

ULTIMATE BARN FIND » *The Amazing VanKregten Car Collection*



# Robb Report

RobbReport.com

## Great Escapes

Unique New Retreats in  
South Africa, Anguilla,  
Napa Valley, and More

PLUS

**EXTREME  
YACHTS**

HIGH-TECH ON  
THE HIGH SEAS

**INSTANT  
CLASSICS**

NEW JEWELRY FROM  
CARTIER, GRAFF,  
VAN CLEEF & ARPELS,  
AND TIFFANY & CO.

JULY 2009



A CURTCO MEDIA PUBLICATION

\$7.99



# Dream Weaver

*Breakfast pastries and high heels inspire the visionary furnishings of Kenneth Cobonpue.*

IMAGINE A BOWL of ramen that suddenly comes to life, its tangled squiggles rising up and taking the shape of a chair. Odd though it is, this was the idea behind Noodle, one of the latest offerings from Kenneth Cobonpue, whose eponymous design firm is based on the island of Cebu in the Philippines. Noodle started, he explains, "as a mass of sketches on paper. In transforming them into functional pieces, doodles became noodles."

This lighthearted explanation is deceptively simplistic. In reality, the loose, lighter-than-air weave, which was created using techniques that originated centuries ago in the traditional weaving communities of the Philippines, differs from

most contemporary furnishings in the way that it supports the body. "The challenge with all my designs," Cobonpue says, "is figuring out how to use as little iron or steel as possible in order to allow the tensile properties of the weave to carry the weight."

Cobonpue began experimenting with this concept when he was a child. His mother, Betty, studied at the Pratt Institute and has her own furniture company, Interior Crafts of the Islands, which has channeled the talents of Filipino craftsmen into modern furniture forms and, in the process, created a new vocabulary of innovative weaving methods in rattan. In the 1990s, Cobonpue chose to follow in her

*Strands of abaca rope tied over a well-engineered frame of light steel allow Kenneth Cobonpue's Pigalle easy armchair to appear light and airy.*





footsteps and become a furniture designer. He studied industrial design at Pratt and then worked in a leather-and-wood workshop in Florence. Additionally, he studied furniture marketing and production in Germany. After school he returned to the Philippines to work at his mother's firm. In 1999 he formed his own company and started producing his own designs.

Cobonpue often finds inspiration in the mundane. His Croissant sofa resembles the French pastry; the Lolah chair, a crushed soda can. A strappy high-heeled sandal inspired the look of the Manolo collection of chairs and tables. He says that though his designs vary greatly, they all adhere to a single guiding principle: "I wanted to create a modern aesthetic based on natural materials, transparency, and innovative weaving techniques. The transparency was derived from nature. What makes a forest or park beautiful is that you have this layering of foliage—shrubs, branches, and leaves—that you can see through. I wanted to have that quality in my pieces, so I developed furniture using open weaves to create a light and airy structure, just like trees."

The brand also strives to have a minimal environmental impact while revitalizing the crafts that have sustained the economy of Cebu for centuries. "Our core materials are sustainable and rapidly renewable," Cobonpue says. Many of his designs use rattan, bamboo, abaca, *buri*, and *kawayan* fibers. "What's more, our facilities have low energy usage. And, in a sense, we are preserving the traditional handcraft of weaving by utilizing those methods in modern design."

Cobonpue's expertise with natural materials has led international designers such as Marcel Wanders and Ross Lovegrove to invite his contributions for their own projects.



And to expand his range, Cobonpue is working on a design for a concept car that fuses both natural and man-made materials. But despite the adventure of experimentation, Cobonpue says that his personal fulfillment lies in fostering the creative talents of other Filipinos. "I teach design classes pro bono in schools, and we bring new, budding Filipino design graduates into our design facilities to allow them the opportunity to expand their wonderful ideas."

The Kenneth Cobonpue furniture line ranges from the smallest Yin & Yang end table (\$400) to the Noodle sofa (\$7,450). The collection currently comprises approximately 200 pieces, most of which come in durable polyethylene for outdoor use or in a variety of natural fibers for indoor use. They are available from Janus et Cie throughout the country, as well as from Muléh in Washington, D.C.

—JORGE S. ARANGO

*Kenneth Cobonpue, 888.889.9005, [www.kennethcobonpue.com](http://www.kennethcobonpue.com)*



*A crushed soda can influenced the design of the Lolah easy armchair (above). The rattan vines around the oak-veneer base of the Noodle love seat resemble ramen (below).*