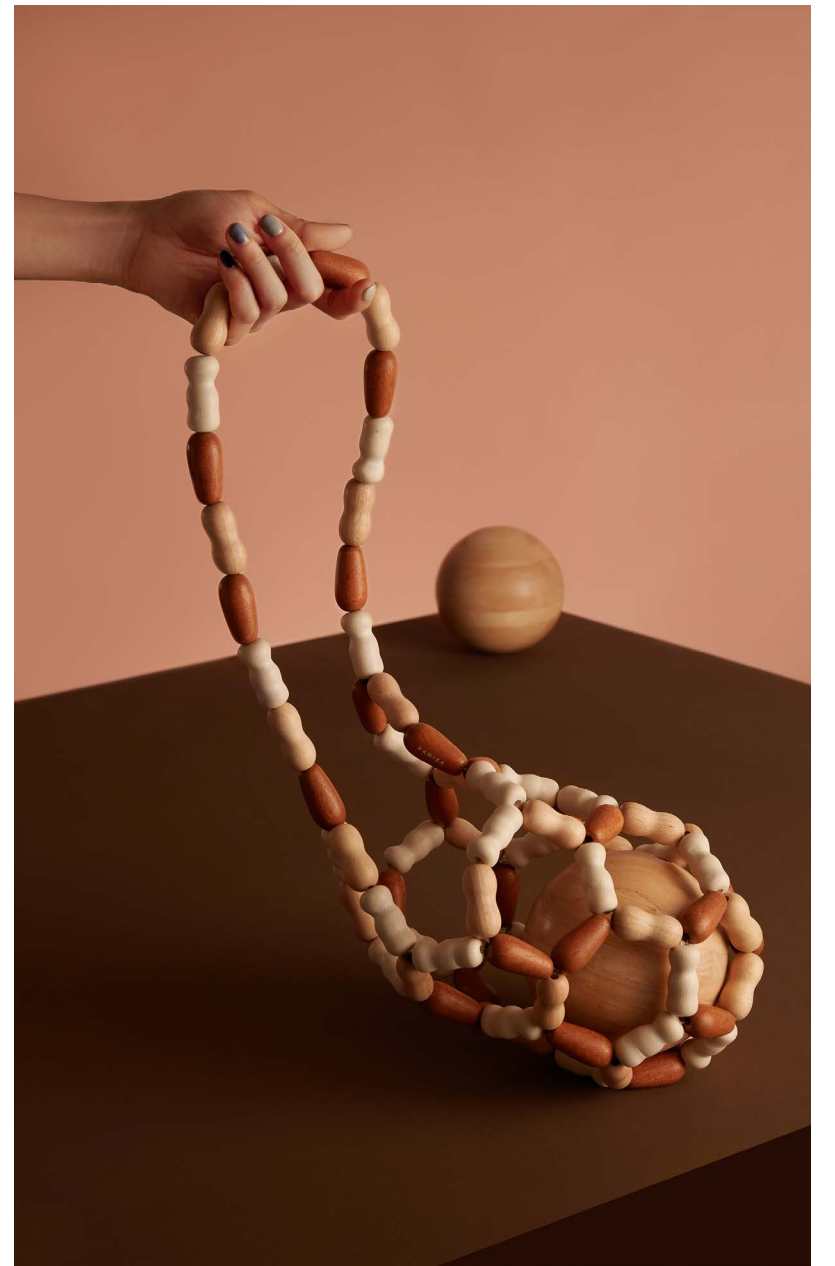


THE ART OF PLAY



Text

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Images

Courtesy of PANISA

There's an 'aha moment' when you learn that product designer Panisa Khunprasert grew up in a toy factory just outside Bangkok. Suddenly, her chunky handbags and puzzle-like homewares start to make sense. Characterised by their vibrant colour palettes and playful shapes, Khunprasert's totemic candleholders, beaded bags and interconnecting wooden containers invite touch and play. In essence, they're like the wooden children's toys her family's factory has been producing since 1989.

'I didn't even realise they were toy-like until people started pointing it out to me,' Khunprasert says of her collection, which she named PANISA. 'I was just having fun designing bubble bags and clutches in weird shapes.' She began experimenting with the machines at her family's factory to blow off creative steam while studying industrial design at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University.

Even though Khunprasert sold a few pieces at school fairs and weekend markets, she never intended to continue the brand when she moved to New York for her master's in product design in 2014. But when people showed interest in the bags she was carrying and would-be stockists reached out to her, she decided to pursue PANISA as a serious project. Since then, she's launched one or two new collections every year.

Today, she divides her time between developing new toys for her family brand and building her own legacy with PANISA. Unsurprisingly, the creative processes are heavily intertwined. 'The beaded bags were inspired by a baby's rattle I designed,' she says. 'The toy never made it to

production due to safety regulations, but I kept rearranging the beads and eventually ended up with a bag design.' Similarly, product sketches for her own brand sometimes end up as toys.

But she finds inspiration beyond the toy aisle too. Her sculptural square and cylindrical Rammed Puzzles mimic layers of compressed earth, while her serpentine wooden paperweights and bookends find their source in the ancient Japanese art form of *mizubiki* (sculpting from stiff rice paper cord) and 1970s Noguchi pieces. 'I'm heavily inspired by art objects,' Khunprasert says. 'I always think, how would this look as a toy? What if I turned it into a puzzle?'

While she only uses wood for her toy designs, she experiments with other materials for the home items and handbags. 'I try to think of wood as a fluid object, and I combine it with other materials to give it a different personality,' she says. Her latest bag collection, Pebbles & Fossils, combines wooden handles with quilted deadstock fabric found in the atelier of her grandmother, who was one of Thailand's first lingerie tailors. 'Wood doesn't have to be static or hard,' she muses. 'I want to reimagine how it can restructure itself.'

While the pandemic scrambled her plans to scale the company after debuting her designs in 2019 at MAISON&OBJET in Paris, Khunprasert is determined to eventually turn PANISA into her full-time job. She sees a gap in the market for affordable accent pieces and coffee table decor. 'A lot of objects just sit there, and you have to be careful around them,' she says. 'I want to create something that people can take apart and play with — home decor could really use a dose of fun.'

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Under the label PANISA, Thai product designer Panisa Khunprasert creates sculptural wooden accessories inspired by traditional crafts, primitive forms and nature. The 2021 Redefined collection features colorful, interactive accessories and home items

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The Loop No. 18 bookends — which could double as striking wooden necklaces — draw inspiration from Japanese craft, reflecting the way Khunprasert combines art, sculpture and play in her designs