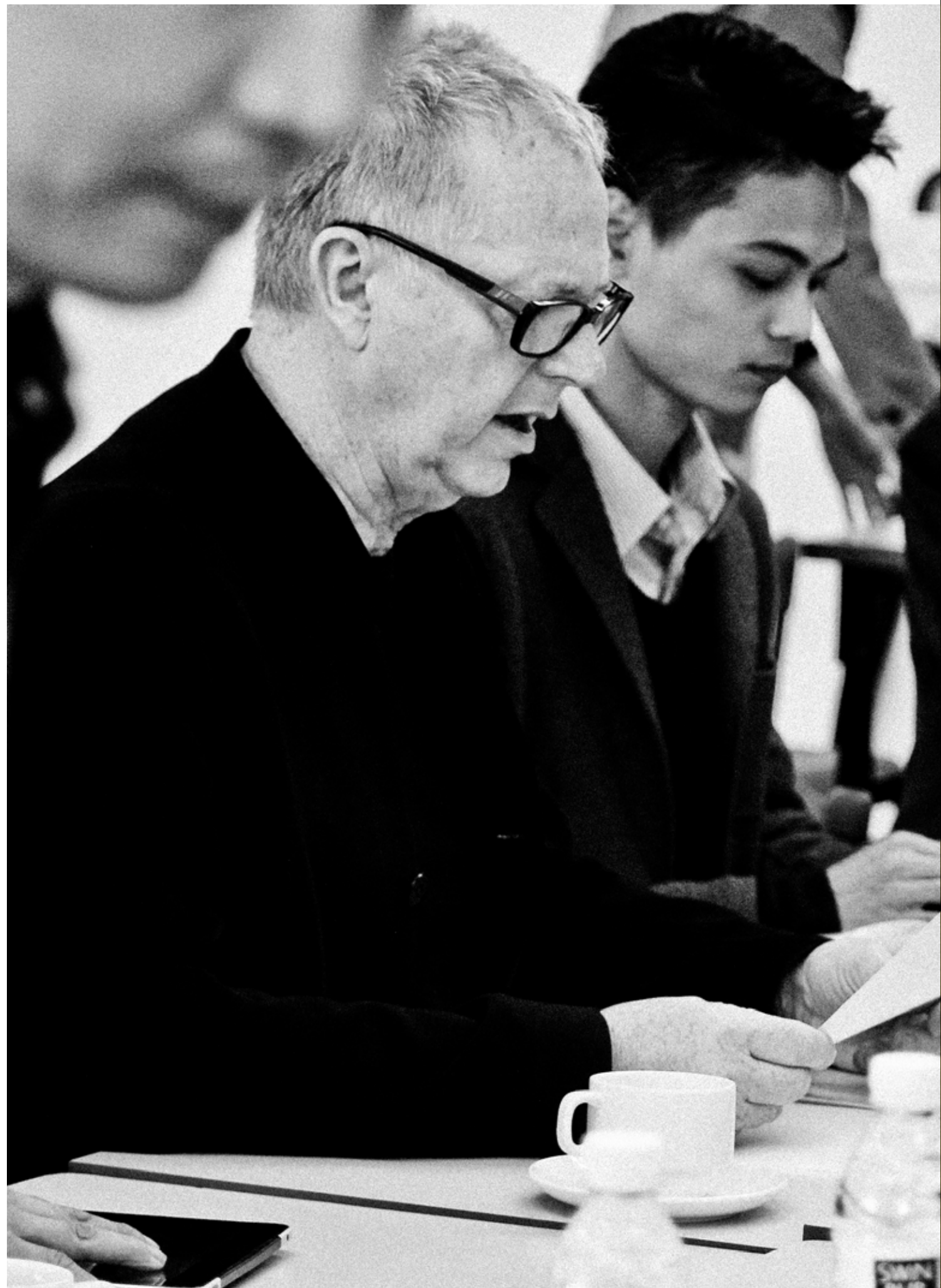




Behind from left to right:  
Ahmad Azuar Zainuddin, Gregory Wee, Muhamad Razif Nasruddin, Karuna Pillay, David Lancashire,  
Vivian Toh, Zachary Ong, Tony Ward, Frida Larios, Tan Guat Ling

Front from left to right:  
Michael Goh Suk Keat, Kyle Kim, Zelda Harrison, Russell Kennedy, Harith Riza Rasid





**A designer  
should be  
the Initiator,  
the Facilitator  
and the Finisher  
collaborating  
with the  
government  
– a perfect team.**

Discussion adjourned at 1237.



# Reference

---

Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada. (2007, October) Design as an Instrument of Public Policy in Singapore and South Korea. Vancouver: MacLeod, D. et. al.

Bloomberg Businessweek. (2006, October 08). Designed in China. Retrieved January 3, 2014, from <http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2006-10-08/designed-in-china>

Design Council. (2007) The Value of Design Factfinder Report. London: Design Council.

Design Council. (2011, December) Design for Innovation. London: Design Council.

Design Management Institute. (2004) Design, Economic Development, and National Policy: Lessons from Korea. Boston: Cho Dong-Sung

DesignSingapore Council (2014) President's Design Award. Retrieved January 4, 2014 from [http://www.designsingapore.org/PDA\\_PUBLIC/content.aspx?sid=4](http://www.designsingapore.org/PDA_PUBLIC/content.aspx?sid=4)

Forbes. (2013) World's Most Valuable Brands. Retrieved January 3, 2014 from <http://www.forbes.com/companies/ikea/>

G-Mark. (2014) About GDA: General Info. Retrieved January 4, 2014 from <http://www.g-mark.org/about/g21.html>

Government of India. (2011) National Design Policy. India: Government of India

Ministry of Communications and Information. (2013, September 06) ERC: DesignSingapore. Singapore: Ministry of Communications and Information

National Agency for Enterprise and Housing. (2003, September) The Economic Effects of Design. Copenhagen: National Agency for Enterprise and Housing

UNESCO. (2013, November 14) Creative industries boost economies and development, shows UN Report. Retrieved January 4, 2014 from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/in-focus-articles/creative-industries-boost-economies-and-development-shows-un-report/>

World Economic Forum. (2013) The Global Competitiveness Report 2013-2014. Geneva: Schwab, K. (Ed.)

# Bibliography

---

Design Council. (2006, February) Red Paper 02: Transformation Design. London: Burns, C. et. al.

Design Council. (2008) Design Blueprint. London: Design Council.

Design Council. (2008) The Good Design Plan. London: Design Council.

Design Council. (2008, January 22) Company Spending on Design. London: Design Council.

Design Council. (2010) Design in the Knowledge Economy 2020. London: Design Council.

Design Council. (2010, January 15) Design Industry Research. London: Design Council.

Design Council. (2010, November) Multi-disciplinary Education in the UK. London: Design Council.

Design Council. (2011, December) Design for Innovation. London: Design Council.

Design Council. (2012, June) The Power of Design. London: Design Council.

Design Council. (2013, September 27) Design Delivers for Business. London: Design Council.

Institute for Manufacturing. (2009, April) International Design Scoreboard: Initial Indicators of International Design Capabilities. London: Moultrie, J. & Livesey, F.



**This discussion  
is to be compiled as  
a missive to the Prime  
Minister of Malaysia.**