

Next generation of Filipino designers takes a bow at Paris' Maison et Objet

From fine bone china to 'abaca' weaves and solid wood, they work with both artisan's hand, innovative technology, and keen design eye

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Just how the next generation of Philippine designers and manufacturers is stepping up to the plate will be showcased starting today in Paris, France, at the Maison et Objet international trade fair.

Design Philippines is presenting Kindred, a design collective of 13 Filipino designers and manufacturers, in the prestigious annual trade fair from Sept. 6-10.

Maison et Objet is one of the biggest events and lifestyle shows that gathers a complete product offering of décor, design, furniture, home accessories, tableware and even fragrances.

Presented to the European market is the theme "Kindred: A Design Collective," curated by creative directors Rita Nazareno and Gabby

Lichauco who were appointed by the Center for International Trade Expositions and Missions (Citem) under executive director Pauline Suaco-Juan.

Nazareno, an accomplished designer and filmmaker herself, explains the thrust of Kindred at Maison, "Kindred is a design collective of like-minded designers and manufacturers. This year, we wanted to focus on objects and contemporary design with a specialist, simple, smaller, straight-forward approach to both the booth and the design."

Lichauco adds, "Kindred highlights the craftsmanship of each of the Filipino designers and manufacturers, but in a refreshing and innovative approach."

Focusing on home accessories such as tabletop décor and lighting as well as fashion accessories, this year's Philippine design delegation includes Maison first-timers and seasoned participants: Vito Selma, Schema, E. Murio, Finali, Nature's Legacy, CSM Philippines, CDO Handmade, JB Woodcraft, South Sea



Gabby Lichauco and Rita Nazareno: Specialist, straightforward approach

The products bear the signature styles, techniques and local materials of the participants, some of them the results of

Collaboration with each other.

They range from fine bone china décor, abaca woven rugs, to wire mesh lighting fixtures, solid-wood accessories and even recycled plastic—on display in the one-stop booth at Maison.

For deeper insights into the Citem endeavor, Lifestyle interviews Suaco-Juan and Nazareno.

Rita Nazareno

You're working with the new generation behind the established brands, through Kin-dred Collective. You yourself belong to that generation. How will your generation up the level on the global market, from what your parents or grandparents started?

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Our capability to mix the old and the new is an edge. Most of us have watched and learned and experienced from our parents aspects of our different businesses. They afforded us the exposure to find our own aesthetic.

I think the combination has somehow worked and has brought us to

Veneer, Halo Halo, Tali Handmade, Weave Manila and Zacarias 1925.

Spotlight in Paris trade show

visual aesthetic. For this Maison et Objet, we focus on contemporary objects and design. We utilize our strengths by harnessing our expertise in our special materials. For instance, I focus on weaves, Schema on wire frames, South Sea on wood veneers, and so on.

We also push collaborations. HaloHalo and E. Murio are showing objects they've worked on. Gabby Lichauco and I worked on exciting, new pieces for JB Woodcraft and CDO Paper. He also collaborated on some pieces with South Sea Veneer.

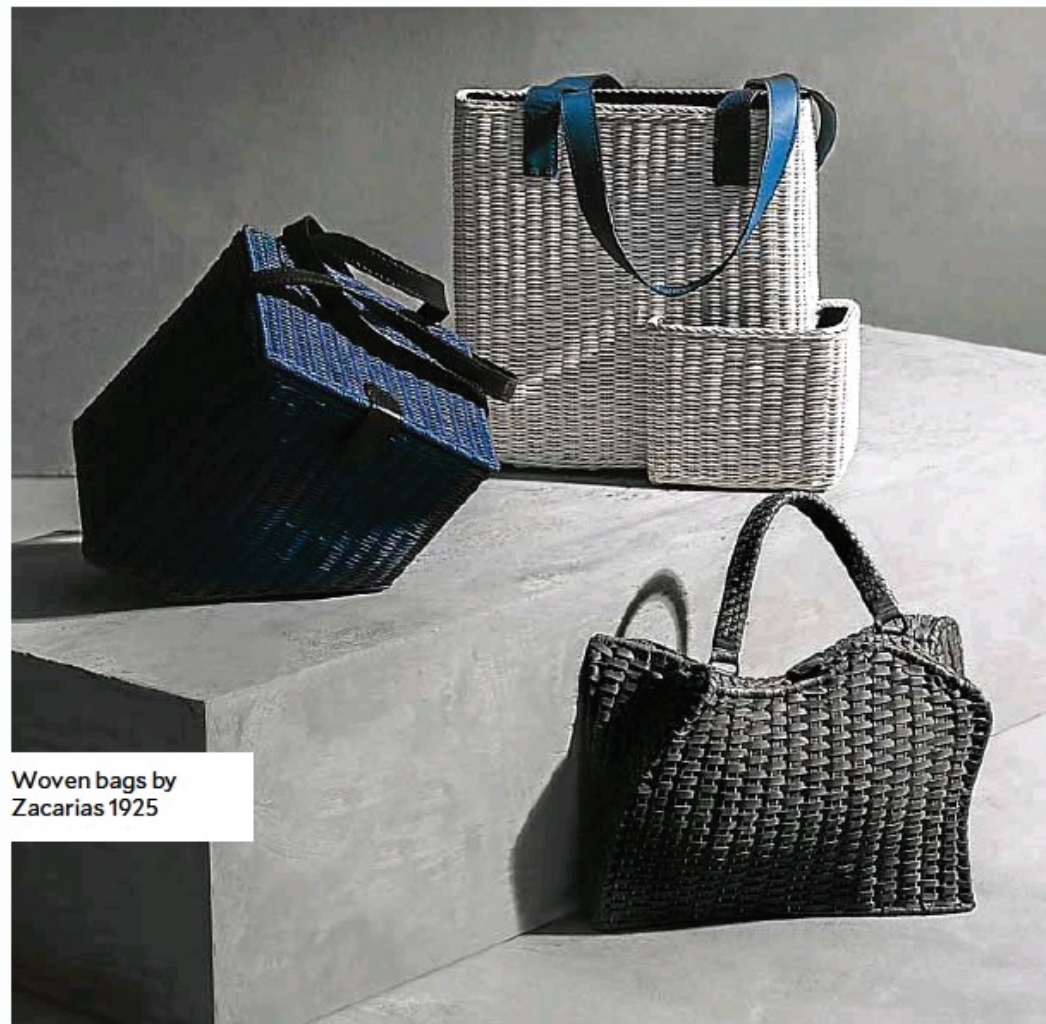
The artist Garapata (Dex Fernandez) has collaborated on pieces for Zacarias 1925 and South Sea Veneer.

