

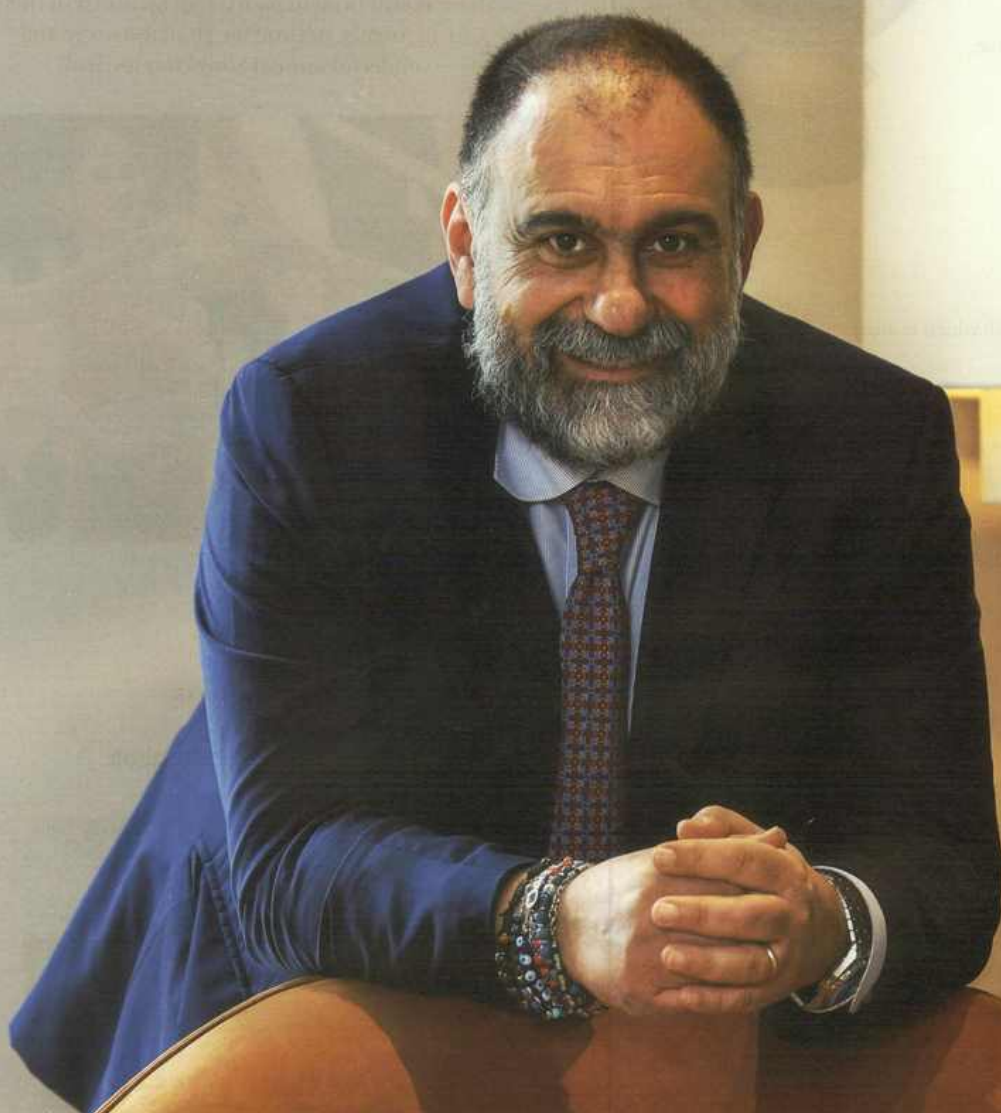
SOPA AWARD WINNER FOR EDITORIAL EXCELLENCE



THE EDGE MALAYSIA  
MARCH 31, 2025

# Options

IN PURSUIT OF PLEASURE + PURPOSE



## Man of the house

Poltrona Frau CEO Nicola Coropulis  
on bringing Italian luxury to Asia  
and the future of furniture design



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Brilliant picks in blue, green and gold



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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
KATHY FONG

