

enterprise

D-BODHI

Giving new life to old wood

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WHEN Ms Anita Sam (picture) started importing eco-friendly furniture five years ago, customers snapped up pieces based on their design and craftsmanship. Today, consumers consider the environmental sustainability of the furniture's raw materials first, and design second.

"I think Singaporeans have reached a level of maturity where they love good design and quality, but they also want to be socially responsible," said the Singapore Permanent Resident and furniture industry veteran.

"It's the 'feel-good' factor ... not only does the furniture look good, it is also good for the environment."

Last Friday's official opening of the flagship d-Bodhi concept store, which Ms Sam said saw "very substantial sales", is testimony to her passion for environmental sustainability. In fact, sales at the eco-friendly furniture business have grown almost 10-fold from 2004 when it would ship out two containers a month to the 18 to 20 containers monthly now. The company aims to expand its monthly exports to some 30 containers this year and 50 next year.

d-Bodhi is one of a few reclaimed wood industry players in Singapore. The furniture range was started in 2002 by Dutch national Raymond Davids, a partner of the company. It recently set up a 3,200-square-foot flagship store at Alexandra Industrial Estate here and hopes to have 200 d-Bodhi shops worldwide by 2015.

d-Bodhi uses reclaimed teak



TREVOR TAN

from Indonesia, with pieces salvaged from buildings and railway sleepers and can be up to 100 years old.

"Reclaimed wood poses other challenges, such as the tedious collection of wood," said d-Bodhi's co-owner and director Ms Sam. A team of 700 in Indonesia is involved in the business — from sussing out buildings for sale to collection of wood.

Unlike buying new wood by volume, reclaimed wood comes in all shapes and sizes. It has to be processed more arduously, as items like nails, nuts and bolts and screws have to be removed before they can be stripped down. The planks then have to be sorted according to the type of furniture they are more suited to be in their next lifetime.

However, such teak has a special quality which Ms Sam and other aficionados love for the character its grain, natural finish and age lend.

The d-Bodhi line is marketed as a premium brand, with prices starting at \$300 for chairs and over \$3,000 for bedroom sets. d-Bodhi also distributes to 13 countries globally and aims to sell in 25 countries by next year.

It has been successful in getting the United States-based Forest Stewardship Council to start a new certification category, that is, "100 per cent recycled wood" for such furniture, different from new wood sourced from sustainable plantations.

"For many of our customers, it's a conscious decision to buy from us rather than from other shops," said Ms Sam.

"Some of them also tell me frankly that they entertain friends and business associates who are environmentally friendly."

That d-Bodhi's furniture come with an international "green" certification is the icing on the cake. The company has extended the eco-friendly aspect of the business to reuse sawdust generated during the furniture making process as they are pressed with a resin to be made into home accessories like tealight holders, coasters and table lamps.

Looking ahead, d-Bodhi is open to using other types of reclaimed wood. It is also looking into working with more Singapore designers through Spring Singapore.