

Cultural Element: Coffee Table Inspired by Wau Bulan in Representing the Identity of Malaysia

Nadhirah Asril¹, Muhammad Firdaus Md Rawi^{2*}

¹ Department of Production and Operations Management, Faculty of Technology Management and Business, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, Batu Pahat, Johor, 86400, MALAYSIA

² Department of Mechanical Engineering Technology, Faculty of Engineering Technology, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, Pagoh Higher Education Hub, Pagoh, Johor, 84600, MALAYSIA

*Corresponding Author: firdausmr@uthm.edu.my

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Abstract

Traditional heritage has been considered as outdated by the society caused the identity of Malaysia to fade due to the mindsets of society and today's trend. This research investigates the combination of Wau Bulan, a traditional Malaysian kite, in the modern furniture design of the coffee table. The research aims to counter the sense that cultural heritage is by integrating Wau Bulan motifs into a minimalist style of furniture, suitable for today's furniture style. This research method uses the quantitative survey involving 205 respondents in Setapak, Kuala Lumpur, and the results showed majority of the respondents strongly agree with integrating cultural heritage into minimalist furniture design. Other research methods are visual research and design development, which involve thumbnail sketching, ideation, idea development, and a scale-size mockup build. For the final design, it combined traditional and current design ideas to develop a coffee table that reflects both traditional values and minimalist aesthetics. The study goal is to develop an innovation of a coffee table with elements of Wau Bulan and to show the unique elements of Wau Bulan.

1. Introduction

Greater Kuala Lumpur is a global city that serves as a gateway between Asia and the rest of the globe, since it was known as the country's fastest-growing metropolitan region (Yasin *et al.*, 2022). Globalization brings new cultural norms, such as digital media, global trade, and tourism, which may overshadow or weaken traditional practices (Sanmee, 2024). Sanmee (2024) also stated that the issue between tradition and modernity is obvious as countries strive to preserve cultural legacy while adapting to global trends. A study conducted by Salman *et al.* (2024) has stated that the society in Malaysia, which consists of diverse races, religions, and nationalities, has developed various cultures that should be preserved for future generations. Traditional games form an important part of the heritage passed down from previous ancestors, which shape the ways individuals or groups interact with one another and offer perspectives on how people should relate to their surroundings while participating collectively. A few traditional games that can be played during leisure time are *wau*, *guli*, *congkak*, *galah panjang*, *sepak raga* and *gasing*. In Malay culture, art has always existed along with the development of utility items. Traditional Malay artwork exhibits the beauty of aesthetic components with deep philosophical and pure meaning. Kelantan is one of the states in Malaysia which popular for its own traditional arts and culture, as well as having a unique traditional vernacular landscape and architecture (Nasir & Salleh, 2015). One of the well-known traditional games in Kelantan is Wau. Wau Bulan is a big Malaysian moon-kite with various patterns, but it is mostly decorated with

floral motifs, and it is usually flown by men in the Malaysia state of Kelantan (Shuaib & Olalere, 2013). There are 14 types of Wau in Malaysia which are 11 of them originated from another states for example, Wau Kangkang from Kedah, Wau Kikik from Melaka, Wau Kenyalang from Sarawak, Wau Kapal from Selangor, Wau Helang from Perlis, Wau Dodo Helang from Terengganu, Wau Merak from Johor, Wau Seri Negeri from Negeri Sembilan, Wau Puyoh from Kelantan, Wau Seri Bulan from Perak and Wau Daun, but only 3 Wau are chosen to be traditional Wau in Malaysia which are Wau Bulan, Wau Jala Budi and Wau Kucing (Reduan Isahak *et al.*, 2018). Culture refers to an individual's attitudes, beliefs, ideas, values, and attachment to a traditional lifestyle (Huang *et al.*, 2025). Design elements of traditional symbols are rich and diverse, in terms of patterns, colours, shapes, and techniques (Yijing & Sharudin, 2023). However, according to Malaysian designer and business consultant Philip Yap, who is based in China, cultural design has various unique values, but it cannot be copied directly, as the export market may not accept the design.