## OPTIONS EDITORIAL TEAM

EDITOR DIANA KHOO  
ASSISTANT EDITORS  
TAN GIM EAN, KONG WAI YENG  
SENIOR WRITER EMILY YAP  
WRITERS AIREENA AZNI, GENIE LEONG, QUINCY TAN  
TRAINEE LEE CHARMYNN  
CONTRIBUTOR LILIAN TAN  
SENIOR EDITOR EDDIE HO  
CHIEF COPY EDITORS ELAINE LIM, MAH PIN PIN  
ASSISTANT CHIEF COPY EDITORS  
EVELYN TUNG, KENNETH FRANCIS MARTINUS  
SENIOR COPY EDITORS  
LEE MEI GEOK, SHANTHI MURUGAH,  
KOAY SOOK KUAN  
COPY EDITOR ARION YEOW  
PHOTO EDITOR CHU JUCK SENG  
DEPUTY PHOTO EDITOR MOHD IZWAN MOHD NAZAM  
SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHERS KENNY YAP, SUHAM YUSUF,  
PATRICK GOH, SHAHRIN YAHYA, SAM FONG, LOW YEN YEING  
PHOTOGRAPHERS ZAHID IZZANI, SHAHRILL BASRI  
ART DIRECTOR SHARON KHOO  
DESIGN DESK RAYMOND KHOR, NIK EDRA,  
CHERYL LOH, VALERIE CHIN, WENNIE HENG  
PRODUCTION MANAGER THOMAS CHEN  
PRODUCTION TEAM HONG KIN SIANG, YONG ONN,  
VOON POH YIN, YONG YIK SHENG

## ADVERTISING &amp; MARKETING

CHIEF COMMERCIAL OFFICER  
SHARON TEH (012) 313 9056  
GENERAL MANAGER  
FONG LAI KUAN (012) 386 2831  
ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER  
GREGORY THU (012) 376 0614  
SENIOR MANAGERS  
GEE THA PERUMAL (016) 250 8640  
KENNY LIM (014) 334 2733  
SHANNON LEONG (012) 677 5345  
SENIOR ACCOUNT MANAGERS  
BRYAN ANG (012) 317 8473  
CECILIA TOO (012) 319 7666  
LINA DIVANA HEDZIER (016) 900 0392  
SHAFINA SYAHRI (017) 281 4787  
ACCOUNT MANAGERS  
DOMINIC LEE (012) 325 3755  
MEGAN WONG (012) 289 2631  
MANAGER, AD-TRAFFIC  
NORMA JASMA NORMAN  
EMAIL: advertising@bizedge.com

## CORPORATE

PUBLISHER & GROUP CEO  
HO KAY TAT  
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER  
LIM SHIEW YUIN

## WATER WORLD

If you are looking for an adventure in April, there is still time to plan a trip up north to the City of Angels, in time for Thailand's wet and wonderful annual Songkran festival



WHAT:

**Songkran**

WHEN:

**April 11 to 15**

WHERE:

**Sanam Luang, Bangkok**



TOURISMTHAILAND

Songkran signals the start of the traditional Thai New Year, and what initially began as the ritual pouring of water as a symbol of self-cleansing, reverence and good fortune has evolved into a spectacular festival that involves splashing everyone and everything around with joyful abandon. It is customarily observed for three days, starting from April's first full moon, although its popularity has now extended the revelry somewhat.

Local and international media hail it as "the world's biggest water fight" and, while it is celebrated all over Thailand as well as in neighbouring countries like Laos and Cambodia, most of the action will be concentrated in Bangkok's Sanam Luang, a vast open ground converted into a multipurpose leisure park near the northern wall of the Grand Palace. This year's festival will be divided into a series of distinct zones, focusing on the five regions of the country. Expect a bustling marketplace offering local products and delicacies, temple fair activities, classical performances, sand pagoda building and merit-making activities. There will also be drone shows and live music by artists and top DJs.

As this is also the hottest time of the year, Songkran is a season of fun. But be sure to come prepared: waterproof footwear or simple rubber flip-flops are ideal, as is a waterproof bag to keep mobile phones safe and dry. Goggles and ear plugs are also a good idea to protect eyes and ears. Super Soakers and expensive water guns are for the gung-ho. If not, a simple bucket would do the job just as well. April 12 and 13 will also see eight spectacular Grand Songkran parades taking place along Ratchadamnoen Klang Road.



