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A literal confrontation with piracy

In the classic Chinese adventure tale *The Water Margin*, about the outlaw Song Jiang and his band of companions, we find perhaps one of the first cases of identity theft. The dark featured Li Kui was one of Song Jiang's most feared cohorts. He was notorious for his bad temper and a wild fighting style with dual broad axes, so he earned the title "Black Cyclone."

Such was the reputation he earned, that the lesser thief Li Gui decided to cash in on the name. He claimed he was the famed villain and stole from others under pretense that he was the famed outlaw. His career was cut short when he tried to rob the purse of the genuine article, Li Kui himself. The false cyclone was not equal to the quality of the genuine, leading to his demise.

Piracy is not just an adventure tale of times past. Like Li Kui, we can see the shadow of Li Gui everywhere in today's society. Everything from books to medicines and software to fashion wear as well as calligraphy, painting and design furniture are pirated. As long as there is money to be made, there will be the scourge of piracy.

Li Gui tried to forge a business for himself based on another man's reputation. Walking along the streets of Shanghai's business district, you will often see vendors who are selling so-called Rolex watches to foreigners. The reputation of these vendors and their pirated fakes has been wide-spread among the foreigners so only the unwary are fooled. Certainly, genuine Rolex vendors will not sell their wares in the street. But even a wise passerby will still be approached and followed by these modern-day Li Gui and find the hassle might ruin their mood for the day.

In the ideal utopian society, there would be no piracy. All the manufacturers would respect quality and intellectual property while customers would only seek genuine articles - thus preventing piracy at its origin and destination. Meanwhile, the companies producing authorized editions would not be priced out of the market and consumers would benefit from better value and quality. There remains a wide gulf between this utopia and current practices however.



I have visited Shanghai furniture exhibitions where one finds many imitations that seem both stylish and low cost. Since some of these pirates are good at camouflaging their falsifications, everyday customers will not realize they have been duped. Some of these devious forgers stubbornly insist that these copies are actually the result of their own ingenious development. If you point out to them their crime, they will insist you are the villain to damage their good name with accusations.

Interestingly, some others openly portray themselves as a "Li Gui", proud to say they have imitated what they have seen in pictures, on the internet or copying one real article that they have purchased from Europe. With a wink and a nod they exhort you to join them in their transgressions.

At one such exhibition, there was a sudden burst of clamor at a nearby stall. As it could not help but grab our attention, we followed the uproar and found a real Li Kui confronting his own Li Gui. This rival factory had pirated his design. In this disheartening case, it seems the hero was outnumbered by the brotherhood of thieves and the police, in the name of order, silenced the designer!



The phenomenon of piracy is not unique to China. For example, Fritz Hansen's earliest imitations came from Denmark but the principle of stopping counterfeiting and shoddy imitations is rigid there. Once the forgery has been investigated, all the products and equipment will be removed, and the Li Gui will be compelled to pay up. To have such a code of conduct requires a developed economy, legal system and civil society.

In Asia, some potential customers simply are not educated about brand and have never considered the issue of originals. For economic and market reasons, another set of potential customers knows about originals but has not had the ability or opportunity to purchase them. Another, more troubling set, are those that know the original and choose imitation based on price alone. We must develop the customer base through brand promotion and education.

When piracy is an industry-wide problem it becomes harmful to everyone in the form of counterfeit medicine, money, liquor and tobacco. Alarming accounts in the media have even indicated dangerous instances of fraudulently produced foodstuffs containing cheaper but unhealthy ingredients.

It would be possible to end the counterfeit market if policymakers decided to. However, until China is ready to improve its legal code and is prepared to uncover and prosecute these pirates in our midst, it is up to us to appreciate genuine design, respect intellectual property and to not purchase these cheaper fakes. Let us hope China can pass from under Li Gui's shadow and reach a new utopia.

Interview

Stands behind “design, quality and artworks”

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Can you describe the landscape of the China hospitality market?

From my past experience of travelling overseas, I got the feeling that China is one of the most dynamic countries in the world. With the economy booming, the demand in constructing high-end living facilities and five-star hotels has been greatly increased. This started in the earlier development of China's east coast and now has emerged as a trend in the inland regions. Also, the rising living standards have supported more and more high-end clubs and villas in China.

How is this industry changing?

Compared to the West, modern design started late in China. We are facing a market that is still maturing and gives a lot of challenges but also opportunities. The majority of end-users chooses based on price and appearance, but care little about design, brand or quality. We enjoy sharing our information, expertise and passion with them, whether they buy from us or not. We also partner with distributors and others in the supply chain to further develop the knowledge. We believe people will eventually understand high-quality products and graceful designs and it is improving all the time!