Kuala Lumpur has experienced rapid economic growth over the past three decades, which has significantly impacted urbanization (Yasin *et al.*, 2022). Extensive urban networks utilize their space for a variety of functions, which impacts both their ecological and cultural significance. However, they can be fragmented, which may lead to the loss of their identities, since most of the new changes to the urban landscape are easily accepted and integrated as part of the ongoing development of the landscape (Dawood, 2019). Even though globalism provides opportunities for economic progress and access to global culture, it also creates obstacles for sustaining cultural identity (Sanmee, 2024). In globalization, traditional cultures have changed the mindsets of people, who viewed traditional design as outdated (Olalere, 2019). The thought of functionality, simplicity, and a "less is more" philosophy, minimalism has influenced in recent years (Gumber, 2023). Several trials have been done by designers in Malaysia in designing a Malaysian product design identity; however, they identify that it is hard to merge the characteristics of culture and heritage in a design of all ethnic in Malaysia (Abidin *et al.*, 2016). The product needs to achieve the standard in modern life of the new age of consumers and has to consider the aesthetics and practicality of the products (Jia *et al.*, 2024). This research shows that there is a requirement for the development of an innovative furniture design inspired by cultural design aims to influence residents' acceptance of cultural elements in product design. This design method can blend cultural components into modern furniture design (Huang *et al.*, 2025). This study aims to explore the design criteria to combine the Wau Bulan element into a coffee table in a minimalist context, to design the traditional coffee table inspired by Wau Bulan that can represent Malaysia's heritage in the modern era in Kuala Lumpur, and to construct a coffee table inspired by Wau Bulan for urban life in Kuala Lumpur.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Wau Bulan

Wau Bulan, also known as Moon Kites, is a Malaysian traditional game played by men in open places and windy areas. There are various of opinion about the history of the name Wau. According to Reduan Isahak *et al.* (2018), there is opinion says that the name of Wau originated from the sound of bussing arch which produces 'woow' sound when it flies, but it was denied by Wayne Hasking in his book "Kites of Malaysia" (1992) which say the name of Wau came form the Netherlands which refer to a large bird found in Southeast Asia called 'Wouw' in Dutch. Wau is one of the traditional games that contain the value of art, history, and has a deep meaning in the Malay community. There are various types of Wau in Malaysia, each of which shows various types of features and is crafted from natural materials. According to Reduan Isahak *et al.* (2018), Wau contains cultural icons and reflects Malaysian society and the Wau design stories about life, etiquette, and customs, making it a storytelling tool. The east coast of Kelantan is home to Wau Bulan, and it can reach 3.5 meters in length from head to tail, which makes it the largest kite (Shuaib & Olalere, 2013). The Wau game can be played by teams which are two or more, and one of the players have to pull the string while the others hold the Wau (Musa, 2024). Each Wau Bulan design must follow the main element that represents the identity of Wau Bulan itself, which is crucial for maintaining the originality of the form (Reduan Isahak *et al.*, 2018). Each Wau is designed with its complex motifs, keeping the anticipated traditional style of artwork for each design.

2.2 Coffee Table

Back in the late 18th century, during the Victoria Era, it was used to place the cup of tea as that was the de rigueur drink of the time, at the height of fashion-everyone drank tea (Bill William, 2017). The coffee table has become an essential piece of furniture in any modern home since it can hold drinks, remote controls, storage, and displays. The coffee table was usually placed in the living room (Max Robinson, 2018). A coffee table is known as movable furniture that supports human daily activities, such as a mattress and hammock for sleeping, and stools, chairs, and sofas for seating (Goh & Ab Hamid, 2021). A coffee table must have its own identity or trend by focusing on creating a lifestyle based on clarity, creativity, and innovation. A coffee table is a long and low table which designed to be placed in front or next to the sofa or upholstered chairs to hold general things such as magazines, books,

decorative objects, and small items while sitting in the living room. The most common materials used in constructing coffee tables are wood, metal, glass, and leather coffee tables are also well known.

2.3 Minimalist

Minimalism is influenced by the Japanese “Zen” culture. Minimalist officially appeared in the 1950s and 1960s and was created with a movement called ‘The minimalist art movement’ in the 1960s and 70s (Rithish, 2022). According to (Jantarangsee & Krairit, 2022), before minimalist design became popular in Japan and elsewhere, minimalism was the first conceived in America by a group of artists in New York. Japanese minimalist Sasaki (2017) wrote a book about how to become a minimalist. *Goodbye, Things: On Minimalist Living*, which discusses the emergence of minimalist and ways to remove items to change our life. From the author’s opinion, “less even more” explains the minimalist design. Minimalist design features geometric forms, simplicity, and the use of contemporary materials can establish creative forms and attempt to create works that were reduced to the most essential components (Gumber, 2023).