We are going for a distinct energy in this Maison edition— from both the objects, participants and the space/booth design.

the global stage.

Can you elaborate on the innovation, craftsmanship that Kindred Collective is showcasing at Maison? How do the Kindred Collective designs fit contemporary lifestyle and today's modern design idiom?

Most of us are secondgeneration manufacturers, each with an indi-



Woven bags by Zacarias 1925

Woven bags by Zacarias 1925

How do our designs become competitive with those at least in the region, like Korea, Thailand?

Because of the materials we specialize in—especially the handcrafted aspect with a more contemporary thrust—I think that will set us apart.

How does your generation use technology as cutting edge in your design?

Most of us translate technology in a different way... Because we do mostly handcrafted pieces, we've mastered material manipulation that can be at par or better than purely tech-produced pieces. The expanded references and our unique aesthetics are what makes us distinct. For instance, Vito Selma and HaloHalo have developed very interesting textures and pieces using innovative techniques.

Can you give me the names behind those brands, apart from Selma?

Schema's Jego Jiao is also second generation. CSM, E. Murio, HaloHalo and CDO Handmade Paper are all second generation. I'm the third generation since my lola started S.C.Vizcarra where all the



Trays and home accents by South Sea Veneer

Zacarias 1925 objects are crafted. The third generation of Bituin Siblings also took over from their parents to manage JB Woodcrafts and expanded with South Sea Veneers.

Your batch decides to continue your respective family's brand heritage, no matter the odds. Why? What drives you? Is the local and foreign business good?

Business (local and foreign) is picking up but it is certainly very different from a generation ago. We continue to adapt to the changing environment.

A strong motivation is we want to keep the legacy of our families, yet blaze our own paths. We want to continue to evolve. It is very fulfilling to be able to keep the heritage of the handiwork of the artisans while making it relevant to today's generation.

Pauline Suaco-Juan

You said times have really changed, from the previous decades when foreign buyers visited trade fairs, and that your direction now is digital marketing. Can you elaborate? How has the experience been so far?

We are continuing our path toward the digital frontier. The world is



Pauline Suaco-Juan: Toward the digital frontier

changing, and we should adapt our services to prepare our exporters for the digital present.

In 1983, when Manila FAME started, there was no internet, no access. Buyers were really going to trade shows to source their products. But digital disruption and the proliferation of the online marketplace enable easy access to valuable information. We can now just subscribe to WGSN, for example, for future trend reports, see what's happening in various design events and trade shows in real time, or do email marketing to opinion leaders, digital influencers and/or key buyers to initiate a survey.

As we were looking for new markets to penetrate, we realized that online is where we must be. We must be there when buyers are Googling for inspiration and products so we will be part of the decision process.

Nowadays buyers already know what they will buy even before they



Various products by Design Philippines exhibitors



Paper trays and baskets by CDO Handmade Paper Crafts

hit the trade floor. They've already made lookbooks of their collections, and presented this to management

and set their budget. We must be part of that progression.

Thankfully, our board, stakeholders and the design community, the Manila FAME brands are willing to take on the challenge to strengthen our presence in the digital arena.

In 2020, we hope to launch a Manila FAME digital platform to connect buyers and sellers, 24/7 and 365 days a year.

How does Citem continue its relevance in the digital era and the globalization of the market?

The digital era has enabled buyers to go straight to the source. They no longer need to keep the traditional twice-a-year buying timetable; they can now place orders, proceed anytime. E-commerce has greatly affected brick-and-mortar stores and this has affected buyers' bud-



Vase by CSM Philippines

gets.

For now, we maintain the online visibility of the Manila FAME brands through stories and content. Admittedly, we still have a long way to go in building content and presence online.

building. We are continuing with our product development initiatives and we will further our support via more developmental strategies.

By next year, we want to provide assistance in improving production and business processes.

We want the Manila FAME exhibitors to be available online as today's buyers are constantly on the lookout for designs on the web and social media sites.

Most of the time, these buyers are finding products on the internet before they visit for the actual sale. For this reason, we eye Manila FAME to be both a digital platform and an experiential event for greater appreciation of the products.

Our digital platform aims to be the home of Manila FAME and Design Philippines, where their content will be aggregated. In time, we also hope to offer buyer and exhibitor services online.

While strengthening our digital marketing efforts we cannot forget to help cultivate the Manila FAME community through capacity-