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Supergrass

Glass discovers Nookha, the company bringing bamboo into 21st Century



Bamboo belongs to the grass family, the fastest growing plant on earth. It can grow in almost any climate and annually new shoots emerge allowing harvest of upwards of 25 per cent without compromising the mother plant. Nookha uses one of the most beautiful species of bamboo, the Tali bamboo, which grows in almost all gardens of rural Indonesia. Teak is the most commonly used material in furniture making in Indonesia but takes at least 25 years to grow, or up to 100 years for the top quality wood and results in the trees' death. Bamboo is almost the polar opposite, making it such an exciting new material for uses which weren't previously envisioned.

The Nookha tables are so streamlined and chic that one forgets they are made solely of bamboo. Using technology to enhance the natural quality of bamboo – high tensile strength, elasticity and durability – the thin yet strong table top almost floats on top of the elegantly arched legs. The tables are designed by the Italian artist and architect Giuseppe Verdacchi, and crafted by a team of local Indonesian artisans who blend their traditional skills and unique aesthetics to form these beautiful pieces.



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Glass caught up with founder Christine Richard who splits her time in between Hong Kong, Indonesia and Paris, to discover the story behind Nookha and the design with this humble "supergrass".

How did you found Nookha?

I was in project finance where a great deal of the work focused on the structural of economies of developing countries and from this analysis I started having an interest in social entrepreneurship. I wanted to start a business, but something meaningful. Banking is a solid school for a business start up. After leaving the banking industry, I went travelling in Indonesia and got inspired by Linda Garland's projects. She was praised as the "Queen of Bamboo" and it really motivated me. I wanted to study and raise awareness of the use of bamboo. I then met Giuseppe and fell in love with his table. He is an artist and only designed and made it out of interest, so I decided to create a business based on innovative bamboo furniture.

What do you like about bamboo furniture?

Initially I did not take to bamboo so much. I thought it was too ethnic, a bit cheap even. But Giuseppe changed my thinking. He has done extensive research on bamboo and opened up so many possibilities. Bamboo is strong, flexible and grows extremely fast. I know he and the experienced craftsmen could work together and bring something new to it. I like the idea of mixing modern technology and aesthetics with traditional know-how.

How long and difficult is the making process of each bamboo table?

Bamboo processing can be quite heavy, e.g. putting anti-fungus product on bamboo, drying them, stacking the bamboo strips into a mould and it takes about 10 working days for one craftsman to make a table. Our workshop is in Yogyakarta, which is called "the capital of craftsmanship" in Indonesia and there is bamboo everywhere. We source the bamboo locally and our craftsmen have strong carpentry background.

What would you like to achieve with your team?

My aim is like the meaning of Nookha, "to give" i.e. to pass down the know-how from international design to local craftsmen to create beauty. I'd like to see Nookha become a bit more accessible, they are now available in Hong Kong and Indonesia, but I would like to bring it to Paris and reach a bigger European design market.

by Lucienne Leung

www.nookha.com

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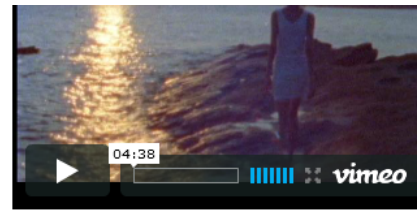
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