

Good Design: Mekong Design Selection
~Travel to Myanmar~

Studio PHENOMENON

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I was one of the chosen designers to embark on a collaboration project, the *Mekong Design Selection* that is organized by the ASEAN-Japan Centre and the Japan Institute of Design Promotion. I have always been curious about the country of Myanmar, so I have been looking forward to this trip ever since I was notified about having my design proposal chosen.

Since we arrived during the evening hours, we had a light dinner and called it a day on the first day. In the following day, I went to go visit YK Collections, the counter partner company with the goal of concluding a contract in order for the collaboration project to start. For my first visit, I presented my design proposal and handed them a copy of the contract so that they can read through it before my next visit.

Prior to my trip to Myanmar, there was a briefing with all of the chosen designers for this project. It was then that a more comprehensive background of the project was explained. Japan had once held a rich culture of creating crafts that have now been replaced by machine made materials. The same culture of craftsmanship still exists in the Mekong regional countries and the project aims to protect the traditional crafts and materials whilst combining the designers' innovative ideas into creating a brand new product that can boost the economies of the emerging Mekong countries.

My design proposal is quite simple. By using the platform of popular capsule toys, a piece of Myanmar culture (handcrafts) can be inserted in the capsules and easily sold as collectibles. My design proposal title is called "Myanmar Air Contains" which simply describes the concept of a part of Myanmar inside a capsule.

On the third day, I visited a woodworking carpenter workshop. The workshop was 2 hours away from Yangon and located near a big temple. Once inside, a large crowd of children and adults work on the bare ground with a chisel and wooden hammer to make wooden crafts. Even girls who look to be 10 to 15 years old carve away in meticulous details with sharp tools. It was impressive to see the craftsmanship of wood carving as the type of wood they were carving seems to be sturdy. At the end of the day, I took a stroll to the night market and Chinatown before I returned to the hotel.

On the fourth day, I decided to visit Mandalay. Since I was only able to see woodwork in

Yangon the day before, I was told that I can visit other workshops that deal with stone carving, rattan, and metal work. The domestic flight took off from early morning and landed around 7:30 am. I first visited the stone carving workshop. The precision and quality of the stone crafts are very impressive and I felt that there is potential. I was able to make a round of visits to other workshops of silver works, rattan, textiles, embroidery, and casting works.

A visit to the National Museum of Myanmar in Yangon was conducted on the fifth day for further research and insights into Myanmar culture and history. From the first floor up, the museum exhibits the remnants of ancient Myanmar ruins, the evolution of Burmese calligraphy over time, the royal family's fine gem/jewelry possessions, ethnic traditional wear, paintings and more. After the museum, I went straight to YK Collections and was able to conclude a contract with them.

The sixth and last day in Myanmar consisted of a visit to Myanmar's Ministry of Commerce to have a meeting and lunch.

During my first visit to Myanmar, I was able to experience and view a new sense of perspective of Myanmar's history, culture and environment starting from the visits of the workshops, temples, museums, and historic sites. Experiencing firsthand the process it takes to make crafts from the carving of stones or woods, the polishing of metals and the use of several tools brought a sense of the origin of crafts making. The fact that the culture of crafts making still exists in the most basic of forms like I have witnessed during this trip is very appealing and a unique experience. I hope that throughout the project, I will be able to help even a little by materializing a new brand product with YK Collections.

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

http://www.asean.or.jp/ja/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Myanmar-Report_studio-PHENOMENO_N_Mr.-Sano1.pdf