

LIFE&TIMES **LIVING**

Fitting pewter into Landscape

Royal Selangor teams up with international design firm VW+BS to create a stylish collection of tableware, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**

YOUR dinner date is quite possibly the dullest person you've come across. To show off, he insists that the correct pronunciation for equilibrium is "equilibrium".

You're desperate to change the subject in case you laugh in his face. If only you have the set of Erosion dishes from Royal Selangor's latest collection, you'll have something else to talk about.

"You can move the dishes around to create new designs," says Wong Voon Yee, 50, one half of VW + BS, an international multidisciplinary design firm.

During a relaxed discussion about these designs, Voon (as he prefers to be called) demonstrates the versatility of six angular shaped dishes that make up one large dish. It forms part of a new collection of edgy and stylish pewter tableware by Royal Selangor.

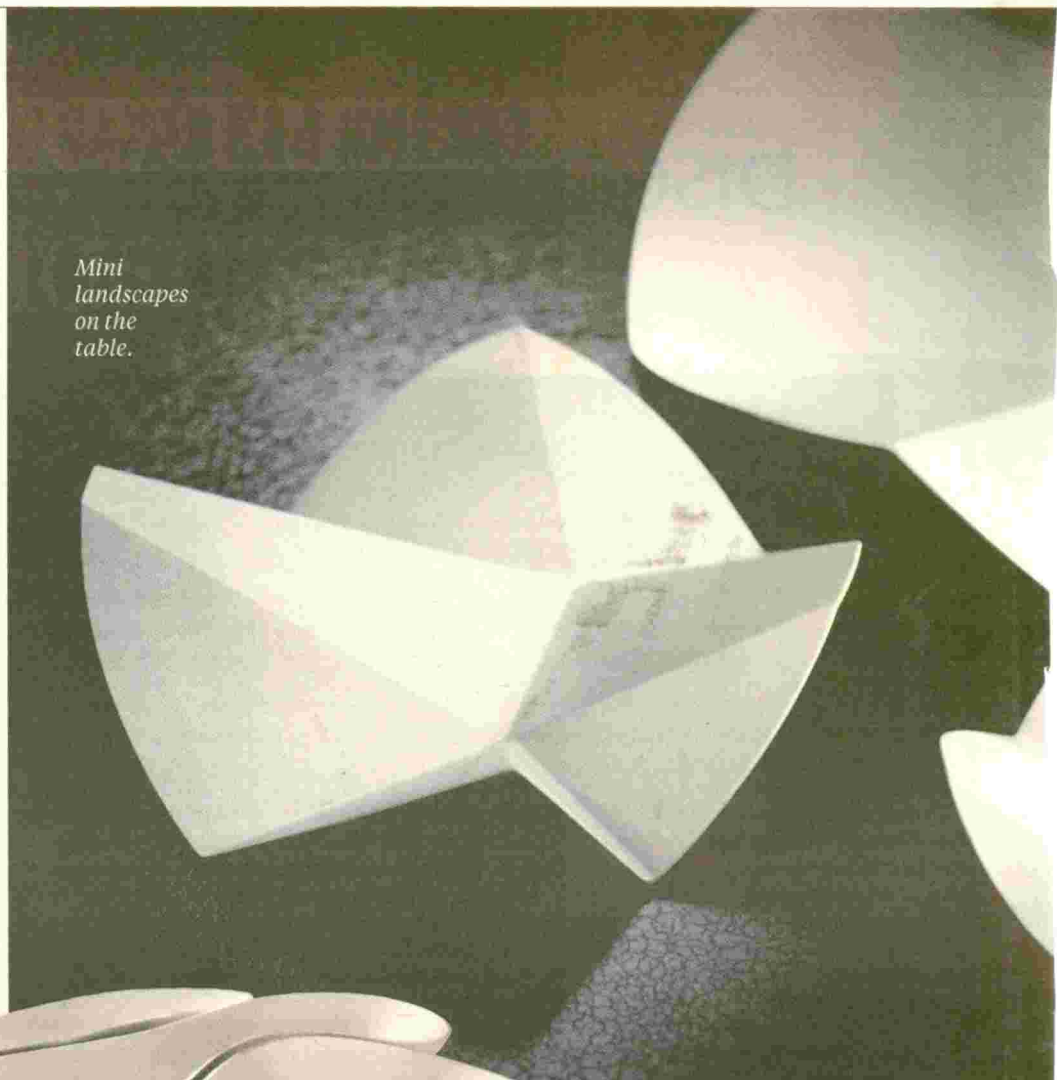
Yong Yoon Li, 42, executive director of Royal Selangor International, says: "In September 2011, we met Voon and Benson Saw (the other half of VW + BS) in London. We had a chat over lunch about coming up with new designs."