2.4 Design Identity

Identity in design is a line to show in the design that parallel with the knowledge, experience, and awareness gained from life, influencing a person’s thoughts and decisions (Özçam, 2022). Furniture design has change due to the increase of various of unique art and cultural, which has leave recognizable influence on how people perceive furniture today (Lu & Shanat, 2024). According to Wijayanti and Ayu (2022) traditional culture and modernity cannot be understood separately, but it is introduced as a culture that exists in our daily life. In Malaysia, the development of furniture with a Malaysian identity is not encouraged since it is still a new idea, even though it’s been suggested by former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohammed (Ibrahim et al., 2017). Besides that, the national symbols can be incorporated into furniture and jewellery as Malaysia identity without bias on any race or ethnic group, such as hibiscus *rosa-sinensis* (bunga raya), Malaysia’ national flower or moon kite (Wau Bulan) (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2017).

2.5 Cultural Element

Traditional symbols hold the cultural image of different eras and demonstrate the evolution of the national culture. Traditional symbols are not only shown by patterns, colours, shape, techniques and other elements, but it represents a nation’s spiritual style, regional traits, and aesthetic preferences (Chen & Azim Sharudin, 2024).

3. Research Methodology

There are a few processes in designing a coffee table. It starts with a questionnaire, visual research, sketches, design survey, final design, and technical drawing, mock-up and prototype (refer Fig. 1). This study used a quantitative method, which is using a Google Form and sharing it with the residents. The open-ended questions are conducted with the residents who live in the Setapak, Kuala Lumpur area. Their opinions and feedback given in the questionnaire are collected. From the feedback given, visual research has been done. A few research studies on the website have been done to get articles, journals, and photos of the Wau Bulan and coffee table to set a benchmark for the coffee table. Various articles and journals have been searched are gathered to conclude some findings. From the information gained, the design process can start with the sketching of the thumbnails. The sketches of the thumbnails can help to generate some new ideas based on the already-made coffee table. From the thumbnails, a few ideations were created based on the design combination of the thumbnails and the elements of Wau Bulan, such as shape and patterns. The process continues until the design of the coffee table fulfills the criteria from the design survey. All the sketches were sketched on the A3 drawing paper using pencil, pen, and markers. The most suitable coffee table design will be chosen and will be created in SolidWorks to create a technical drawing of the final design of the coffee table in 3 three-dimensional (3D) and two-dimensional (2D) views. Then, a general arrangement drawing can be drawn into a Mahjong Paper. This will give a better view of how the real-size furniture looks and find a better measurement for the coffee table. From there, a small-scale mock-up can be created to show the real product’s appearance by using suitable materials. Lastly, a real-size prototype was built according to the results from the survey on materials, measurement, and finishing.

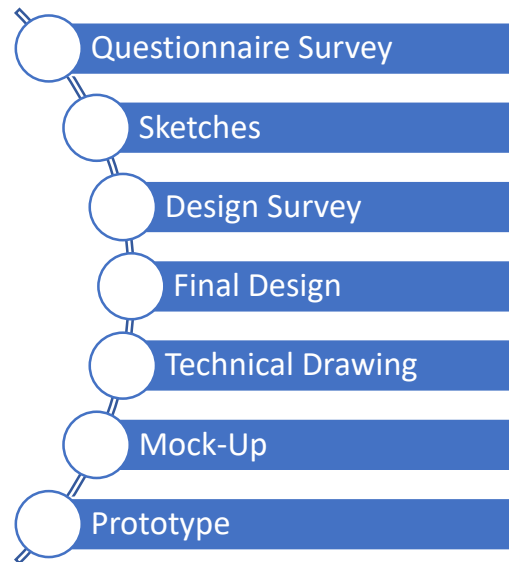


Fig. 1 Flow Process of Research Design

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Survey Analysis

To obtain design criteria for a coffee table, the results from the questionnaire were analysed, and data from approximately 205 respondents were collected. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: Section A (demographic), Section B (Element of Wau Bulan), and Section C (Design Criteria). The data gathered provides a significant insight into the design of the coffee table based on respondents' opinions. Table 1 shows the results from the questionnaire analysis.

