



Wood you sit on me please?



Artist Fabrizio Galli (above) with his work, Tete-a-tete, a bench with tall backrests, and "pencil" benches (left) by exhibition curators Faith Teh and Caroline Pang.
ST PHOTOS: LAU FOOK KONG

Trees cut down to make way for a university campus building have been turned into furniture and art

Natasha Ann Zachariah

Dozens of roadside trees felled to make way for a new campus building at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) have been given a new lease of life: as beautiful sculptures and furniture.

In an exhibition called NTU Trees: Upcycled to open on Monday at the new extension, more than 50 works by artists, designers, faculty, alumni and students made from these fallen trees are on show.

Cultural Medallion recipient and veteran sculptor Han Sai Por created four pieces, including one that looks like books stacked one on top of the other; while a visiting artist from Italy, Fabrizio Galli, made two impressive semi-circular, high-backed benches.

The recycled wood also appears in Co-op@NTU Shop, a student-run business on campus, as shelving and display fixtures.

The furniture was created out of 77 trees and 10 branches that were salvaged from NTU's main campus and the two new buildings of the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCMedicine). The first is the Experimental Medicine Building, where the exhibition is held. The other campus is in Mandalay Road, near Novena.

The trees were common roadside ones – albizzia, acacia and khaya. Before they were felled more than two years ago, the fast-growing trees were estimated to be between 40 and 50 years old.

The exhibition is curated by Ms Faith Teh, 43, deputy director and head of the NTU Museum, and Ms Caroline Pang, 47, deputy director and head of the medical library and heritage centre at LKCMedicine.

The first priority for the school then, they say, was to save the wood. The idea for an exhibition was to exhibit the items in one place before distributing them throughout the university.

The raw timber went through a treatment process for more than six months before the artists and designers could work with them.

First, the wood was debarked and cut into planks that were 6 to 10cm thick. The planks were then kiln-dried to reduce their moisture



Heap Of Books (above right), a tower of books topped off with an open tome, is one of four works by veteran sculptor Han Sai Por.

content to 25 per cent to prevent cracking and warping. Lastly, they were fumigated to prevent insect infestation.

Earlier, before the wood was treated, artist Han, 72, had selected four tree trunks for her sculptures.

She wanted to make something to "highlight the meaning and philosophy behind education and learning". Fittingly, one of her works is titled Heap Of Books, an almost 1m-high tower of books that is topped off with an open tome.

Han, who more often works in stone than wood, worked with a tool she rarely used: a chainsaw. "I had to be really careful and wear thicker shoes," she says.

Galli, 58, a visiting artist and faculty member of the university's School of Art, Design and Media, created Tete-a-tete: two semi-circular benches, each with a series

of tall backrests. The benches seat people in a circle, but not in a claustrophobic way, as spaces were left between the backrests.

Galli says that although most people do not appreciate these kinds of wood for their uneven colour, tones and grains, the materials are of a good quality. He adds: "I hope that over time, the wood will age beautifully."

As for the curators, they contributed a series of "pencil" benches, where tree trunks are sharpened to a point at one end and painted at the other end to resemble the rubber tip of the writing tool.

Leftover scraps were also turned into something functional. One of the fabricators NTU worked with created 13 benches out of leftover cuts that came in different shapes, sizes and textures.

Once the NTU Trees: Upcycled exhibition is over, the furniture and artworks will be moved to various spots in the university.

Ms Pang says: "Some directors at other schools have already reserved their favourites. We hope this project would get others interested in reusing trees, instead of throwing them away."

natashaz@sph.com.sg

We hope this project would get others interested in reusing trees, instead of throwing them away.



MS CAROLINE PANG, one of the curators of the NTU Trees: Upcycled exhibition

VIEW IT / NTU TREES: UPCYCLED

WHERE: Experimental Medicine Building, Collaboration Space, 59 Nanyang Drive, Level 3

WHEN: Monday to Nov 4, 9am to 8.30pm daily

ADMISSION: Free