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**Japanese products
at Koncent**

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They don't make crayons like they used to, they've made them so much more interesting



Koncent began as the retail arm of Japanese design agency H Concept

Japanese design product shop Koncent opens second international outpost in Malaysia

BY VIVIAN CHONG
PICTURES BY CHOO CHOY MAY

PETALING JAYA — There are fuzzy pouffes that stand on wooden animal legs; a coaster that takes the form of a grassy island accompanied by a little plastic creature; a mug lid with a gaping hippopotamus protruding from the middle that can rest just as easy on the rim; colourful rubber bands in the shape of our furry and feathered friends.

Yes, it's a bit of a happy zoo at Koncent Malaysia, a Japanese zakka store that has its roots in Tokyo where it started as the retail arm of design consultancy H Concept. Having designed a variety of lifestyle goods for a large number of manufacturers in Japan, it only made sense for H Concept to bring their works together under one roof. Having a store also gave the company the chance to understand things from a retailer's point of view.

Koncent opened in Tokyo's Kuramae area in 2012, below

H Concept's office. It has since branched out into several outlets in Japan, as well as two international outposts — the first opened in Melbourne at the end of 2014 and the second found its home in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia last month.

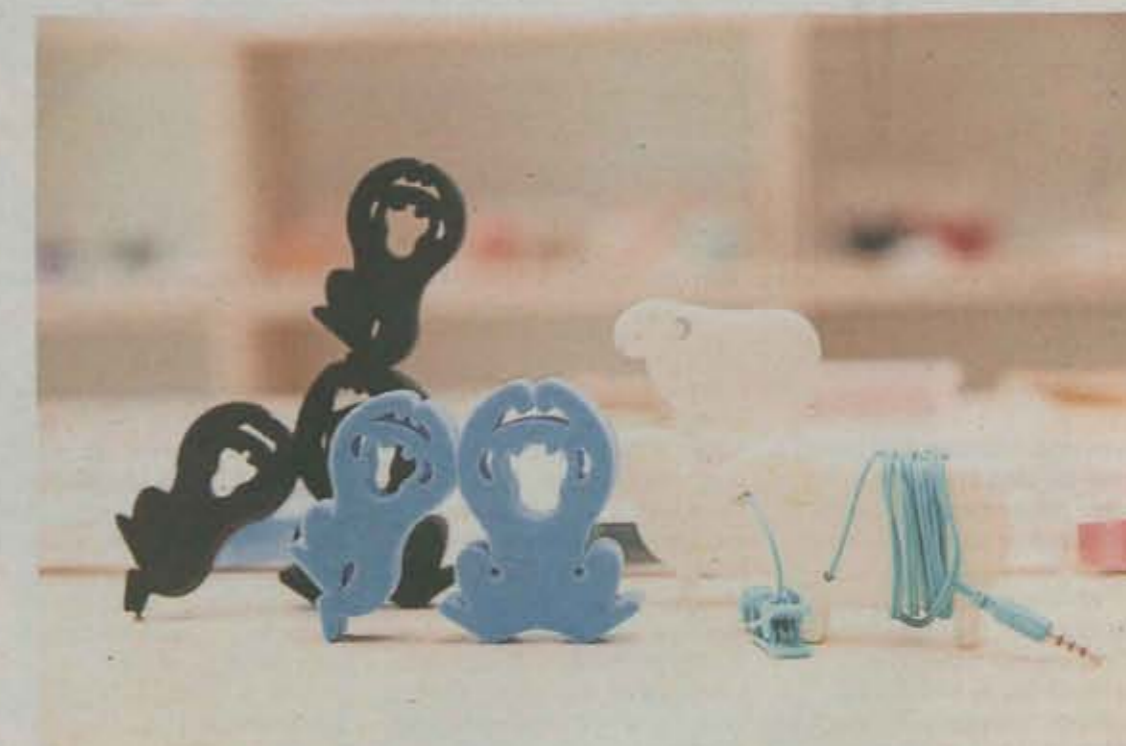
Following in Koncent Tokyo's footsteps, the local store sits below the office of Pride Works', the retail offshoot of interior design agency Pride Studio, which brought Koncent to Malaysia. The trio behind Koncent Malaysia — Mike Saw, Patrick Chin and Leonard Phang — are the same people behind The Jekyll & Hyde Project at Bangsar Shopping Centre, known for its fantastic range of design-focus home decor and gift items, stationery, and lifestyle goods. In fact, that first retail venture of theirs came about because of H Concept.

"We first came across products from +d, H Concept's own label, in Singapore and contacted their Japan office. They said they didn't have a distributor in Malaysia at the time, and so they appointed us!" Mike reveals. "Within two or three months of that, we opened The Jekyll & Hyde Project and began selling the +d range along with other brands."