Table 1 Summary of survey results

Question	Percentage (%)	Description
1. Gender	62.4	Female
2. Age	34.6	Above 40 years old
3. Race	90.2	Malay
4. Education level	75.6	Degree
5. Employment status	35.6	Government worker
6. Stay	43.9	Kuala Lumpur
7. Duration	38.0	10 years above
8. Type of house	30.2	Apartment
9. Familiar with Wau Bulan	96.6	Yes
10. Experience Wau Bulan flying activity	64.4	Yes
11. Aspect of Wau Bulan	66.3	Colourful pattern
12. Wau Bulan symbolizes	85.4	Culture
13. Learn about Wau Bulan	73.7	Education
14. The importance of cultural heritage in modern design	87.3	Strongly agree
15. Modern design can help the younger generation connect with the cultural heritage	70.7	Strongly agree
16. Design of the furniture	48.3	Minimalist
17. Material	38.0	Mix (wood & glass)
18. Colour	56.6	Natural wood
19. Factors in choosing a coffee table	77.1	Durability
20. Price range	38.0	RM300-RM500
21. Size	85.4	Medium
22. Elements considered inspiring for modern design	52.2	Symmetrical pattern
23. Additional criteria	-	- Storage compartment - Easy to assemble - Stable

4.2 Visual Research

In designing the coffee table, visual research (refer Fig. 2) has been done by searching the existing coffee tables in the marketplace and brainstorming the criteria that should be considered by referring to the respondents' opinions from the questionnaire and internet resources. There are a few minimalist coffee tables with storage, and the combination of glass and wood has been chosen as a reference. This visual research can give a better view in exploring a few designs that can be used in developing a coffee table inspired by Wau Bulan.

