



GREAT MINDS >
(From left)
Wendy Chua,
Sebastián Alberdi,
Gabriel Tan,
Gustavo Maggio

FOUR OF A DIFFERENT KIND

AS TOLD TO JACQUELYN CHEOK

A fortunate stroke of serendipity. That was all it took to create Outofstock, a Singapore-based design collective inspired by simplicity and poetry. The year was 2005. Sebastián Alberdi, Wendy Chua, Gabriel Tan and Gustavo Maggio had fortuitously met at Electrolux Design Lab, a global competition for design students, held in Stockholm, hence the name Outofstock(holm). A year later, they decided to collaborate and have since been working across three cities – Barcelona, Buenos Aires and Singapore – to design and manufacture furniture, products, lighting and spaces. Gabriel Tan shares how Outofstock is disrupting the way that designers usually do the job, working virtually across the globe on actual commercial projects.



LYRICAL LINES >
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WHAT INSPIRED OUTFOSTOCK?

Mr Tan: We wanted a platform where four designers of different cultural and geographical backgrounds can work on selected projects together. Outofstock was hence formed in 2007 as a design collective, comprising Sebastián Alberdi from Spain, Gustavo Maggio from Argentina, and Wendy Chua and Gabriel Tan from Singapore. Outofstock enables us to collaborate on self-initiated, creative projects as well as commissions from international clients.

DOES EACH PARTNER BRING A UNIQUE TYPE OF EXPERTISE OR INSPIRATION TO THE TABLE?

We are all trained in industrial design, but we each have our own inclinations and passions such as product and furniture design, branding and publication design, interior design and design research.

TELL US ABOUT DEMAND FOR CUSTOMISED SPACES AND SOME OF YOUR MORE INTERESTING CLIENTS.

Consumer and business owners today are looking for unexpected solutions to design challenges, and we work on commissions from clients who want something unconventional, pleasantly surprising the user and at the same time, improving the spatial or product experience. (Spaces in Singapore designed by Outofstock include the 1,500 sq m food court Food Junction at Bugis Junction, as well as baking store and kitchen Plain Vanilla in Tiong Bahru.)

As for interesting clients, we have launched a new lounge chair for a well-known office and contract furniture brand from the south of Sweden at the Stockholm Furniture Fair. Despite the fact that this client operates in a field of furniture that is traditionally very serious, they are a breath of fresh air as they are open to designs that redefine the genre of office and contract furniture.

We also designed a series of biodegradable beach toys for Biobu, a French company that makes homeware out of thermal moulded bamboo powder, which was launched in Europe and the US last summer.



DOES OUTFOSTOCK TAKE ON EVERY PROJECT? WHAT MAKES A PROJECT MEANINGFUL?

Charles and Ray Eames (husband and wife American designers famous for their Eames Lounge Chair) used to say that they are interested in the intersection where the interests of the designer, goals of the clients, benefit of society at large overlap and are aligned, and we resonate with that. It is not easy but I think all four of us strive to benefit these three groups of stakeholders in the projects we take.

IS OUTFOSTOCK A "DISRUPTIVE" COMPANY – AND HOW?

Yes, in many ways we are. We disrupted the way designers normally work when we started, working virtually across the world on real commercial projects.

As we continue to evolve as a collective and individual designers, we will continue to help our clients and ourselves find value by seeing problems from another perspective. There is also more acceptance these days to



disruptive creativity as people read about the success stories of companies such as Uber, Tesla and Airbnb, all of which played a huge part in coining this term.

The challenge is to get more traditional business owners and clients to embrace it as a strategy to win the hearts of users. ■