What is your firm's history and main business and how does Van Collection position itself in this market?

Van Collection was founded in the beginning of 2010. Even as a young company, I don't want to position ourselves as a furniture supplier, rather, we try to work as an idea provider. We want to deliver a good lifestyle and contribute to a more wonderful world. We provide professional furniture planning and our customers are always satisfied. We offer total furnishing solutions following our company values to those who care about quality design products.

What value does Van Collection offer to its customers?

Design, quality and artworks are the key words to our philosophy. We embody them wherever we are and whatever we do!

Why does Van Collection partner with Woodmark? What are the synergies and added values the partners bring?

Woodmark is the first and most important brand we have partnered with. By delivering the beautiful work from Woodmark, we also spread the value of our company. Personally, when I first visited the Woodmark website in the spring of 2008, I fell in love with this brand. Woodmark enjoys unique design, high quality and also blends well with the surrounding environment. By the time Woodmark first considered entering the China market; Van Collection was also beginning our journey of supplying high-quality designed furniture in China. Therefore, the cooperation started naturally.

Do you see an increasing appreciation of genuine brands in this industry?

I believe so. With the ongoing development of our society, people will show more respect to intellectual properties. They'll pay more attention to their working and living environment as well. Under such circumstances, I believe genuine brands stand for the future of the market.

What is the greatest challenge you are facing or have faced and how you address it?

I don't think it too difficult to sell products, but selling is not our final destination. Our biggest goal is to deliver the value of our company. In many cases, people make decision to buy knock-off or products that are in poor quality. The reasons vary and our duty is to help people choosing good designs and raise their living standards. Meanwhile, we can also make us a stronger brand.

How do you plan to grow your business? Focusing more on your existing segment or expanding into new business areas?

We cherish our long-term partners like Woodmark and will also maintain focus on the industry to bring new lines to extend our portfolio. However, we will not take everything, but a strictly selected group which matches our language of pure and simple design. Currently, we specialize in the hospitality industry such as hotel, club, and luxury villa projects. We may consider the retail market by opening stores when we are ready.

How do you see partnerships like those with Woodmark? How do you select partners? Does Woodmark's strong local China presence influence your choice and does it enhance the value to your customers?

I think the core value behind partnerships is understanding, trust and support. Luckily, we have reached consensus on these points with Woodmark. These are the key values from which we choose our partners. Of course we also evaluate the products and the ideas they express. To us, strong local support from a brand is also very important. We are looking for those who share the same values with us and we won't prefer those who only offer products.

Brand News

Release of Charles Wilson's new iconic design - The Heron Chair



At age 43, Sydney-based Charles Wilson has already secured his design reputation in Australia. His new designs have attracted some of the world's leading furniture brands. By the end of 2009, Wilson had successfully designed the "Heron" chair for Woodmark, his long term friend in the furniture industry. After a year of development and refinement, Heron has finally been revealed to the market. "My inspiration started while doing a commission for NSW Government House. I was photographing the interior spaces and all these curvaceous Victorian lounge chairs and wondered how I could re-interpret these organic shapes in a modern way," says Wilson. The shape of the heron bird from old Chinese paintings has also become an inspiration. Heron's side profile is reminiscent of a large bird coming to land; the graceful, streamlined form of the body sits on a cantilevered axis that seems to flow directly into the star base. Wilson used a procedure similar to how Arne Jacobsen made his first prototype for the famous Egg chair over 50 years ago. He made the 1:1 patterns that form the chair and seat moulds by hand.



Giving more flavors to the new Woodmark Inspiration Binder



In June 2011, Woodmark's new inspiration binder goes live. The new binder includes 13 new fabric ranges providing a great variety of colors and patterns for you to choose from. This is a collection that complements the existing Woodmark binder. Each new fabric expresses an individual flavor so that you could easily spice up working and living environments. We have carefully tested the suitability of all fabrics and the details are shown in the "fabric pattern usage" matrix.

The list of new fabric ranges includes:

Kvadrat:
Snorre, Bjorg, Vidar, Oda, Sigrid2, Skifer2, Molly
Woven Image:
Airport, Ripple, Bonbon, Rivet, Quill, Hex



Case Study

GHD's office interior design in Canberra was designed by GHD itself. Its main focus was to make a dynamic and innovative environment with bright colors for a creative working atmosphere. The range of Woodmark products selected support this creative environment while presenting a certain sense of style.

Project Name: GDH Office
Location: Canberra, Australia
Interior Design: Zenith, Australia
Woodmark Product:
Amelia & Ella lounge chair, Stool Sixty, Rose coffee table, Cecelia side table