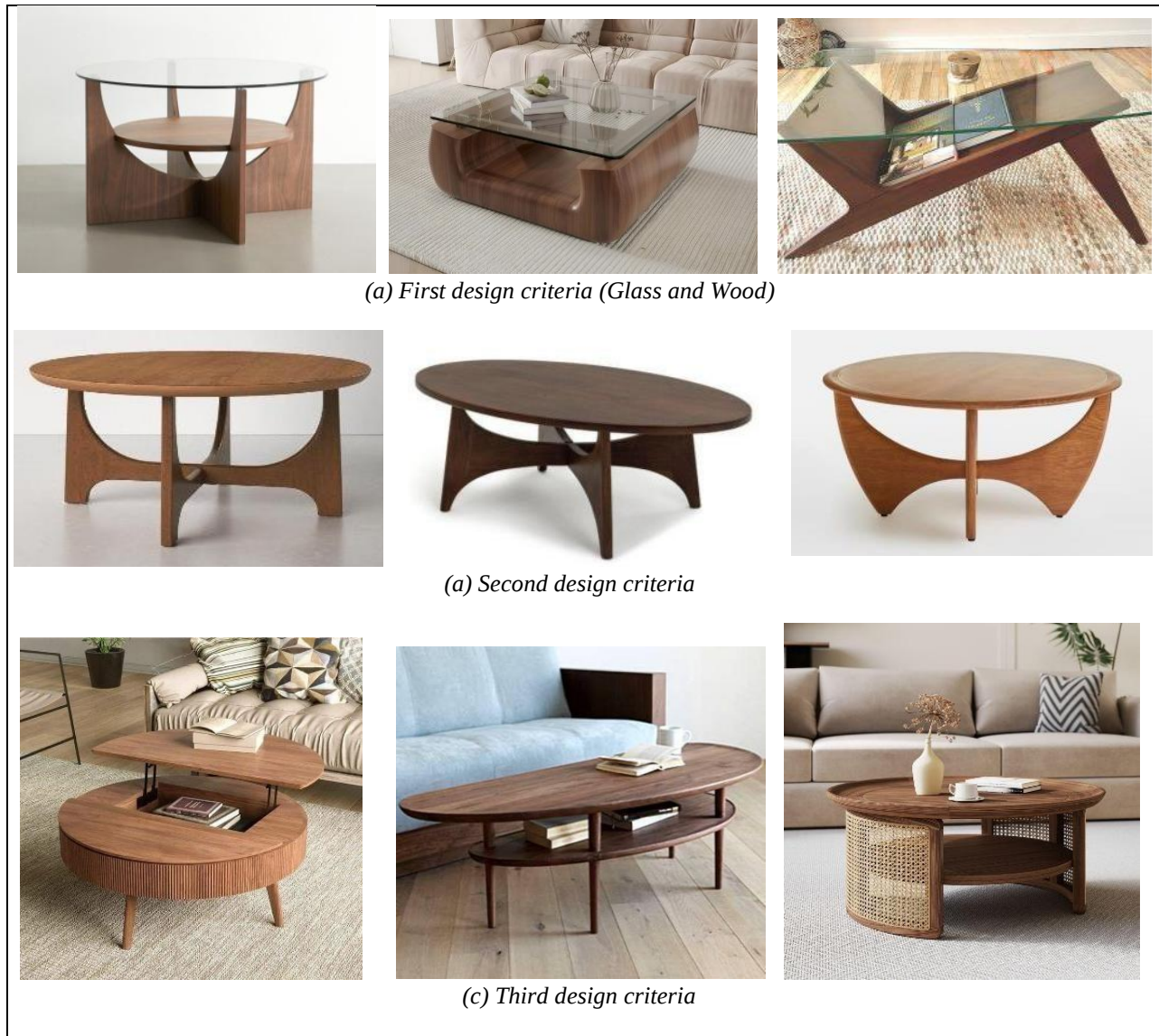


Fig. 2 Visual Research of Coffee Table

4.3 Thumbnail and Ideation

From visual research, a sketch of thumbnails as shown in Figure 3 has been done to give more ideas and the opportunity to explore more design. The sketches of the thumbnails combine the 2D and 3D to give a better view of the coffee table. 5-7 sketches have been chosen since they fulfil the respondents' opinions and develop for the next phase.



Fig. 3 Thumbnails According to Design Criteria

4.4 Idea Development

Fig. 4 shows a few sketches of the coffee table developed from the thumbnails. A few designs of coffee tables become references and at the same time incorporate the element shape of Wau Bulan. The sketches have been drawn in 2D and 3D, including isometric view, top view, and front view. This can give a better view of the coffee table and generate new ideas for designing a coffee table.

