



# 30 years of making dream homes a reality

**STEPPING** into the Signature Flagship Store located in Kota Damansara, Selangor, visitors will be instantly captivated by the delicate craftsmanship that defines the brand.

The sprawling 50,000 sq ft space — recognised by the Malaysian Book of Records as the largest interior design showroom in Malaysia — showcases an array of design concepts, from contemporary classic to urban chic, each carefully crafted to inspire the imagination.

The journey of Signature started in 1994 when a dynamic partnership was formed between Datuk Michael Chooi, an expert in sales and marketing, and Tan Kee Choong, who is savvy in the technical aspects of kitchen cabinets.

With the ambition to revolutionise the kitchen planning and buying experience, the duo established their inaugural office and showroom in Bandar Sri Damansara, Selangor, focusing on the distribution and retail of kitchen cabinets. As the business grew, the company ventured into the project market and set up a manufacturing arm to advance further in creating and producing its own designs.

In 2002, the group started to diversify by establishing a new subsidiary — Signature Obicorp Sdn Bhd — to distribute imported kitchen appliances, acting as an exclusive agency for Italian brand Ariston. It also ventured into aluminium and glass fabrication works in 2005 by establishing Signature Aluminium Sdn Bhd.

Ranked as Malaysia's 100 Outstanding Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) by the prestigious Golden Bull Award in 2003, the group became a public-listed company on Bursa Malaysia in 2008.

"Following the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, we reflected on what we could do apart from kitchen and wardrobe products. As such, we became aggressive in merger and acquisition (M&A) exercises to diversify our product offering — not just for residential units but also for commercial units," says Signature International Bhd Group CEO Lau Kock Sang.

As such, the group ramped up its expansion to acquire several businesses, including a 75% stake in Singapore-based interior fit-out solutions provider Corten Interior Solutions Pte Ltd and a 51% stake in renovation and construction company Space Alliance Contracts Sdn Bhd.

In addition, Signature Group acquired a 100% stake in Areal Interior Solutions Pte Ltd, which is involved in the fabrication and finishing of kitchen countertops and bath vanities. It also acquired a 50.1% stake in Zigzag Builders (M) Sdn Bhd, which specialises in commercial projects, particularly for the semiconductor and



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— Lau

food and beverage (F&B) industries.

"In 2022, we also expanded our product range to offer whole house solutions, to include customised cabinets, loose furniture, curtains, floor and wall coverings, sanitaryware, tiles, kitchen and home appliances and smart home systems," says Lau.

To tackle the challenge of manpower shortage in line with its business expansion, the group set up Signature Academy to train and produce competent installers. It also collaborated with Mobius Academy to cultivate professionals for the interior design profession and home improvement sectors.

"We bring in and train vocational and polytechnic graduates to become skilled workers. Not only can they become our employees but they can also choose to become entrepreneurs and act as our subcontractors once they have acquired the skills and experience," says Lau.

## TAKING ITS HOME KITCHEN BUSINESS TO THE WORLD STAGE

While the home-grown brand is said to have established the largest retail network for kitchen cabinets in Malaysia, it has also made significant strides overseas with a global presence in 13 countries including Asean countries, Sri Lanka, Maldives, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

Its international journey began when it launched its first venture abroad in Bangkok in 2003, followed by the successful completion of its inaugural overseas project at Hyde Park Residences in Colombo, Sri Lanka. In 2008, it marked another milestone with the completion of the prestigious Marina Residence Project in Palm Jumeirah, Dubai.

In 2012, the brand made history as the first Malaysian kitchen manufacturer to showcase its products at Eurocucina @ i-Saloni Milan, the

world's largest international kitchen trade fair.

"Milan is internationally recognised as the city of design. We are proud to say that we are the first from Malaysia, or even Southeast Asia, to showcase our products there, and today, our design is on a par with the European standards," says Lau.

In 2020, the company expanded its footprint in Sri Lanka through a strategic joint venture with Singer Sri Lanka, solidifying its position in the local kitchen market.

"Further expansion in the region includes India and Bangladesh, through the recruitment of new dealers and the expected completion of new showrooms in these countries by the first half of 2024," he adds.

## TRANSFORMING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE THROUGH SMART TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION

While the company has gone through a 30-year journey adapting to several industrial changes, such as changing consumer preferences and new competitors in the market, Lau says the group has held strong to its customer-centric approach, which he attributes as a key factor that sets Signature apart from its peers.

"We emphasise strongly on the buying experience. We are consistently improving our operational excellence to deliver excellent service to our customers. We are talking about a focus point on every touch point — from planning to delivery and beyond. It is not enough to advertise our products and prices. It is about delivering a total hassle-free customer experience," he explains.

"While interior design is always about aesthetics, it can be difficult for customers to visualise the end-products. For example, the tables and chairs presented in a 3D drawing may not be the same as the final products. As such, we integrated our

design software with automation technologies, which digitise and convert the design into machine-readable data, allowing the machines to produce exactly based on the customised orders."

The company is also developing a mobile application — expected to be launched by the fourth quarter of the year — that will allow customers to experience 3D features and design their dream homes effortlessly.

"End-users can select the date they want the installation and track their orders in real time — whether it is in production, packing or ready for delivery. They can also change the scheduled date easily through the application instead of having to make calls," he says.

"We will also be introducing the artificial intelligence (AI) design by the end of the year. Without having to visit the site, the AI can generate initial draft designs based on the criteria set by the customers. Our designers can then refine the designs according to the customers' feedback," he explains.

The adoption of technology goes beyond enhancing the customer experience to boosting operational efficiency. According to Lau, the company built a new smart factory in Negeri Sembilan with a size of 40,000 sq m, which has integrated automation technology for the panel-cutting and sorting process. It is also undergoing a transformation process to upgrade its existing factory infrastructure to improve accuracy and boost efficiency.

"The transformation into a smart factory will encompass various solutions, such as a quality control inspection system to speed up root cause analysis, manual line tracking system to digitalise and optimise order tracking, as well as robotic process automation to streamline the mundane operational process," says the group in its Annual Report 2023.

The group is expecting to improve productivity by 95% upon the completion of such transformation.

Looking forward, Lau says the group aims to establish 100 Signature showrooms across the country and that it is expecting double-digit growth in revenue in the coming years.



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