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Stroke of genius



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BY FRANCIS KAN - 9 HOURS 57 MIN AGO

SINGAPORE — At hip eatery The Green Door, a seven-foot bear holding a lamp leans over a brick wall that surrounds a garden at the Dempsey Road venue.

The striking sculpture — created specially for the restaurant by a craftsman in central Java — is designed to provoke curiosity, daring passers-by to find out what lies beyond the beast and behind the door in question.

In effect, it is the three-dimensional teak wood equivalent of a teaser advertisement; a 30-second spot made permanent and built into the environment of the establishment it is trying to promote.

This melding of advertising with real-world environments is the signature of the creative agency behind the branding of The Green Door, The Stripe Collective, and the brainchild of the firm's

founder Kelly Dickinson.

“We help to build brands from scratch, and we can build it into the actual environment itself, rather than something that is just digital on print. An ad lasts a few seconds, but we create something that can last 10 years,” said Ms Dickinson, who started Stripe five years ago after a globe-spanning career as a Creative Director at advertising agency Ogilvy & Mather. Stripe provides branding and communications services across a range of disciplines — from advertising and interiors to graphic and product design.

Wanting to start a family in Singapore, where she has lived for the past 13 years, the Briton struck out on her own in order to slim down her hectic travel schedule as well as indulge a creative streak unhindered by big agency constraints.

The firm’s 10-strong team of interior designers, art directors, an architect and graphic designers, among others, has worked on homes — a villa on the Indonesian resort of Lombok is one ongoing project — offices and retail space, but it is in Singapore’s booming high-end food and beverage (F&B) sector that the agency has struck creative gold.

Its niche is in infusing a space with one singular message that is manifested in every aspect of the establishment — from menus and uniforms to lighting and artworks. Indeed, for some projects, they have done everything “except the air conditioning and the exit signs”.

“Everything has to sing to the same song sheet, from the menu to the uniforms and lighting. Otherwise, it’s not adding to the message,” she noted.

Stripe has been nominated for a President’s Design Award this year for its work on Spanish tapas bar Sabio.

The agency’s portfolio may feature some eye-catching creations — playful interpretations of Escher paintings or antique pistols masquerading as deer antlers are just some of the novelties littering the Stripe office — but Ms Dickinson makes clear that after the final picture is hung and last table put in place, its only concern is putting bums on seats.

“There is a fine line between art and business, commercial creativity and straight creativity. But, at the end of the day, it has to make money,” said Ms Dickinson, 37, who also acts as Stripe’s Managing Director and Executive Creative Director.

To give clients a unique yet unified aesthetic, she works directly with furniture craftsmen in Indonesia and artists in Vietnam to produce bespoke pieces. By cutting out the middleman, she is able to give clients a customised experience at affordable prices.

“A lot of people think that we are expensive because we do so much bespoke. But we’re not. A chair for an F&B outlet may cost you S\$150, we can make it for S\$180,” she explains.

A typical Stripe project for an F&B space can cost anywhere between S\$300,000 to S\$700,000, she added.

Her approach has garnered particular cachet among the edgier eateries and bars that seem to inhabit every street corner in Singapore these days. Two of Stripe’s coming projects — English gastropub Oxwell & Co and “nose to tail” restaurant Wolf — are located within a stone’s throw of its Club Street office.

The interiors of Wolf, which will serve up dishes made from every part of the swine when it opens in October, will feature something “never before seen in Singapore”, said Ms Dickinson.

Stripe is also expanding beyond its home market and working on projects in Indonesia and Malaysia. Looking ahead, Ms Dickinson’s dream is to do a boutique hotel, giving Stripe a bigger canvas to showcase a brand’s DNA.

“We want to attract more like-minded clients and help build them lasting brands.”