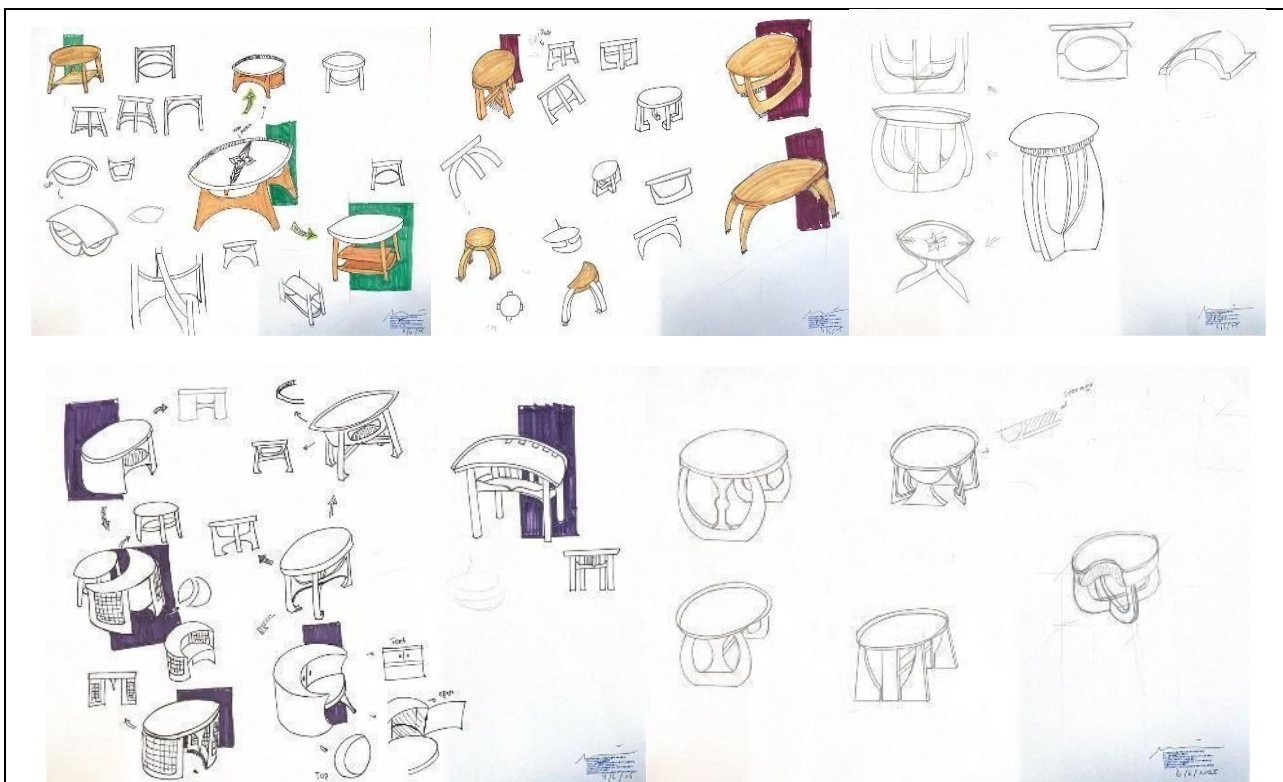


Fig. 4 Ideation of The Coffee Table with Elements of Wau Bulan

The collage consists of several hand-drawn architectural sketches for a stool, organized into a grid-like fashion. The sketches are dated from 10/10/04 to 16/10/04.

- Top Row (Left to Right):**
 - Sketch 1: A top-down view of a stool with a circular seat and four legs. Notes include "Take top down to reveal legs below" and "10/10/04".
 - Sketch 2: A side view of a stool with a rounded backrest. Notes include "Take top down to reveal legs below" and "10/10/04".
 - Sketch 3: A perspective view of a stool with a rounded backrest. Notes include "The top of the backrest is the same as the top of the seat" and "10/10/04".
- Second Row (Left to Right):**
 - Sketch 4: A top-down view of a stool with a circular seat and four legs. Notes include "Front side" and "Top side".
 - Sketch 5: A side view of a stool with a rounded backrest. Notes include "The top of the backrest is the same as the top of the seat" and "10/10/04".
 - Sketch 6: A perspective view of a stool with a rounded backrest. Notes include "The top of the backrest is the same as the top of the seat" and "10/10/04".
- Third Row (Left to Right):**
 - Sketch 7: A top-down view of a stool with a circular seat and four legs. Notes include "Front side" and "Top side".
 - Sketch 8: A side view of a stool with a rounded backrest. Notes include "The top of the backrest is the same as the top of the seat" and "10/10/04".
 - Sketch 9: A perspective view of a stool with a rounded backrest. Notes include "The top of the backrest is the same as the top of the seat" and "10/10/04".
- Fourth Row (Left to Right):**
 - Sketch 10: A top-down view of a stool with a circular seat and four legs. Notes include "Front side" and "Top side".
 - Sketch 11: A side view of a stool with a rounded backrest. Notes include "The top of the backrest is the same as the top of the seat" and "10/10/04".
 - Sketch 12: A perspective view of a stool with a rounded backrest. Notes include "The top of the backrest is the same as the top of the seat" and "10/10/04".
- Fifth Row (Left to Right):**
 - Sketch 13: A top-down view of a stool with a circular seat and four legs. Notes include "Front side" and "Top side".
 - Sketch 14: A side view of a stool with a rounded backrest. Notes include "The top of the backrest is the same as the top of the seat" and "10/10/04".
 - Sketch 15: A perspective view of a stool with a rounded backrest. Notes include "The top of the backrest is the same as the top of the seat" and "10/10/04".
- Sixth Row (Left to Right):**
 - Sketch 16: A top-down view of a stool with a circular seat and four legs. Notes include "Front side" and "Top side".
 - Sketch 17: A side view of a stool with a rounded backrest. Notes include "The top of the backrest is the same as the top of the seat" and "10/10/04".
 - Sketch 18: A perspective view of a stool with a rounded backrest. Notes include "The top of the backrest is the same as the top of the seat" and "10/10/04".

Fig. 5 *Idea Development of Coffee Table*

One idea development design has been chosen to improve the design of the table leg. To improve stability, a few designs of flat legs and an odd number of table legs have been drawn. The odd number of legs generates a better view of the coffee table and creates uniqueness. Odd numbers like 3, 5, and 7 have been chosen as the number of the table legs to find better stability and convenience. Figure 6 shows the final design of the coffee table.