As Jekyll enters its fifth year, the trio had been looking to expand their reach beyond the shopping mall crowd. At the same time, H Concept's founder Hideyoshi Nagoya had been urging them to open Koncent in Malaysia. The wheels were thus set in motion and the search began last year for a suitable location. Eventually, they decided that it was most practical to have the store at the same premise as the office. The location is certainly unexpected. Vibrant and bustling as it may be,



The trio behind Koncent Malaysia (from left to right): Mike Saw, Leonard Phang and Patrick Chin



Keep messy cables in place with these animal-shaped holders

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Ornament card cases are made from a material that was originally meant for phone cases



Shiba Inu island coasters come with plastic animals to keep your drinks company



Hit the bull's eye with the fun Love & Peace Gun loaded with heart-shaped rubber bands



Kaki 'floating' vases can adhere to mirrors and glass or tile surfaces



A handy little plastic bag container for pet owners



Squeeze and knead your worries away with a Cao Maru anti-stress ball



Easily mistaken for pewter, the Nousaku range is actually made of malleable tin



Jazz up empty corners with Flowerman vases



A handy little plastic bag container for pet owners



The UnBrella closes inside out so water doesn't drip from it



Koncent Malaysia is located in SunwayMas Commercial Centre



Shaped like an egg, this dehumidifier is meant to be placed inside the refrigerator

Events at Koncent Malaysia-based art collective Tiga Artistry is showcasing their products (notebooks, sketchbooks and art prints) until mid-May. On May 21, chef Sapna Anand will be doing a demonstration of her selected recipes while promoting her cookbook, *New Indian Kitchen*.

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SunwayMas Commercial Centre is not the kind of area one would think of when it comes to creative or trendy consumer products.

"We don't just sell things but also want the experience of visiting our store to be an education as well," Mike explains. "Shoppers can touch, feel, try out and understand what the designers were thinking when they created these products as we display information on each." There's also a cafe within the store that

currently offers coffee drinks (using beans from HotShots Coffee & Tea), green tea and selected cakes from Tray Cafe. Relax with a good cuppa and a creamy slice while poring over books and magazines in their library section. "These titles are from our own collection, and are mostly on speciality design and travel. Have a seat, read a book... even if you don't end up buying anything, your visit would not be a complete waste of time." Give yourself at least a good hour to browse through the more than 200 products from nearly 30 brands. It's not the

exact range as Koncent Tokyo but selected items based on market preferences. About 90 per cent are from Japan while the remaining are non-Japanese brands that are carefully curated based on how well they fit Koncent's focus, which are on products that promote design, art, craft and culture. Fans of Japanese designs know to expect a minimalist flair that is often peppered with whimsical elements, and fun forms that not only don't compromise on function but actually enhances it. It's something Mike can attest to. "I

tried the Sweep by Cloud Design and it's such a good broom that cleans up dirt and dust easily, it actually makes me enjoy sweeping." Walk through Koncent Malaysia's displays, try out the products and you will come to the same conclusion. The UnBrella by Hiroshi Kajimoto for +d is one of the best examples, a unique design that closes inside out so that the wet surface is inside and the water doesn't drip everywhere. Michiya Kobayashi's Uni Hashi are chopsticks with raised ends that let you do away with rests, while

Shuji Miyamoto's Ninja Pins have an advantage over regular push pins that perfectionists would appreciate: The blades are V-shaped and leave only subtle marks. You will also be impressed with the Soil collection, made from diatomaceous earth, a natural material that's highly effective for absorbing moisture and controlling humidity. The range includes soap dishes, dehumidifiers and even floor mats. Spray water onto the surface and observe how quickly the liquid dissipates into the material.

Besides creating designs for the brands they work with, H Concept also often helps clients innovate new ways to utilise their existing technology. The Ornament card case, for example, was developed for a company that specialises in phone covers and uses the same iridescent material with striking gradient tones. Simply press the sides of the sleek case and the top flap automatically opens. To brighten up your home, consider the Kaki 'floating' vases that can adhere to glass, mirrors and tiles with pockets to hold water and keep the

flowers fresh. Nousaku presents a range of textured, malleable tin ware such as cups and fruit baskets, while Nendo's Kazan is just the thing to place atop a pile of tissue paper. Shaped like the tip of a mountain, pull the paper through and it turns into a 'smoke'-belching volcano! There's even more fun to be had with the Mimi Pet ear plugs that take the form of mini dachshund in bright colours. Need a tension buster? Grab a Cao Maru stress ball — they come in the shape of human heads with funny expressions, and vegetables — and squeeze

repeatedly until you feel calmer. To refresh during moments of mental blockage, slip the Byuum pencil copter over your writing tool, give it a good spin before letting go and see how far it flies. Local brands include handmade cold-processed soap maker The Saponifist and Wicked Plants, which offers succulents in handmade pots. There's also The Jekyll & Hyde's in-house brand of stationery such as notebooks and parody postcards. Mike reveals that their range is growing and in time to come, will include

fashion-related accessories that might be made in Japan. Koncent Malaysia also aims to be a design platform, a hub for creative minds to engage directly with customers through events such as exhibitions, showcases and workshops. "Our display units are modular and so can be moved around as and when needed, and we have gallery hangers installed along one wall," says Mike. It's all well within Koncent's vision, which is reflected in their logo that's inspired by a power point: Connecting people through design.

Vivian Chong loves all things Japanese, kawall or not. Read her Japan travel tales at <http://thisbunnyhops.com/>

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