

Asia-Pacific

THOMES *Tropical*

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Riotous Reflections: Bangkok's artful hotel



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Region Stick it to 'em

Are you a homeowner who likes to stay abreast of current trends? Do you find yourself constantly redecorating, changing from bold colours to pastels, floral patterns to geometric? Are you so fickle that the drop-cloth is currently stuffed in the corner, under the end table, for easy access? If so, Wall Print may have what you need.

Developed by French-born Julien Salut, Wall Print's adhesive murals resemble the vinyl stickers you'd find on the inside of a car window, except these are a lot more hip. No stranger to the arts, Salut has been working in graphics, including photography and printing, for over 15 years. Combining his love of nature and vintage décor with his affinity for interiors, Salut, together with his partner Clarissa, began working with wall decals, something they felt presented an easy means to a versatile and contemporary lifestyle.

The collection - its motto: "Make your life stylish" — includes a giant octopus, a high-stepping fashionista, an urban flare of birds, a faux beaded curtain and much, much more. The 2008 collection is cutting-edge, sometimes verging on the whimsical where, for example, it couples nesting dolls with spiralling flowers or retro video-game screens. Any and all can either be wall sized or else scaled down to the dimensions of your space. Custom orders are accepted. If you can't find the exact thing you're looking for, just describe it in a few lines, or send a collection of images, and Wall Print will try their best to produce it. One recent project was the pediatric wing of a Seattle hospital. "I saw my designs come to life and brighten the space in a fun and happy way," says Salut.

The adhesive designs are simple to apply, and come off as easily as a sticker. That way you can change your environment to fit your mood — whenever! (It's way easier than repainting.) **MFM**
www.wall-print.com

Vietnam
Design & Decor

In praise of Mantra

Achieving their common goal of "refusing to follow trends", three innovative international designers living in Saigon have joined forces to create their first shop. Both the pioneering Mantra store and its stunning original designs offer a refreshing retail concept for Saigon (ironically located opposite the city's colonial-founded Fine Arts Museum).

With its minimalist showroom style of white walls and studio lighting, the intimate Mantra makes the perfect backdrop to showcase exclusive leather bags and accessories by British-Indian Ms Anupa Horvil, as well as furniture, lighting and interior décor by Indian Vivek Chaudhary and Australian Kevin Lane.

Best-of-friends Vivek, Kevin and Anupa each come armed with their own individual flair, originality and diverse backgrounds, yet wonderfully complement each other wonderfully in their creative output for Mantra. They also share the same design concept: promoting beautiful quality objects that are environmentally friendly and sustainable, created with elements of Vaastu Sastra, the Indian art of designing and building of living environments in harmony with both physical and metaphysical considerations. They have devoted much thought to consumer and local workforce needs with practical, ergonomic design considerations for the former, and fair trading practices for the latter.

Items are hand-crafted in Vietnam. Inspired by the exceptional traditional craftsmanship of their adopted home, Mantra's designers aim to show that Vietnamese design can equal anything found on the global design stage. They have added a fusion of traditional and contemporary styles and techniques to an interesting mix of premium materials to get a unique "contemporary antiques" hybrid. Yet affordable prices and a hands-on designer approach belie the exclusive "wow factor" look.

The constantly evolving, limited-edition design collections feature white marble, multi-sized picture frames and curved table lights ethereally lit by candles (US\$10-89); dining table incorporating walnut top and sand-blasted aluminum legs (\$750); and funky leather laptop satchels and classic jewellery boxes. Striking lacquered MDF creations include lofty bun-shaped floor lamps and calming white "pool table" (\$300). **SC**

www.mantravietnam.com



Buy By DESIGN



Daun of the times

It took a second glance to realize what lay behind the shadowed inside of the propped-open shophouse door. Daun Gallery, an intimate homes shop, was opened in July 2007, just three months after the two owners first thought of embarking on the idea. The boutique setting fits well on Neil Road, where interior design shops, architectural firms and creative energy surrounds. "We work with an architect down the street," says owner Keith. "We supply them with items for their projects — it works well."

The collection on display is ever changing, with new items appearing often. Items regularly on display include creative jewellery, carefully selected ceramics, lighting, fabrics and textiles, tableware, art pieces and sculptures, accessories and cushions. A shop specialty is their carefully selected accent furniture — large chairs made out of rattan or woven leather add distinction to the collection.

Owners Keith and Ridwan have collected items during their travels throughout Southeast Asia. "Initial sourcing was from Indonesia," say the owners, "but recent travels have added new product lines from Thailand. In future, as the Gallery expands, we plan to visit Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia for additional interesting and different accessories for the home." **MF**

www.daungallery.com



Samui Loving the lounge

No one who walks into Ruen Design Studio — one of Samui's new breed of ultra — cool creative workshops — can resist sitting on the shop's best-selling piece of furniture, the EZ 70 Love Seat. And owners Gene and Nathan, from the UK, can't remember how many times they have included this modern Thai piece in furnishing high-end villas and hotels around the island. Their customers seem to fall in love with it at first sight.

The Love Seat was created by a young Thai talent, Matee Boonkerd, for The Lifeshop, a Singaporean furniture company. And, like much of The Lifeshop's furniture, the Love Seat is sleekly elegant, ultra-modern yet recognizably Asian. It's comfortable and efficient, while incorporating basic functions that many of its counterparts neglect.

The Love Seat stands 40cm high (below most Westerners' knee level) and about 80cm deep, with soft cushions that evoke an almost irresistible urge to lounge. What's more, it has slender frame arms made of solid teak plus a wide teak-veneered backrest, both elements subtly curved.

Although not quite quintessentially Thai, in the sense of Jim Thompson's silk products, the Love Seat's design shows a strong Thai influence. Its gift of relaxation is derived from the traditional Thai way of life. And, when it comes to kicking back, Thailand chairs the board. **JK**

Bophut, tel. 077 427 633.



Accentuate with antiques

You'd never know it by just driving by, but The Palace of Art Gallery Shop presents a treasure chest of antiques. Marked with nothing but a simple sign by a busy road, it's easily passed by, but those lucky enough to stop and visit are in for a treat.

You're greeted by all the busy glitz and glimmer of the Orient, and, however faded with time these items might sometimes be, they still project the timeless beauty of Asia's past. Items collected from Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Burma, Tibet and beyond fill three air-conditioned rooms and an open-air corridor. Ceiling segments from Burma, intricately detailed in mosaics of coloured glass and spiralling to a centre-point, hang from above and line the walls. Their eyes suggestive of deep wisdom, Buddha images come in various sizes and postures, carved from wood and sometimes covered in gold leaf. Betelnut baskets from Burma and lacquerware in rich colours sit next to *garudas*, their spread wings decorated with tiny mirrors. A worn wooden *naga*, a mythical serpent, from the north of Thailand curls upward in greeting from the floor, and elaborately carved pieces of teak depict scenes from the *Ramayana*, evoking the myths of the country's origin, each piece suggesting stories from a rich cultural history.

Established eight years ago by an interior designer from Boston with an interest in Asian antiques, The Palace of Art is known around the island mainly through word of mouth. This establishment ships anywhere in the world, working closely with a trusted company that carefully loads the purchase at the port. **MF**

www.thaiart.com

