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PREMIUM

# Stay safe with a 'Clik'

1 of 6 Made in Australia, the ClikClax desktop dividers are meant to create fun partitions for work spaces and are designed to curb the spread of harmful airborne droplets. PHOTO: CLIKCLAX

# The coronavirus pandemic has led to designers coming up with funky ideas to keep the virus at bay

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Adversity sparks creativity. Local and overseas designers are drawing inspiration from Covid-19 to create nifty gadgets to keep the virus at arm's length.

A search online throws up, among other items, colourful desktop dividers from Melbourne, plasma air purifiers from Dublin and portable air cleaners from South Korea.

One Singapore design firm has even released a series of intellectual property-free design templates and ideas ranging from phone sanitisers to splatter shields to help fight Covid-19.

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Melbourne-based designer Zahava Elenberg adds colour to social distancing with her new range of desktop partitions, or sneeze guards, called ClikClax.

Modular perspex pieces that can be assembled to create desktop partitions for home offices, hot-desking spaces and communal dining areas, they were designed to curb the spread of harmful airborne droplets.

ClikClax's riotous hues of neon orange, yellow and red hark back to the cult toddler toys of interlocking squares called PlayPlax, designed by British children's toy designer Patrick Rylands in the 1960s.

Associate Professor Patrick Chia of the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Division of Industrial Design says: "I would say the ClikClax partition system could work in some Covid-19 scenarios such as retail."

Can Covid-19 products also be playful?

"Yes, why not?" says the 51-year-old product design pioneer who won the President's Design

Award in 2013.

"It's just that we don't see much of this probably because the pandemic is still quite new to us and most solutions are solving more immediate and pragmatic needs."

One company that is banking on pragmatism is home-grown firm Wah Ye Advertising.

The events management outfit, which creates props for the exhibition and events industry, worked during the circuit breaker to create desktop partitions with a difference.

Wah Ye's Singapore team came up with a design that, instead of social distancing, brings people together but safely.

Its transparent acrylic desktop separators are almost invisible, save for fine outlines that catch the light. This allows front office staff such as customer service and marketing sales executives to interact and engage with the public without the fear of cross-contamination from harmful airborne droplets through talking, coughing or sneezing.

The dividers were exactly what Mr Patrick Keng's office needed.

The human resources manager at a local wholesale trading firm bought the acrylic dividers from Wah Ye for 30 workstations in his company because it was the perfect fit for his HR staff.

"I spent about $3,000 on dividers of different shapes and sizes," says Mr Keng, 45. "Our staff deal with employees face-to-face. The clear acrylic desktop dividers not only allow for social interaction, but also ensure some measure of safe distancing."

Not all Covid-19 product designs are created to be monetised.

Singapore design firm Stuck Design released a range of free downloadable designs between April and this month for medical front-liners as it felt a "moral obligation" to do its part to "chip away at the pandemic challenge", says Mr Donn Koh, Stuck's co-founder and design principal.

"As design innovators, we know our skill sets are useful for many of these experiments, so we wanted to respond responsibly," says Mr Koh, 38, who is also a senior lecturer at the NUS Division of Industrial Design.

He worked with a team of more than 20 designers and collaborators to release six free designs online for medical personnel around the world to protect themselves against Covid-19.

The products include "Stay Home" door handle hangers which "nudge" responsible behaviour, splatter shields for front-line staff performing procedures on patients, and ultraviolet (UV) mask sterilisers.

The firm this week completed the design of a new UV phone sanitiser and will release it under the MatterClean brand in the next few months.

"During a crisis, designers solve problems by bringing in broader and unexpected sources of inspiration. This is helpful and offers new possibilities in situations where the typical solutions seem futile," he says.

## CLEAR ADVANTAGE

Wah Ye Advertising's team of designers, who are usually deployed to create backdrops for events and fabricate exhibition booths, worked through the circuit breaker from April to May on the firm's acrylic desktop dividers.

The company's director Cindy Pua, 58, says: "As an events-based firm, we were quite badly affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

"We designed the clear table partitions to help keep our company going after the circuit breaker ended on June 1."

The design allows front-line staff such as customer service personnel to engage in a face-to-face setting without the risk of infection from droplets.

The team came up with four main types of dividers which suit a variety of desk sizes and needs: standard single pieces; L-and U-shaped dividers as well as customisable separators. The pieces are priced from $35 for a standard divider to $65 for a U-shaped unit.

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## VERSATILE DIVIDERS

Australian Zahava Elenberg originally designed her ClikClax desktop dividers as a way to help her employees get back to the workplace. The Melbourne-based architect conceived ClikClax for her interiors firm Move-In.

