A family affair

Brothers Ierfan and Adam Azriff combine their passions to open the creative, unique Wood & Steel Café and Gallery

The owners of Wood & Steel Café and Gallery couldn’t have found a better location for their first outlet. In The Strand area of Kota Damansara, the café-cum-furniture and art gallery is hard to miss, especially if you’re driving along the main road past the Giant hypermarket. Its proportionately-sized metal sign is eye-catching, even if you just manage to catch a glimpse of it from a moving vehicle. True to its name, this definitively cool outlet is decked out in wooden furniture combined with metal rods and decorative fixtures made of the two elements.

With such creativity and detailed decor occupying the outlet, one could assume Wood & Steel is owned by experienced café owners; but that is hardly the case. This concept of merging a café and a gallery is the brainchild of two brothers, Ierfan and Adam Azriff. Twenty-two-year-old Ierfan is the older and his passion lies in furniture design; while 20-year-old Adam has always dreamt of owning a café. The unique concept of the outlet is a café-cum-furniture and art gallery featuring an array of wood and steel pieces that fit the industrial-chic concept.

All the amazing wooden furniture is designed by Ierfan. "Every piece is one-of-a-kind because I produce only one piece per design, to retain the uniqueness of each piece," he says. His passion for furniture design is influenced by their father’s business, operating for the last 10 years. The passion for furniture goes back to a family trip to Indonesia many years ago, when their father fell in love with the furniture they saw there, which prompted him to open a shop. "Our family’s furniture shop is in Subang Perdana but the café’s displays and concept are totally different. My dad is very much into the modern Balinese style and though I have an interest in the style, mine differs from his," he continues.

Ierfan’s passion for furniture design led him to complete an interior design course at SEGi College. The special thing about their café is the fact the furniture arrangement changes every fortnight. The chairs, tables and stools are for sale and once the pieces have been bought, the layout of the café changes to fit new furniture. If someone buys a table at which you sit, you definitely won’t see it the next time you come. "Our regular customers know better than to pick a favourite spot, because the arrangement will be different next time they drop by," he explains. Apart from the awesome furniture, the art on the walls is available for purchase. Some of the pieces are from their father’s collection, which includes work by popular Malaysian artists like Rafiee Ghani. "I also have art pieces made by my friend, who is a stay-at-home mother. I bought her some canvas and paint, and she creates whatever she wants with the tools. We also display artworks by fresh graduates from UiTM."

While Ierfan concentrates on that aspect of the café, Adam immerses himself in the food and beverage side of the business. Adam isn’t an ardent fan of coffee but his passion for the industry comes from his childhood ambition of owning a café. "I’ve always wanted to own a café. When I was much younger, I remember one outing with my parents at a café and I felt so relaxed and calm sitting there. I said to myself, ‘What if I owned this café? Is this what I’d be feeling every day, coming to work?’"

The coffee culture is fast becoming a lifestyle for many. It has become more of a need to many and Adam saw an opportunity to start his own establishment. Instead of focusing on gourmet coffee, Adam decided to try a different approach with Wood & Steel. "As a café owner, I actually like to go to a café for the service provided and the good vibes I get," he says. Instead of focusing on the product, Wood & Steel emphasises relationship-building with its customers and giving them a space that’s uniquely designed and comes with good vibes. In terms of food, simple and fuss-free dishes are what you will find at Wood & Steel. Only five months after opening, Wood & Steel has established a steady customer base, which includes the workforce with offices nearby, families and people who just want to hang out and catch up with friends.

In the earlier stages, its delicious breakfast spread was the café’s highlight; but weeks after it opened, the brothers decided to add a lunch and dinner menu. The café’s offerings are simple and basic, which is what cafes are known for. "One thing about most Malaysians is they don’t know the difference between a restaurant and a café. What’s the difference, you ask? Menus in cafés aren’t supposed to be extensive. You can indulge in our simple and easily-prepared food; but if you’re..."
seeking something more elaborate, a restaurant would be more apt. I don’t want people to get the wrong idea of our concept, so that’s why I keep the menu very basic,” explains Adam.

These first five months have been one hell of a ride for the brothers. The outlet opened quite quickly and the men feel blessed by the positive feedback they have been getting from customers. They had thought of opening the café in a bustling urban area like Sri Hartamas or Bangsar but, realising how congested those areas are, decided against it. “We grew up in Kota Damansara, so we know the area very well,” says Ierfan. “Plus there are no proper cafés in the area. You can find Starbucks and a lot of kopitiams but certainly not a café with a concept like ours.”

The duo attributes business growth to the encouragement and support of parents, especially of their father. As clichéd as it may sound, the brothers look to their father as their role model. “He helped us by networking with his connections and supplying us with raw materials,” says Adam. “Though he doesn’t have an F&B background, he helped us a lot. He designed a few of the things in the café as well, so he is very much involved in our business.”

Ierfan and Adam hope to open two more outlets in separate locations. “I would like to develop the business but not as a franchise,” explains Adam. “What we do is sell unique concepts, so I wouldn’t want to open another Wood & Steel because I think it would kind of boring. The plan is to open new outlets with a different name but branded as Wood & Steel.”

Being a young entrepreneur isn’t easy, especially when you are being observed by older people; but Ierfan and Adam aren’t too worried. “My credibility as a furniture designer is stamped on these pieces displayed here. They can doubt all they want but our passion speaks loud and clear.”

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