In three months, VW + BS came up with a set of designs for Royal Selangor to consider. Today, the collection is called Landscape and consists of a candleholder, bowls, trays, milk jug, tea caddy, sugar bowl, dishes and lamp.

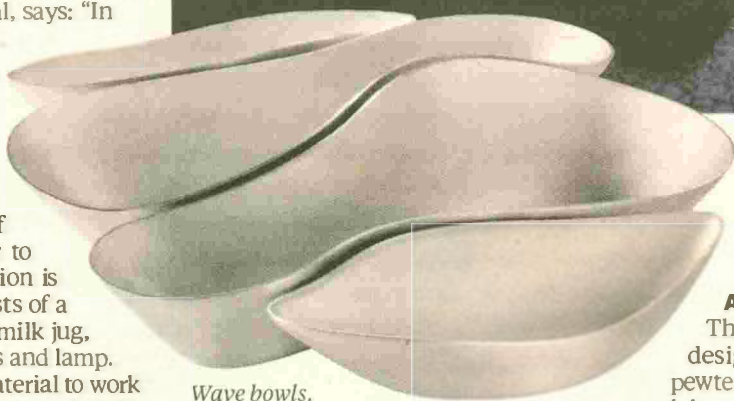
"Pewter is a wonderful material to work with and in the right hands, its possibilities are limitless," says Yong. "What Voon and Benson have created reflect the sign of times. People want to use the items they buy from us. They're no longer just decorative items."

The inspiration for Landscape came from shapes and ideas around the world. "The brief was to create something for the personal environment. We wanted to create mini landscapes on the table. Let's go back to Erosions."

As he explains his idea behind this



Mini landscapes on the table.



Wave bowls.

design, it is possible to imagine that the dishes as a coastline of a mountain range. The spaces between each dish are fissures caused by wind and water beating against the coastline.

"It's not right for me to put into words what each design means. We prefer people to project their own interpretation for each item created. There's no right or wrong," adds Voon.

Next is Track, which is described as "a simple seamless ridged tray reminiscent of sand on the beach as the tide recedes" in the official

documentation that accompanies the launch of Landscapes. "It's like sand dunes, don't you think?" asks Saw, 39.

A SHARED HISTORY

The discussion then veers away from design, production, manufacturing and pewter and focuses on the history of this collaboration, which reveals friendships that have lasted decades and began with something as mundane as carpooling.

Voon says: "I met Yoon Li's cousin, Chris, when we were in school in Singapore. It was the infancy of the ERP (Electronic Road Pricing) where if we had four people, then we didn't have to pay the road fees. Chris and I went to ACS (Anglo Chinese School) and we didn't live far from each other. So, our mothers got together and decided to carpool."

While studying architecture in the UK, Voon met Benson (the latter's sister was Voon's classmate). While Benson pursued an engineering degree in the US, Voon stayed on in the UK to practise architecture. Today, his area of specialty is interior architecture which he explains in the following terms: "We don't do the whole design package. Instead, we try to solve problems. A lot of the buildings in the UK are protected. We can't tear them down and start over. Instead, we have to refurbish and remodel. That's what I do."

Yong, however, has a different kind of story to tell about his days in university. With his fascination for machines, it's no surprise to hear him say: "After A levels, I studied Manufacturing Engineering in Birmingham. It is the place where the Industrial Revolution began and the birth of manufacturing. I studied the



From left, Executive Director of Royal Selangor Yong Yoon Li with designers Benson Saw and Wong Voon Yee.

"We prefer people to project their own interpretation for each item created. There's no right or wrong."

Wong Voon Yee



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nuts and bolts of machinery.”
In the next breath, this father of two makes an almost unbelievable statement: “Birmingham is the most romantic city in the UK.”

THE COLLECTION

Seeing my disbelief, he insists: “Seriously! It has leafy suburbia... and chocolate...” Yong lets his words trail away while Voon explains: “He thinks that because that’s where he met his wife.”