“  
The role of designers  
is to look at tradition,  
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”





# Best seat in the house

BY GENIE LEONG

English author D H Lawrence once described, in his 1921 travel book *Sea and Sardinia*, the coastal city of Cagliari, Sardinia, as: "A naked town rising steep, steep, golden-looking, piled naked to the sky from the plain at the head of the formless hollow bay. It is strange and rather wonderful, not a bit like Italy. The city piles up lofty and almost miniature, and makes me think of Jerusalem: without trees, without cover, rising rather bare and proud, remote as if back in history, like a town in a monkish, illuminated missal. One wonders how it ever got there. And it seems like Spain — or Malta: not Italy. It is a steep and lonely city, treeless, as in some old illumination. Yet withal rather jewel-like: like a sudden rose-cut amber jewel naked at the depth of the vast indenture."

The quaint capital is a stunning anthology of rows of winding alleyways, rolling promenades and baroque churches stacked on top of each other like Legos across a series of seven hills (not unlike Rome), and just as Lawrence suggested, is a curious combination of cultures that gives it a look quite unlike any other in the country. Hugged by the azure waves of the Mediterranean Sea and warm glittering shores, the village was founded by Phoenician-Punic rulers in the Neolithic period, and named Caralis during the Roman occupation. Today, you can catch glimpses of the many groups that passed through the land through its historic infrastructure — looming Pisan watchtowers constructed from blonde stone, Spanish townhouses with wrought iron details and remnants of an amphitheatre. The place has long enchanted generations of travellers who have roamed its myrtle plant-perfumed streets. Perhaps then it comes as no surprise that such a paradise could produce one of interior décor's greatest names — Lorenzo "Renzo" Frau, founder of Italian furniture maker, Poltrona Frau.

Born in 1881 in Cagliari, Renzo grew up amid the city's vibrant landscape. He later left the comfort of home for military service in Milan, where he earned the title of lieutenant. There he met Savina Pisati, whom he married after being discharged. The newlyweds moved to Turin, which was at the time a nucleus for Italian culture, craftsmanship and product manufacturing. He began working as a sales representative for Gribaudo and later, Dermoide Patent, a faux leather company. However, his inner entrepreneurial spirit made him crave his own unique project.

After going on a business trip to Britain, he fell in love with Chesterfield armchairs, a prime example of classic English upholstery boasting a distinctive diamond pattern with buttons sewn deep into the backrest for an almost quilted appearance and a nail-studded front. These seats, commonly found in London's drawing rooms and gentlemen's clubs, were not the only thing the businessman set his sights on; the ornamental and elegant French styles and baroque associated with Central Europe also tickled his fancy. Drawing inspiration from all over the world, he decided to set up his own venture and, in 1912, registered his namesake brand in Turin.

Sadly, Renzo died prematurely in 1926. Using his rich archive of sketches, his wife and son Ugo took over the company and turned it into a globally renowned name, carrying on his spark of genius. Now 113 years old, the heritage brand is synonymous with luxury and elegance, becoming the finishing touch for some of the world's most exclusive spaces and architectural icons (like the Stadtheater in Solothurn, Switzerland, and Louvre Abu Dhabi) as well as the most opulent of vehicular status

In the world of furniture and interior décor, Italian label Poltrona Frau's pieces are the pinnacle of elegance and quality. As the brand sets out to expand its presence in Asia-Pacific, CEO Nicola Coropulis emphasises the importance of global collaboration.



From left: Yoong Low, general manager of Stanzo Italia, Coropulis and Ken Low, group managing director of Stanzo Collection, at the showroom opening in Bangsar



Renzo Frau

symbols (the upholstery for Singapore Airlines' Business and First Class seats, and several Porsche, Ferrari and McLaren models).

The man at the head of it all today is Nicola Coropulis, named one of *Forbes Italy's* 2023 Top 100 Managers and *Entrepreneurs*, who joined Poltrona Frau in 2007. In a journey that echoes that of Renzo himself, Coropulis started as a sales director before being appointed CEO and brand director in 2016. While on a quick stopover in Kuala Lumpur for the grand opening of Poltrona Frau's first-ever local monobrand store, he talks about his love for Italian manufacturing, plans for expanding into Asia and how smart design choices can turn a house into a home.

## EAST MEETS WEST

Even after nearly two decades in the business, Coropulis is the definition of pride and zealousness. Unlike some who might tire of their work after many years, he insists his 18-year tenure has only intensified his love for Italian craftsmanship and furniture, as well as nourished his inner gregariousness and wanderlust. Recent travels to the Asia-Pacific — where the people, cultures and tastes vary greatly from those back home — have been particularly enlightening, he says.

