

A contest winner is taken on an inspiring, colourful trip.

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THERE is nothing like Tokyo to stimulate and inspire any designer, in any field, with its sheer energy and the creativity that is found everywhere, from its iconic architecture to its street fashions.

So a visit to this vibrant Japanese city was a fitting reward indeed for the winner of the inaugural Nippon Paint Young Designer Awards 2008.

Malaysian Myron Liu Jun Leang, 23, received an unexpected kickstart to his career when he beat 90 participants in the competition organised by Nippon Paint Malaysia and the Malaysian Society of Interior Designers to encourage creativity and the intelligent use of colour.

Nippon Paint Malaysia took Liu - and members of the Malaysian media - on a visit to the Nippon Colour Design Center in Tokyo and the company's global headquarters in Osaka earlier in the year.

The centre, located in the industrial area of Shinagawa, conducts vital colour research for the company particularly in its automobile sector.

"At Nippon, we take our colours very seriously!" the centre's general manager, Keiji Shimizu, says with a smile. "After all, colour influences, impacts, and inspires us every day in ways we do not even realise."

The best way to appreciate colour, he says, is to witness the effects before and after a shade is applied. For instance, an industrial building with a boring street-grey facade can be transformed simply by painting exposed piping in different colours.

"Intelligent application of the knowledge of colours can have a profound effect on the well-being of a building's users," explains Shimizu.

"If kindergartens have cheerful splashes of colour to stimulate the senses and to encourage creativity and excitement among young children, how is it that so many corporations no longer believe that colour is equally important for us as adults?"

One of the colour design centre's vital func-

Colour creativity



Nippon Paint Japan's museum displays original paint cans from the company's 15th century roots as well as the country's oldest existing paint samples. - Photos by CHIN MUI YOON / The Star

tions is its yearly predictions of consumer colour trends that it bases on intelligence gathered from various sources around the world, including the major fashion runways.

Gladys Koh, Nippon Paint Malaysia's marketing assistant general manager, who came

with us to Japan, says, however, that "hyge" colours, ie fashionable ones, usually don't last in Malaysia where "basic off-whites and neutrals continue to be best-sellers".

But, "With the current economic slow down, we believe we will see a growth in yellow to counter the gloom and doom. Yellow is the colour of hope, it is cheerful and optimistic, and it has many nuances and shades. Colours are the cheapest way available for anyone to change the mood and look of their homes."

Koh adds that Nippon is introducing more environmentally-friendly products such as its recently launched paint that are water-based and refracts light to help buildings remain cooler.

While the Nippon brand in Malaysia is known for architectural and interior paints - Nippon Paint Malaysia currently commands the largest share, 27%, in the decorative paints market - Nippon Japan is known for its cutting-edge research in paints for numerous other applications such as in the shipping and automobile industries. Indeed, 35% of its sales are in such areas compared with 17% in architectural and interior uses.

Shimizu proudly shows off this year's shades for the auto industry; they fall into five groups, each catering to different types of cars: the Radiate group of colours offers psychedelic and snazzy shades ideal for sporty sedans; Dark Veil comprise distinctly masculine tones of black and grey that convey a suave and stylish appeal and are naturally suited for luxury cars; White Out colours are pure and serene to cater to hybrid or compact cars; Rough Tough colours are nature-inspired and naturally designed for 4x4 vehicles; and Stained Metal comprises shades of gold, bronze, copper, chrome, and rust for sedans or SUVs.

"Colours are very emotional and influences the way people choose their cars because they are an expression of their personalities," Shimizu explains. "Colour catches people's hearts, and they are more engaged when selecting the colour of their car."

For those who can't seem to make up their minds on colour, Shimizu offers his favourite



Keiji Shimizu with a motorcycle coated with Maziara paint, a highly versatile industrial paint that can be used on anything from bikes to electric guitars.

range, the Maziara, which was introduced in 1996 and continues to be popular.

Maziara colours were inspired by soap bubbles and are based on technology created to tackle counterfeit money with watermarks - ie, varying shades of colour can be seen when you look at it from different directions or under different lighting.

It is a very versatile range, as it is applicable in just about every consumer product segment, though it is particularly suited to cell phones and stylish motorbikes, says Shimizu.

Despite being unique, however, colours cannot be trademarked. Brands like Nippon can invest millions in researching and creating their colours but they cannot trademark a single one.

"There are over 10,000 existing colours and nobody can claim they discovered any shade," explains Koh.

After the colour design centre visit, Liu and the media are whisked by Shinkansen, Japan's famous high-speed bullet train, to Osaka city where Nippon's global headquarters is located.

There, Liu is taken on a tour of Nippon's museum, which chronicles the journey of this 120-year-old company from its humble roots, when it began with a single product in 1881, to the global brand that it is today offering everything from fine chemicals, biotechnology, and electronics.

Green winner

MYRON Liu Jun Leang entered his Malaysian Institute of Art college project for the Nippon Young Designer Award 2008 never expecting to win.

His idea of a health centre was based on the global trend towards health and well-being found in the spas and wellness centres sprouting up in many cities. His design incorporates consultation rooms, a relaxation lounge, a conference hall, and retail area laid out with an easy spatial flow of sleek lines.

"I used primarily green and white because I felt that these two colours encapsulate the aspects of health and life that are at the heart of health centres," Liu says.

"I've always been inspired by Datus Dr Ken Yeang's biomimetic architectural designs. I used the idea of a tree as an inspiration, so the central hall acts as an air filter with all the spaces 'branching' off from that core."

Gladys Koh, Nippon Paint Malaysia's assistant general manager, marketing, explains that colour innovation and coordination commanded 35% of the score in the competition.

"Myron did well by cleverly using the primary colour of green to express the messages of life, rejuvenation, healing and energy for his health centre design. Many entries used too many colours instead of working with a well conceived palette."

The theme of the 2009 competition - which comprises two categories, interior and architecture - is "Leading design with



Myron Liu exploring Nippon Paints' rich heritage in its museum in Osaka.

colour trends".

Entries will be judged on colour innovation, colour coordination, originality of design, aesthetics, environmental friendliness, space planning, and compliance with submission requirements and design brief. All entries must reach the organisers by Sept 30.

More information is available at nipponpaint.com.my or ts-exam.com.