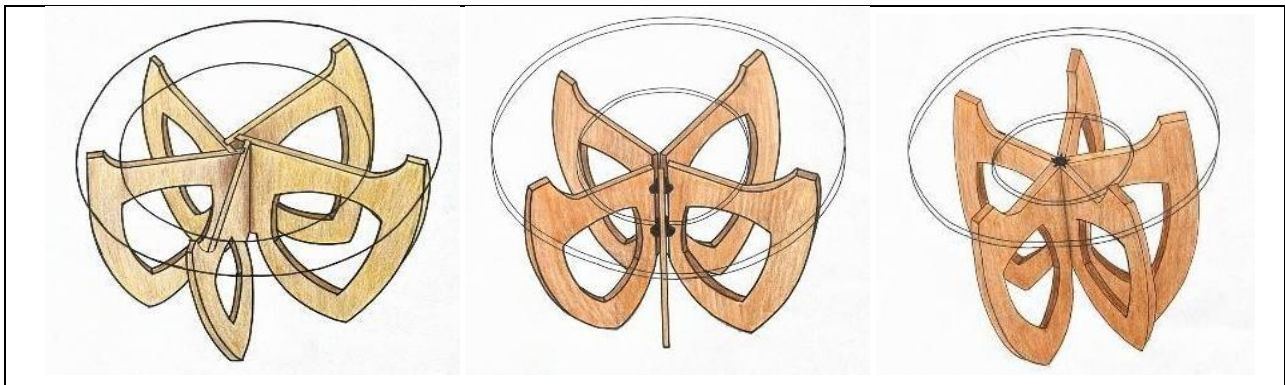


Fig. 6 *Final Design*

4.5 Mock-up

From design development, 3 drawings are selected, and a design survey has been done to choose which design suits and fulfils the criteria the most. From the design survey, the majority of the respondents chose design 2. From the result, a small-scale mock with a ratio of 1:8 was built with a 3D printing with round acrylic, and a mock-up made from Balsa wood by using a laser cutting service. Through this process, the real-life view of the coffee table can be seen clearly.

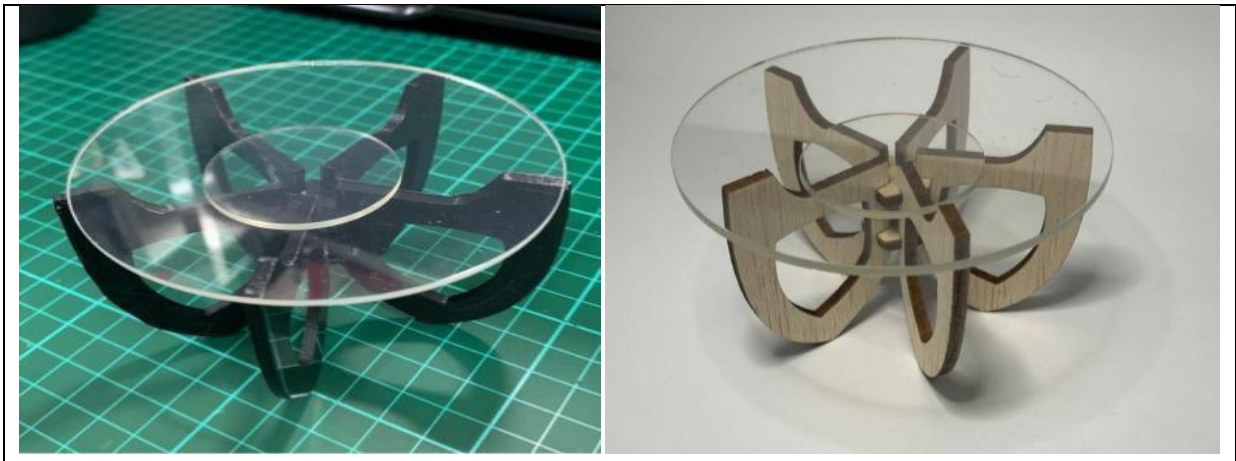


Fig. 7 *Mock-Up from 3D Printing and Balsa Wood Using Laser Cutting*

4.6 Final Design and Technical Drawing

The SolidWorks software was used to draw the perspective view of the coffee table according to the measurements that have been put for each part. This is crucial for manufacturers to ensure the product is suitable and avoid any mistakes or errors during the cutting and assembly of the part of the coffee table. The rendering shows the assumption on how the product appears on a real scale to find suitable material and colour.