"There are many aspects of the work that intrigue and keep me motivated. Of course, there is the passion for the products and finding innovative solutions. I also like meeting new people and discovering new places, and my trips around Asia have been very eye-opening as I've been able to learn a lot about the different markets I did not know before."

With each new year comes the promise of fresh beginnings and ambitions. For Poltrona Frau, 2025 means looking east, especially to Southeast Asia (SEA) where it intends to broaden its presence across the region's greatest cities in the coming months, and the allure of colourful, multicultural KL was simply impossible to ignore.

So what made KL the obvious choice as one of the first stops on Poltrona Frau's expansion? Coropulis says: "Malaysia is such an important market in the Asia-Pacific, which showed us a lot of growth and energy last year, inspiring us to actively seek out a new [local] partner. It became the natural choice to move on to opening the store here, and we are very confident this will be an important point for our growth here."

Established with furniture dealer Stanzo Italia, the flagship opened its doors in January. Its clean white exterior and tall glass windows might give it an unassuming appearance, fitting right in with the many rows of bungalows-turned-roadside boutiques along lively Jalan Maarof in Bangsar. However, a quick skip up the front steps and through the heavy front door reveals something quite unlike any other in the area.

Created by multidisciplinary studio AMDL CIRCLE with Ferrara-born architect and designer Michele de Lucchi at the helm of the design efforts, the store evokes the comfort and sumptuousness of a chicly decorated abode rather than a stark and sterile showroom. Double-height spaces give the 500 sq m lot an airy feel and each floor boasts its own distinct atmosphere. The ground floor is cool and open, with a surprising amount of natural light filtering in through many large windows. The two mezzanines above are dimmer and intimate, thanks to soft warm lighting and an abundance of plush fabric and buttery leather surfaces. The south-facing corner of the topmost level receives the most sunlight, which shines in on the Material Library — a wall of sleek black metal shelves displaying an array of lush textiles with various hues and finishes to choose from.

Beyond house icons like the Archibald, 1919 and Dezza armchairs as well as the Let It Be or Get Back sofas, clients who swing by may also browse through a selection of home accessories from the brand's Beautilities collection — think a fully-leather-lined baggammon set or a comfy pet bed for Fido — and even a medley of items by Cecotti Collezione, a small woodworking company acquired by Poltrona Frau in 2018.

The winning aspect of the showroom's layout is that it allows customers to easily envision how they might fit these products into their own havens. "The brief we gave [de Lucchi] was for a space where our furniture could live and breathe and, most importantly, allow customers to walk about and browse, where they can experience the beauty of being immersed in our products. The final result of the store really surpassed our expectations, and if I could use a word to describe it, that would be 'cosy'. It makes great use of the available rooms, has a lot of natural light coming in and perfectly blends with our offerings," says Coropulis.

Establishing stronger roots in KL and wider SEA enables the brand to project its outlets as platforms for creatives in the region to congregate and collaborate. "We have always been passionate about incorporating new ideas and points of view. I like to say it is a multilayer company that embraces diversity and perspectives that come from different sources," he mentions, recalling travelling to Taiwan at the beginning of the year to launch the 2025 Asia Pacific Design Competition, where emerging and established designers from the continent submitted their drafts for an armchair that could become a new superstar product.

Collaboration has always piqued Coropulis' interest and attention. In fact, one of his favourite items is the first-ever piece the maker put out with the help of an external designer. "Products are like children and it's almost impossible to choose just one, but I personally love the Dezza armchair designed by Gio Ponti in 1965,

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which I have at home. The design turns 60 this year and it has always been very popular."

## WHERE THE HEART IS

The term "new normal" refers to the way a community, its economy, behaviours and practices shift in the wake of a crisis. Most today associate the phrase with Covid-19 and how it forever altered how we approach our social interactions, healthcare and work-life balance. As international travel and large public gatherings dwindled with the introduction of lockdowns around the world, people everywhere were cooped up indoors. Adults worked remotely while children attended school online, and as the weeks and months passed, our homes began to feel more like prisons than sanctuaries.

Oftentimes, consumers settle for pieces that fulfil the most straightforward needs — a table to eat and work at, chairs to seat company, a bed to sleep in — and once function is met, one forgets about form and the critical role it plays in keeping life interesting. Funnily enough, we usually only notice this impact when we spend extended periods of time in one place. Most have never had to do so until the pandemic. "After Covid, people are at home a lot more and therefore realise the furniture they have is not as functional as needed, or even as nice as they would like. I believe now more people are looking to create safer and more functional environments through their furniture," Coropulis says.

