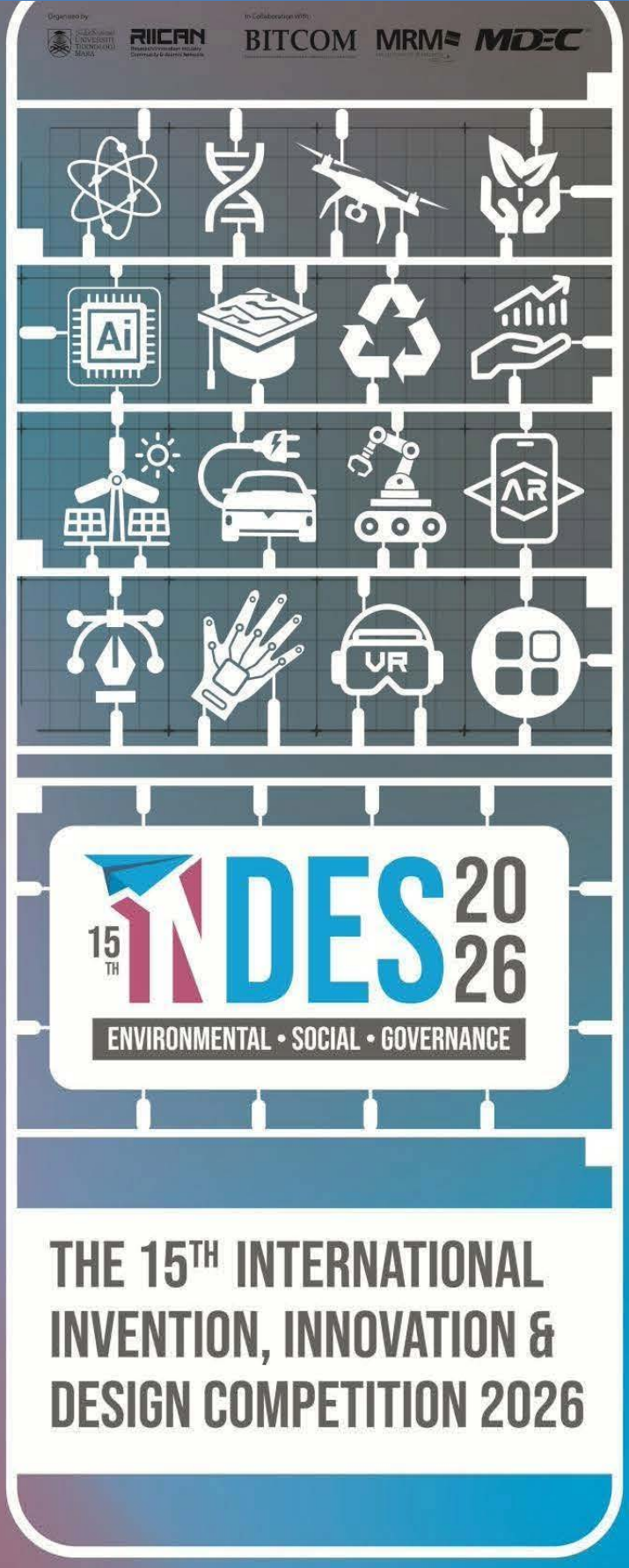


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THE 15th INTERNATIONAL
INVENTION, INNOVATION &
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BESPOKE GIFT SET: A DESIGN RESEARCH STUDY ON CULTURAL HERITAGE PRESEVERATION AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the development of a bespoke Hari Raya gift set commissioned for Her Royal Highness, the Tengku Permaisuri of Selangor, as a case study in collaborative design innovation rooted in cultural heritage. The project represents a significant intersection of traditional Malay cultural heritage, indigenous craftsmanship, and contemporary design practice. Employing a qualitative, practice-based methodology, the research reinterprets the traditional Bunga Tanjung motif into a contemporary table-setting collection comprising songket table runners, placemats, coasters, and *anyaman* boxes. A total of 300 sets were produced through a collaborative partnership with the Mah Meri community of Pulau Carey, Klang. Findings demonstrate that traditional motifs can be effectively integrated into modern products without compromising cultural authenticity, that indigenous craftsmanship elevates perceived product value, and that such collaborations yield measurable economic and social benefits for artisan communities. The study proposes a replicable model for culturally responsive, community-centred design practice and contributes to the growing discourse on sustainable design and cultural preservation.

Keyword: Cultural Heritage Design, Bunga Tanjung, Orang Asli, Mah Meri, Collaborative Design, Community Craft, Hari Raya, Indigenous Artisans, Malay Heritage, Royal Patronage.

1. INTRODUCTION

The intersection of traditional cultural heritage and contemporary design practice presents both opportunities and challenges for designers working within multicultural contexts. In Malaysia, where diverse ethnic traditions coexist within a framework of constitutional monarchy and Islamic governance, design projects commissioned by royal institutions carry particular cultural weight and responsibility. There is an increasing emphasis on integrating cultural heritage with modern innovation to create meaningful and contextually relevant products, an approach that not only preserves traditional aesthetics but also strengthens cultural identity while fostering sustainable community engagement (Xie & Huang, 2021; Revitalizing Malay Woodcarving, 2021).

This paper documents a design research project undertaken to create a bespoke Hari Raya gift set for Her Royal Highness, the Tengku Permaisuri of Selangor. The project centred on the development of 300 gift sets of songket, each comprising a table runner, placemats, coasters, and a*nyaman* boxes. The design concept drew inspiration from the Bunga Tanjung (Portia tree flower), a motif with deep historical significance in Selangor's cultural heritage (Shamsuddin

et al., 2024; Amat Sairin et al., 2024). The *anyaman* boxes were crafted through collaboration with the Mah Meri community, an indigenous Orang Asli group residing in Pulau Carey, Klang, whose

traditional weaving practices represent an important aspect of Malaysia's intangible cultural heritage (Zamzuri et al., 2024).

