



#### CLEAN AND CLASSIC

Left and far left: Amari collection of low and high back lounge chairs, designed by Janice Feldman. They are made of Janusfiber, suitable for indoors and outdoors. Below and bottom: Amalfi hourglass side table and deep tufted sofa, made of aluminium, which can be used as indoor or outdoor furniture



**A**CCORDING to the left-brain, right-brain dominance theory, the right side of the brain is best at expressive and creative tasks. The left side of the brain is considered to be adept at tasks that involve logic, numbers and analytical thinking. For most people, one side is more dominant than the other.

But Janice Feldman quips that if you cut her in half, "both sides of me are equally dominant". The American founded Janus et Cie, a furniture company, 36 years ago. As president, she not only looks after the business side of things, but is also one of the label's designers.

Janus et Cie started as a showroom for office furniture in 1977, but has evolved into retailing outdoor furniture. The company now has 14 showrooms in "triple A locations", says Ms Feldman, including New York, Los Angeles and Miami. The brand is also represented in cities such as Hong Kong and London, and this week, it opened its first showroom outside of the United States, at Space Asia Hub.

Not bad for someone who, when she started Janus et Cie at 25, had no collateral or cash to get a business loan. But Ms Feldman had some antiques bought during her college years, which she insured and used the policy to convince bankers of her worth.

Over 20 years ago, when most other furniture manufacturers were focusing on indoor pieces, Ms Feldman saw a shift in culture. "People were beginning to spend more time on the computers and you could see they were craving to be outside where they could spend time under natural light," she says. It was also at that time that indoor smoking bans were starting to kick in and smokers had to take their cigarettes outside. "I saw the opportunity to create pieces that could be used outdoors," says Ms Feldman. It also helped that growing up in California, the doors and windows to her home were always open. "My living space was both indoors and outdoors." So started the shift from office furniture to retailing outdoor furniture.

Retailing outdoor furniture made sense to her, as "from a business perspective, I could cater to homes, and also restaurants, cafes and hotels".

Not only did Ms Feldman see an opportunity in a new range of products, she also took the initiative to make her products sustainable, even before being environmentally conscious had become trendy. "You could call us leaders of a conscious movement," she says.

She owns the trademark to Janusfiber, and Januswood. The former is made from recycled plastic bottles, which comes in strips which are handwoven over aluminium or solid teak frames. Janusfiber comes in various col-

The founder of Janus et Cie is in charge of the creative process as well as the practical aspects of the furniture company.

By Tay Suan Chiang

ours, some with a sheen, and will not tear or fade, making them very durable.

Januswood is made using recycled wood from milk cartons. The end material looks and feels like regular wood. As the furniture pieces are often placed in the open, Ms Feldman says Januswood will not warp, fade, splinter or crack. The wood is also treated to prevent insect infestation.

She is aware that there are other companies which offer similar materials, but is confident enough to say: "Their quality doesn't come close." She wants the pieces to be long lasting, to be able to pass down from one generation to another. "From a business point, of course I want people to buy new pieces, but I also like the legacy and sustainability idea," she says.

Her pieces are meant for the outdoors, but Ms Feldman hasn't forgotten about the indoors. Some items come in the same design, but are made of rattan, because the material will not last as long in the elements. "And when customers are paying a certain price, you want to be sure the pieces will last a long time," she says.

Prices vary according to styles, materials, finishes and cushion textiles. Expect to pay from \$1,980 for an Amari lounge chair to \$12,065 for an Amalfi sofa.

## A head for business and design

Some of the pieces are made in the US and Europe, as well as the Philippines and Indonesia, where the weaving is done. She is most particular about finding people with the right skills. "Out of 100 weavers, only five would make the grade," she says.

New collections are introduced twice a year, but throughout her years of business, Janus et Cie has kept to the same look. "The design is clean, easy to understand, and classic, but not too traditional," says Ms Feldman.

It was one of the designers that she works with, Michael Vanderbyl, who pushed her to not just run the business but also be involved in the design side. Ms Feldman is a trained artist and interior designer schooled in graphic arts and industrial design. The history lover also studied Roman mythology and Latin, which influenced



#### MS FELDMAN

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the company name. Janus, the god of beginnings and transitions, is usually depicted as having two faces. "I loved history, and in business, I always have to look to the future, hence it was the right choice," she says, while et cie means "and company".

As someone who handles both design and business, she says that while she can be creative in her design, she also has to be practical. "Can the piece be made, can the piece sell, will it add to the success of the company," she asks.

To the untrained eye, the pieces look elegant and easy to make, but Ms Feldman says otherwise. "The designs are really complicated to construct." There is a reason for it. "It makes them a lot harder to copy," she states. Not that people have not tried. And Ms Feldman has gone after them too.

She is now focused on expansion in Asia, and has already moved to Singapore. Home is an apartment on Sentosa. "Previously I had no guts to try, but now that the company foundation is strong, I have the confidence to take on the world," she says. She declines to say how many stores she hopes to open in the region, but would only say she is "looking for expansion opportunities".

She has other plans in mind, such as teaching design classes or even offering scholarships. "I want to be involved in the design community here," she says.

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