Poltrona Frau took the global slowdown as an opportunity to rethink the way it approaches furniture and home goods. "[Those years were] a very important time to reflect on our catalogue and what we have been doing over the past few years. We realised we need to offer our consumers products that can serve different purposes and be used in all kinds of environments in as many ways as possible. But we also noticed we should not only be looking at creating big-scale furniture, but also smaller pieces that can offer interesting solutions for customers," he explains.

This paved the way for expansion into décor items such as vases, loose pillows and even fitness products, perfect for those wanting to experiment with their personal taste and anoint their rooms with a touch of fine Italian craftsmanship without committing to whole new sofa sets or dining tables. "We believe that you can always have a piece of Poltrona Frau no matter the size."

That said, once the worst had passed and social distancing orders were lifted, the desire to be set free from the confines of our abodes only lasted so long before praises of hybrid and remote work styles were sung. A heightened desire to be closer to loved ones and adopt flexible lifestyles led to people wanting to be at home more and make their spaces more enjoyable. Furniture that performs its primary purpose well and offers more through thoughtful design additions (such as sleek magazine compartments on the side of a sofa that effortlessly store your weekly read, or a bar cart with detachable shelves that double as serving trays) has become a method to facilitate that.

Additionally, a room that is welcoming and worth lingering in must not only have strong bones, but also be pleasing to the eye. Take it from Greek philosopher Plato and the father of modern architecture Andrea Palladio, who have respectively named beauty as one of three universal human values and the characteristics of a good building.

Coropulis affirms that while the company has never shied away from modernising, it has never forgotten



A live upholstery demonstration at the opening event gave guests a glimpse into the artistry that goes into every piece



The 60th anniversary Dezza model features a surrealist print of 26 electric blue hands



As if straight out of an interior design magazine, this bedroom setup on the top floor of the Bangsar flagship demonstrates how to balance cosiness and modernity



Golden lamp light gently illuminates the little trinkets and decorations that fill the corners of the mezzanine

the decorative uses of furniture, understanding that a little splendour makes a world of difference. "Last year, we began introducing mechanisms and even elements of automation in our products, which can be a little strange when it comes to furniture design. But I believe today, giving people products that make life easier is the most important. Still, aesthetics must be preserved and that will

always be a strong commitment for us."

The contemporary consumer who is financially savvy has always been highly attuned to labels that can properly mesh practicality and looks. In recent years, the climate crisis has seen the emergence of a third stipulation — sustainability. Coropulis will proudly tell you that this has long been a key pillar across all levels of operations.

"I like to say Poltrona Frau has been sustainable since its establishment in 1912 because our goods have always been produced using natural materials. Leather ensures the skins of animals that have been killed for their meat do not go to waste and everything we make is created to have a very long lifespan. Durability is key pillar of sustainability. Based on these cornerstones, we have over the years developed a thorough approach which includes multiple initiatives that touch all aspects of our company operations, from product ideation to energy supply."

Poltrona Frau, which installed solar panels at its factory and headquarters in Tolentino 15 years ago, is always on the lookout for unconventional and inventive materials to minimise its environmental impact. In 2022, this culminated with the launch of the Pelle Frau Impact Less textile, a never-seen-before leather variant that completely omits the use of chrome and heavy metals in its tanning process. And in the age of technology and rapid development, this is surely just the beginning.



Padded with rubberised horsehair and seat cushions filled with soft goose down, the Chester armchair celebrates Edwardian English style

No matter the era though, what the brand wishes to highlight most is its rich Italian heritage and technique. In Coropulis' opinion, tradition and innovation must go hand in hand, and it is the job of artisans and manufacturers to preserve the art forms and cultures passed down by those who came before us while imbuing what we make with fresh perspectives. "I believe designers can help keep tradition alive by bringing in innovative ideas. It is through this that you can preserve customs and make sure the products you develop today are inspired by history, but also relevant to the contemporary times we live in. The role of designers is to look at tradition, get inspiration from it and then find fresh methods to address the requirements of today's customers."

At the upcoming 2025 Salone del Mobile, scheduled to take place in Milan from April 8 to 13, Poltrona Frau is set to unveil a wealth of novel creations, sure to prove once again that newness and function need not come at the price of beauty or heritage. We for one will surely be keeping an eye out for what the house plans to bring to the table. ■