Also the co-founder of award-winning architectural practice Elenberg Fraser, she says the broader functionality of her sneeze guards, comprising modular interlocking perspex panels, motivated her to turn her sketches from concept to finished product in about three weeks.

Made Down Under using Australian perspex in a range of stylish colours inspired by the country's flora and fauna, the system is available online at clikclax.com. Prices start at A$395 (S$384) for a 16-piece pack that includes panels and bases.

Ms Charmaine Wong of home-grown multidisciplinary design firm Chalk Architects says ClikClax's lightweight dividers can be easily assembled in a variety of permutations, making them versatile and customisable to various users, especially those working from home.

"The collapsible feature is definitely a plus for space-constrained homes and people who appreciate a clutter-free home office," she says.

Ms Elenberg says the system also works well in co-working spaces, airports, libraries, schools, hotels and communal tables in cafes.

The brand is donating A$5 from every online sale to one of a series of Australian charities, with the first month's donations going to the World Wildlife Fund's Adopt A Koala appeal.

"ClikClax isn't just for offices. It's for any communal space - anywhere people want to come together but need to keep safely apart," says Ms Elenberg, 47, who is married with three children. "There's nothing we can't click together."

## CLEAN AIR ON THE GO

Working from home can entail a fair bit of workarounds.

When it is not possible to work from the study due to unexpected guests or if you need to politely excuse yourself to go to an Internet cafe to beat pressing deadlines, fluid situations can take a toll.

For those who worry about airborne pathogens, it is now possible to clean the air wherever you settle down to pound away at your laptop.

South Korean electronics giant LG released its new PuriCare mini air purifier last month, claiming it is the world's first filter-type portable air purifier designed to be used on the go.

Similar in size and weighing the same as a 500ml bottle of water, the wireless PuriCare freshens the air for up to eight hours at low speed or two hours at the highest setting on rechargeable batteries.

LG says it can clean up to 50 per cent of the air in a car in about 10 minutes.

Inside the handy design, the PuriCare employs a patented four-step filtration system that detects and removes up to 99 per cent of particulates as tiny as 0.3 square micrometre.

The air purifier has been tested by four independent professional organisations, including the British Allergy Foundation and quality testing firm Intertek.

On a low setting, LG's PuriCare is also quiet enough to be used in an enclosed stroller without rousing a sleeping infant.

LG's PuriCare retails for $349 at major retailers such as Best Denki, Courts, Harvey Norman and the LG Lazada Store.

## HIGH-TECH SAFE ZONE

In 2015, during the Middle East respiratory syndrome outbreak, South Korean ambulance operators used Novaerus air disinfection units, designed and produced in Ireland, to protect first responders against infections.

Convinced by the efficacy of Novaerus' plasma technology, fire departments ordered most ambulances across the country to be installed with the brand's air disinfection systems after the outbreak was controlled.

The systems generate a "plasma field" that does not emit harmful ions, ozone or chemicals.

Its patented "dielectric barrier discharge" (DBD) is said to create a stable atmosphere of charged particles that kill airborne harmful micro-organisms such as bacteria, viruses and fungi in 0.002 seconds.

It has been tested by independent laboratories as well as the United States' National Aeronautics and Space Administration and certified to be effective in killing pathogens, including the bacteriophage

MS2, a coronavirus surrogate that is similar in strain to the novel coronavirus (Covid-19).

Industrial-grade plasma technology for air purifying is traditionally a costly process, says Mr Alan Teo, 57, a biosafety laboratory and cleanroom expert whose company, Airtech, has built complex World Health Organisation-certified clean-room environments.

"There is a wide range of industry-grade plasma technologies, but from past experience, I've found that the units are costly, compared with other methods.

"Plasma waves can cause electromagnetic interference in certain products resulting in product malfunction," he says.

But Mr Paolo Nicolas, 49, regional director for Asia-Pacific at Novaerus, says this is not the case with the company's systems.

"Novaerus has been certified and proven to function without interfering with other electronic equipment even in the medical segment, where sensitive life-saving devices are used. While other plasma technologies may very well consume more energy, Novaerus' patented technology generates low energy plasma or cold plasma."

He explains that the Novaerus NV200 unit, which is ideal for homes, consumes 20W, the equivalent of a household light bulb.

Prices for household units start at $2,300 for the NV200, which covers a floor area of 20 sq m; and $3,950 for the NV800, which covers 60 sq m.

• **E-mail inquiries for Novaerus products to info@novaerus.com**

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