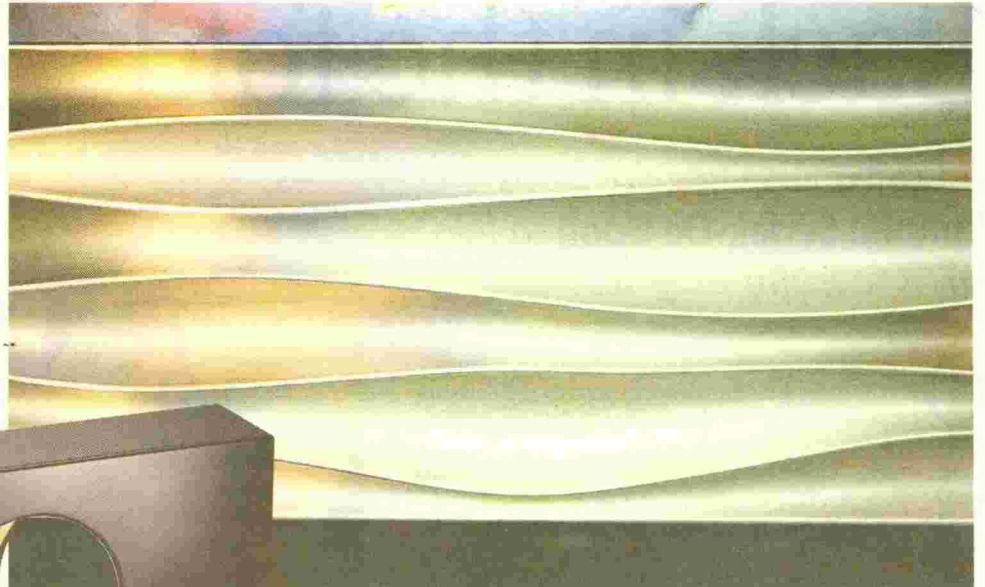
The discussion about Landscape resumes. “Creased is a series of trays that are available in three sizes. Each tray resembles a piece of paper that has been crumpled and then flattened and recreated in pewter,” explains Yong.

As he points to the next set, Pillar, he wants to highlight the different textures used. “In Creased, we sand-blasted the pewter. With Pillar, we tried to use two textures. It has a satin body with highly polished top.”

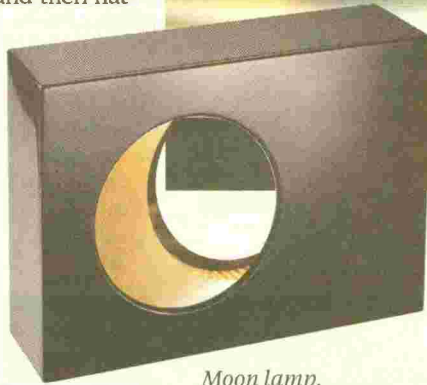
The rationale in creating Pillar, says Yong, was because such items do well. “We find that tea caddies, sugar bowls and milk jugs are popular.” Indeed, they are cylindrical in shape and fit perfectly into the hand. Each piece has a curved base that appears to make them float, in contrast to the weight of the material.

All three men insist that their collaboration has been smooth sailing all the way. Indeed, having worked with many designers in the course of his career, Yong says that Voon and Benson are easy to work with.

For the two designers, this was the first



Track tray that resembles sand dunes.



Moon lamp.

time they were working with a new medium — pewter. “It’s been really interesting. We’d never done anything like this before. The malleability of pewter was something new for us. It was different from working with other metals. This was more like working with ceramics. It allowed me to explore a little more,” says Voon.

He did overestimate the weight of some of the items, however. “What looked doable on paper was too heavy when it was made. But that’s the beauty of pewter. I can vary the thickness,” he says.

Pointing to Clover — the three-pronged candlestick holder — Voon adds: “This has gone through many incarnations. In one of them, you can change the positions of three candles by varying the distance from each other. Now, we’ve made it so that they merely have three different heights.”

Yong then points to the last item in the collection: Moon lamp. Made in high gloss wood, this rectangular box lamp with LED lights has a circular opening on both sides. With the designers determined to arrange the items in Landscape properly so they are in balance for the photographer, ever the romantic,

Yong says with finality: “With all these, anyone can easily set the mood at home.”

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