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# CLOUD FORMS

STUDIO SKLIM DEVELOPS A MULTIFUNCTIONAL RETAIL DISPLAY SYSTEM FOR EOMM USING A SINGULAR MATERIAL WITH A RICH HERITAGE.

TEXT » STEPHANIE PEH  
PHOTOGRAPHY » BÉTON BRUT



CAPSULES OF RATTAN CLOUD the frontage of a retail space along Singapore's Somme Road, piquing the curiosity of passersby. Titled *Rattan Clouds*, this 68-square-metre installation is a product display system conceived by Studio SKLIM for lifestyle retail store Emporium of Modern Man. It cleverly fulfils the brief for an alternative display system with a semi-permanent quality – one that is able to accommodate daily showcases as well as occasional store events.

Studio SKLIM defined modularity and flexibility as key solutions to the challenge of the brief. *Rattan Clouds* is made up of modules weighing up to seven kilogrammes, with each unit consisting of three rattan spheres. Permutations, such as the halving of the sphere, allow the emergence of various configurations – including a flat surface. When positioned at waist height through unit stacking or suspension, the halved spheres serve as product displays.

With a sturdy arched structure, lower or ground-level capsules function as storage units or seating. Hanging units can be raised or lowered when required using a pulley system and stainless steel wires. Some units are suspended overhead as lighting fixtures to capitalise on the shop's lofty 4.7-metre-high ceiling, establishing a cohesive aesthetic throughout against a neat canvas of cement screed and white paint.

"The idea [of using rattan] came about through research into Southeast Asian receptacle precedents," explains Kevin Lim, principal of Studio SKLIM. "We were intrigued by how 'primitive' and functional rattan baskets were used to transport goods, including livestock, from point A to B



Above: Suspended and freestanding 'cloud' modules offer a variety of storage and display options

Right: A back-of-house area is neatly concealed behind a pivoting wall panel





## RATTAN CLOUDS

**CLIENT** Emporium of Modern Man (EOMM)  
**DESIGN FIRM** Studio SKLIM  
**PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS** Kevin Lim, Beatrice Ong  
**BUILDER** Ideal House  
**RATTAN CRAFTING** Mint Garden

**TIME TO COMPLETE** 5 Months  
**TOTAL FLOOR AREA** 68 sqm

**STUDIO SKLIM PTE LTD**  
(65) 6293 6275 sklim.com

### FINISHES

Bent Rattan Display/Storage/Seating Modules with Stain and Clear Lacquer Finish, Manufactured by Mint Garden. Cement Screed Floor. Mapei Ultraplan 1 Plus Top to Concrete Sales Counter.

### FIXED AND FITTED

Brass Pulleys and Stainless Steel Wires Sourced From Local Hardware Shops. Tiger Hand Winch BHW1200. Hanging Rail Supplied by Sourced by Client.

### LIGHTING

LED Halos Within Rattan Clouds Supplied by 42 Degrees Asia Pte Ltd. Black Pendant by Morph Design Lab, Supplied by 42 Degrees Asia Pte Ltd.

**42 Degrees Asia Pte Ltd** (65) 6744 3086 42degreesasia.com  
**Mint Garden** (65) 6292 3212



“THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN DESIGNER AND CRAFTSMAN INVOLVED MANY SWEATY HOURS AT THE WORKSHOPS IN SINGAPORE AND MALAYSIA.”

» KEVIN LIM

and then subsequently used for the hawking of goods by the roadside,” he continues. The practical possibilities of rattan – its inherent strength, flexibility and lightness – convinced Studio SKLIM to explore the potentials of the material.

Lim and his team engaged a local traditional craftsman with whom they shared an existing working relationship in order to materialise the design. “It took a bit of convincing for him to try [*Rattan Clouds*], as it was out of his comfort zone. We had to show him that it was rather similar to his current methods of construction, just different in terms of assemblage,” says Lim.

The design team was significantly involved in the making process. Pre-manufacturing work of 3D modelling and the building of life-sized prototypes helped with deriving the ideal geometry and troubleshooting construction issues. “Rattan requires incremental bending in order to achieve tight curvatures,” elaborates Lim, “and as it’s an organic material, you need to allow some tolerance for the material to adjust itself to its stable position.”

The craftsman introduced the team to his colleagues in Johor Bahru, Malaysia, where most of the production took place. “The dialogue between designer and craftsman involved many sweaty hours at the workshops in Singapore and Malaysia, looking at the material and establishing a structural hierarchy where there was rigidity, yet some flexibility in the opening of the rattan covers,” Lim adds. Old brass fixtures were sourced by Lim’s team to complement the rattan’s unostentatious finishing.

Despite the longstanding association of rattan with Southeast Asian craftsmanship, it is only recently that young designers such as Alvin Tjitrowirjo and Abie Abdillah have created modern interpretations. For Lim, it was the historical significance and physical potential that drew him. He says, “We have always been interested in materials, especially ‘primitive’ ones, and in utilising the singularity of the material in our projects by pushing its boundaries to the maximum limits.”

Top: A pulley system allows for the raising and lowering of modules in the lofty space

Bottom: Halos of LEDs transform the rattan modules to abstract lighting features