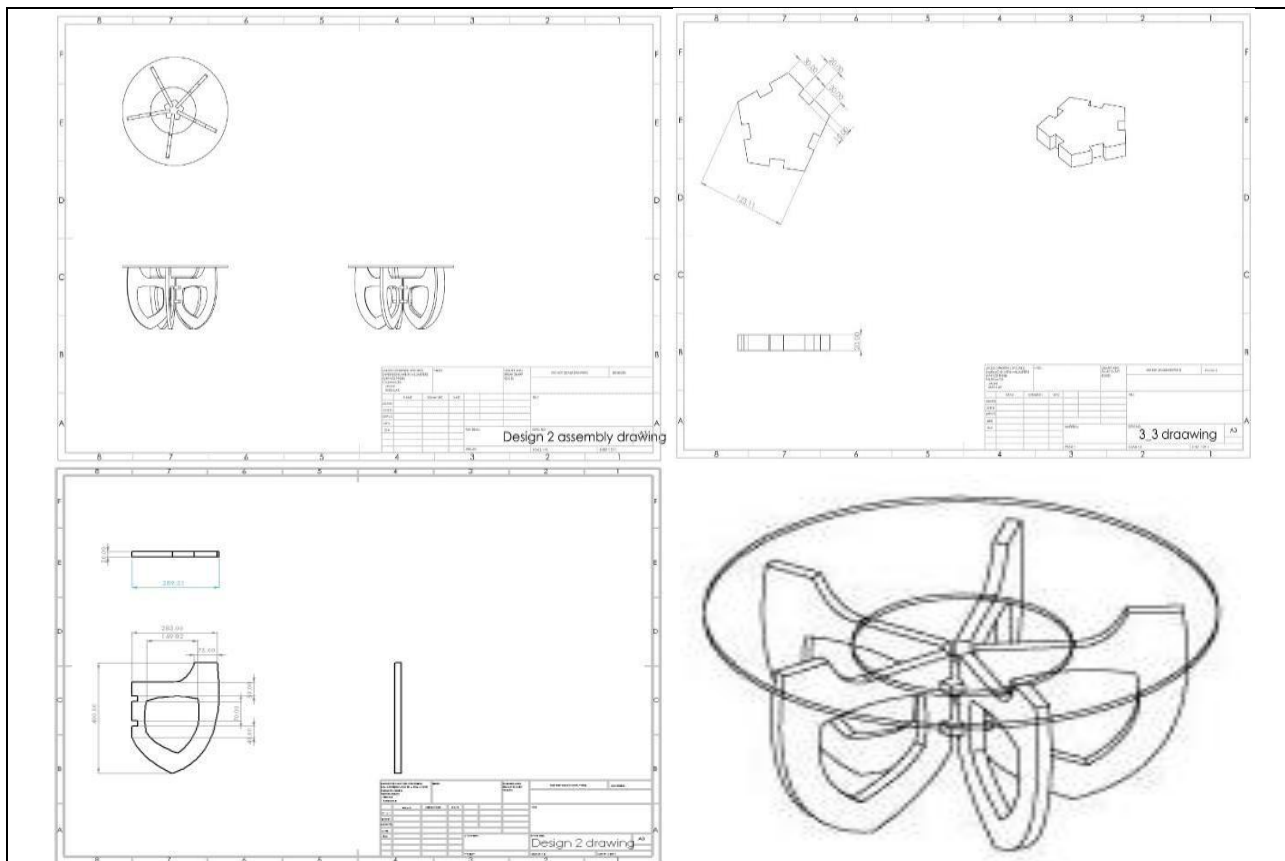


Fig. 8 The 2D and Isometric View of The Coffee Table



Fig. 9 The 3D rendering of The Coffee Table

4.7 Prototype

The development of the prototype was made based on measurement, materials, and scale-size mockup. Materials that have been used in the making of the coffee table are rubberwood, tempered glass, and clear plastic rubber glass sucker.



Fig. 10 *Prototype of The Coffee Table*

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research focuses on how to design a coffee table that blends with the cultural heritage in presenting Malaysian heritage. The combination of minimalist and cultural elements can create an innovation of furniture since there is a lack of furniture design inspired by Malaysian cultural heritage. The design aims to show that culture can be represented in a product that aligns with today's trends and changes the mindset of people about traditional heritage being outdated. The design criteria of the coffee table inspired by Wau Bulan are through a close-ended questionnaire with 205 respondents from different states in Malaysia who live in Setapak, Kuala Lumpur. The main design criteria of the coffee table are using materials combined with wood and glass, finished with the natural colour of the wood, and having a small storage. For future study, the researcher must conduct research and develop innovations about traditional heritage into a modern style of furniture.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of the paper.

Author Contribution

*The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: **study conception and design:** Nadhirah Asril and Muhammad Firdaus Md Rawi; **data collection:** Nadhirah Asril; **analysis and interpretation of results:** Nadhirah Asril; **draft manuscript preparation:** Nadhirah Asril and Muhammad Firdaus Md Rawi. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.*

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