This research contributes to scholarly discourse on culturally responsive design, community-based craft production, and the role of royal patronage in preserving traditional arts. By examining the design process, cultural contexts, and collaborative methodologies employed in this project, the paper offers insights into how contemporary design practice can meaningfully engage with cultural heritage while generating tangible socio-economic benefits for indigenous artisan communities.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative, practice-based design methodology, combining design development processes with community collaboration and cultural research (Xie & Huang, 2021; Revitalizing Malay Woodcarving, 2021). The methodology integrates five interconnected phases, each described below.

2.1 Cultural and Visual Research

The design development process commenced with comprehensive research into the cultural significance of the Bunga Tanjung motif, examination of its historical applications in Selangor's visual culture, and analysis of contemporary design trends in Malaysian festive gift products. An in-depth study of Malay cultural motifs was conducted, focusing particularly on the Bunga Tanjung as a symbolic representation of elegance and tradition (Shamsuddin et al., 2024; Amat Sairin et al., 2024). Secondary sources, visual archives, and existing textile patterns were analysed to understand their historical and aesthetic significance (Jalil et al., 2024; Rahayu et al., 2025).

2.2 Design Development Process

Initial conceptualisation involved sketching and digital rendering of motif applications across the various product components. The design team explored multiple approaches to stylising the Bunga Tanjung flower into geometric shapes, balancing recognisability with aesthetic refinement. The iterative design process (Xie & Huang, 2021) involved:

- Concept sketching and motif abstraction
- Colour palette development drawing from the natural tones of the Bunga Tanjung flower
- Material selection suitable for festive table settings
- Prototyping of table runners, placemats, and coasters
- Refinement based on aesthetic coherence and usability

Prototype evaluations informed refinements to designs, materials, and production specifications. The table runner served as the primary visual element, incorporating stylised Bunga Tanjung flowers in a pattern that balanced symmetry with organic flow. Placemats and coasters required adaptation of the motif to smaller formats, necessitating simplified versions that retained recognisable characteristics while remaining legible at reduced sizes (Jalil et al., 2024; Shamsuddin et al., 2024).

2.3 Community Collaboration

A participatory approach was implemented through collaboration with the Orang Asli artisans of Pulau Carey (Zakaria et al., 2025; Sheh Hamidulfuad, 2024). Coordination with the Mah Meri community involved site visits to Pulau Carey to discuss project requirements, observe traditional weaving techniques, and establish specifications for the anyaman boxes. These consultations ensured that box dimensions would integrate properly with other gift set components while remaining feasible within traditional weaving practices. Engagement included:

- Knowledge exchange between designers and artisans
- Alignment of design dimensions with handcrafted capabilities

- Ethical sourcing and fair compensation practices
- Sample production and evaluation prior to full-scale commissioning

These practices align with established frameworks for equitable designer–artisan collaboration (Suib et al., 2020; PUCP Design Team, 2025; Suntrayuth, 2017), ensuring that indigenous artisans were engaged as skilled professionals rather than simply as sources of 'authentic' materials.



Figure 1 Coordination Visit at the Mah Meri Cultural Village.

2.4 Production Planning and Quality Assurance

The project was commissioned for approximately 300 units, requiring careful coordination between design production and handcrafted packaging. Quality control measures were established to ensure consistency while respecting the handmade nature of the woven boxes (Zhang et al., 2018; Syed Ahmad et al., 2023). For the anyaman boxes, quality criteria were established collaboratively, identifying essential structural and aesthetic requirements while allowing for natural variations inherent in handcrafted items. Regular communication with community coordinators facilitated monitoring of production progress and early identification of any quality concerns. Assembly of the complete gift sets involved careful packaging of all components with attention to presentation quality.



Figure 2 Product Assembly.

3.0 CONCLUSION

The bespoke Hari Raya gift set project for Her Royal Highness, the Tengku Permaisuri of Selangor, demonstrates how contemporary design practice can meaningfully engage with cultural heritage while generating tangible benefits for indigenous artisan communities (Xie & Huang, 2021; Revitalizing

Malay Woodcarving, 2021). Through careful research, culturally sensitive design development, and equitable collaboration with the Mah Meri community of Pulau Carey, the project produced 300 gift sets that embody refined elegance, cultural authenticity, and social responsibility. The application of the Bunga Tanjung motif across table runners, placemats, and coasters created a cohesive design language that honoured Selangor's cultural heritage while projecting contemporary sophistication (Jalil et al., 2024; Shamsuddin et al., 2024; Amat Sairin et al., 2024).

The collaboration with the Orang Asli community in Pulau Carey underscores the potential of design as a tool for social impact, enabling the preservation of traditional skills while supporting local livelihoods (Zakaria et al., 2025; Sheh Hamidulfuad, 2024; Che Soh & Omar, 2012). Furthermore, the project illustrates how culturally inspired design can meet the expectations of exclusive commissions while maintaining authenticity and integrity (Syed Ahmad et al., 2023; Revitalizing Malay Woodcarving, 2021). Several key lessons emerge: meaningful engagement with cultural heritage requires serious research into historical contexts and symbolic meanings; equitable collaboration with indigenous artisan communities demands respect for traditional knowledge and fair compensation; and royal patronage can play a catalytic role in cultural preservation when commissions are structured to achieve multiple objectives beyond immediate aesthetic outcomes (Hussin et al., 2017).

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