

Good Design: Mekong Design Selection **~Travel to Vietnam~**

Japan Institute of Design Promotion

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The “Mekong Design Selection” is a collaboration project, organized by the Japan Institute of Design Promotion (JDP) and the ASEAN-Japan Centre (AJC). It aims to promote the traditional materials and techniques of the Mekong Design Selection awarded companies from CLMV (namely Cambodia, Lao P.D.R., Myanmar, and Vietnam) and the innovations of Japanese designers to create high-end new brand products. Through a public competition for designers to conceptualize new brand products, evaluation by jury was held and in the end 12 groups were chosen for this collaboration project.

The chosen designers have the opportunity to visit the respective countries of the awarded companies. They will have a preliminary meeting to propose their ideas for the prospective collaboration. The development of the new brand products will incorporate the importance of sustaining traditional techniques or materials while incorporating an edge that will make it appealing and marketable in the global markets.

The final brand products will be showcased in October, 2015 at the annual *Good Design Award G-Mark Exhibition* to be held in Tokyo. In the following year of February 2016, the products will then be exhibited at the *Tokyo International Gift Show* in order to find prospect buyers to start marketing into the Japanese market.

The following is a brief report of the first trip to Hanoi, Vietnam from the duration of March 15 to 21, 2015.

- **Project Name: New Brand Fashion Items of Vietnam Delicate Embroidery**
- **Awarded Company: Vietnam Embroidery Company Limited (VINAEM Co., Ltd.)**
[\[https://www.facebook.com/VINAEM.vn\]](https://www.facebook.com/VINAEM.vn)
- **Characteristics:** The main products are embroidered home interior items such as bed linen, table linen, and curtains. The meticulous hand-embroidered details and the usage of vibrant colors were acknowledged.
- **Designers: Mr. Shunsuke Ikai and Mr. Hirohide Takei (ALBATRO DESIGN)**
Mr. Shunsuke Ikai: After graduating from the University of the Arts London, he returned to Japan and was employed by Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. Mr. Ikai became independent after having accumulated experience in working to create art designs, magazine designs, and design collaboration with Louis Vuitton. He established ALBATRO DESIGN, a design company.

Mr. Hirohide Takei: After graduating from the University of the Arts London, he returned to Japan and was employed by a Tokyo based fashion agency DUNE Co., Ltd. as a Retail Sales division Merchandising/Buyer, and gained experiences in overseas project and product planning. In 2014, Mr. Takei became independent freelancer and worked as a consultant for apparel companies.

On the first day, we all went to go visit VINAEM's new office and they briefly showed us their current product line. The owner is clearly well versed in business negotiations and is passionate about this collaboration project with the Japanese designers.

On the following day, Mr. Takei the designer and Mr. Takata the advisor went to visit the owner's hometown to inspect and learn the culture of Vietnam embroidery and was able to determine the level of embroidery skills. Though there are challenges ahead, both parties earnestly discussed how to work around the challenges in order to create a product that has potential to be distributed in Japan and eventually the global markets.

■ **Project Name: New Brand Utilizing Silk**

■ **Awarded Company: Thai Hoa Fashion Textile Company**

[\[http://www.thaihoasilk.com/index.php/home#\]](http://www.thaihoasilk.com/index.php/home#)

■ **Characteristics:** The main products are home interior items and apparel. It is the first Vietnamese company to manufacture silk knit fabrics. The techniques of hand and machine knit textiles are reputable. They also have the ability to meet the needs of clients.

■ **Designer: Mr. Mitsushi Yanaihara (STUDIO NIBROLL)**

Mr. Mitsushi Yanaihara: After graduating from Kuwasawa Design School, he worked as a director and costume designer for the internationally successful performing arts group *NIBROLL* from 1997-2011. Alongside this, Mr. Yanaihara presented his designs at the Tokyo Collection fashion show from 2001-2009, under the name *NIBROLL ABOUT STREET*.

On the first day visit to the office in the city, the owners showed us their current product line and samples. Mr. Yanaihara brought with him the design proposal and presented his idea for a new brand product. Through their prior correspondence, a visit to the silk farm on the third day was arranged for Mr. Yanaihara to learn and understand the company's silk manufacturing process and technical facilities.

It was early in the morning of the third day when we headed to the silk farm 180 km northwest of Hanoi city. It was off season at the time, so none of the facilities were in operation. However, we did see a large field of mulberries and the workshops. The inspection of the silk farm was an eye opening experience as I came to realize that silk is a living material made from the ground we walk on and the silkworms that provide us with the majestic silk thread.

On the fourth day, we went to visit the office again and Mr. Yanaihara and the owner discussed about the project's concept for the final brand product. Through their discussion, both parties agreed to take on the challenge of creating a product that is simple, not decorative and purely expresses the main material of silk in an original way.

Even though this is just the beginning step, both Mr. Yanaihara and the owners have a mutual understanding that will reflect on the results of the final product of this collaboration project.

■ **Project Name: Female Oriented New Brand from Vietnam**

■ **Awarded Company: Hiep Hung Group Pte**

[\[http://bellizeno.com.vn/\]](http://bellizeno.com.vn/)

■ **Characteristics:** The main products are home interior items such as bed linen. The company is successful in both the European and American markets under their brand line "Bellizeno". Their quilting technique of silk floss is recognized.

■ **Designer: Mr. Mitsushi Yanaihara (STUDIO NIBROLL)**

On the first day, we visited the office of Hiep Hung Group Pte which also has a workshop. After having been presented their main products lineup, the owner spoke about the company's vision. They already have experience in exporting overseas, most prominently to Europe under their original brand name. However, exporting to Japan is considered difficult as of present and they need to strategize the marketability and design tastes of the products.

Based on the discussions during the first meeting, Mr. Yanaihara proposed that the target consumers be specific which the owner agreed with. Furthermore, both parties agreed with the final product targeting "Child rearing mothers". In the future, the designer will conceptualize the logo and the merchandising plan while the company moves forward with creating samples.

On the morning of the last day, all of us visited the VIETRADE office to report to the officials the progress of each designer's collaboration project. VIETRADE gave us helpful advice on moving forward with the project and we in return inquired about issues such as copyrights of designs.

VIETRADE officials spoke about the future establishment of design promotion organization similar to that of JDP. This is especially seen as important, because Vietnam is a country that is going through a remarkable progress in the manufacture and economic sectors.

In the afternoon, a seminar co-organized by VIETRADE and AJC was held at a hotel meeting hall. The seminar was titled "Design Consultation for Gift/Lifestyle Products Exporting to Japanese Market". Mr. Do Kim Lang, Deputy Director General welcomed the audience with a few remarks and Mr. Takata made a brief speech about the project and introduced the presenters,

Mr. Yanaihara and myself. Lastly, Mr. Go Matsuura, Assistant Director of AJC wrapped up the seminar with the closing remarks.

During the Q & A session, Mr. Yanaihara and I were asked great questions such as, “What is the future trending color for Japan?” and “Why is quality management strict in Japan?” There were about 60 people in attendance and about 5 different media present during the successful seminar to end our trip.

Overall, our first visit to Vietnam was a great opportunity for both Vietnam and Japan to come together through this project. For the future of good business, we have just planted the seeds and aim to have a beautiful blossom as a result of this ongoing project.

For the original report in Japanese with pictures, please view this link:

http://www.asean.or.jp/ja/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Vietnam-Report_JDP_Mr.-Yajima1.pdf