

Ticket to Freedom



Coast Cycles presents bike designs in a social space for cycling enthusiasts.

BY ASIH JENIE

“I was looking for a bike frame that would suit my taste but I couldn’t find one unfortunately, so I decided to make one,” says Jansen Tan of how he started Coast Cycles. Born in a family of entrepreneurs, Tan is an avid cyclist and a former national bike trial athlete in Singapore. Starting as a schoolboy, his passion for cycling carried over to his tertiary education at Temasek Polytechnic, where he enrolled in the industrial design programme, and submitted a concept tricycle in his final year. The idea to design his ideal bike frame was a seed that grew. Fast. “Soon I had an idea to design the whole bike,” he says. “Then I thought I could turn it into a brand. And then with a brand, you need a space—a front, for the brand.” And so the idea blossomed into Coast Cycles.

With the growing popularity of city biking in Singapore, a host of new bicycle brands have opened brick and mortar outposts, mostly in the busiest and hippest parts of the

Lion City. Coast Cycles, takes a different approach, located as it is in Siglap, a sleepy residential neighbourhood in the mostly low-density residential eastern part of the city. “I want cyclists to feel safe when they come here. The location is away from the main road and cyclists can reach this place from several routes,” says Tan of the location. It’s a smart choice; the quiet neighbourhood could use a jolt, the streets are ideal for test rides, and there are no competitors for miles around, or any other commercial places to hang out for that matter—plenty of space for Coast Cycle to expand its concept beyond an indie bike shop.

Coast Cycle occupies a two-storey heritage shophouse refurbished by architecture studio *Fuur Associates* and exudes a cool industrial vibe. The exposed concrete finish of the walls meet trailing greenery and sleek copper signage; and in statement of who the space serves, the front porch and the side alleyways are lined with bike stands. The space is a hybrid of a cafe, a workshop and a showroom that operate together as a social hub for bike lovers and cycling enthusiasts. Visitors entering the premise via the main entrance are received into *Coast & Company*, a small cafe serving light bites, cakes and artisanal coffee courtesy of local independent coffee boutique, *Papa Palheta*. They are invited to socialise over a cuppa, while, separated by a glass wall, their bicycles are serviced at the adjacent Coast Cycles workshop, and yes, bicycles of every pedigree are welcome.

Upstairs is the Coast Cycles Experience Centre, a spacious showroom displaying the brand’s original designs. Customers can choose to take the bike they fancy for a test ride around the neighbourhood, or do so on

a rolling trainer indoors. Launched in May, the brand’s best-selling *Coastliner* is meticulously engineered to manoeuvre Singapore’s busiest roads, while also articulating its hidden paths and trails. It is rustproofed to tackle the rain, humidity, and scorching heat of the tropics. The *Coastliner* features a sleek and uncluttered look thanks to Tan’s patented *Stealth Internal Cable Routing* system, which keeps all the unsightly cable inside its seamless aluminium frame. It does away with conventional bike chains, replacing them instead with the US-made *Gates Carbon Belt Drive System* for a silent and virtually maintenance-free ride. It took Tan three years to develop *Coastliner*, but after this painstaking firstborn, the subsequent models have taken about a year from design to production.

Coast Cycle has a few intriguing models in different development stages. There’s the *Cargo 20/20* for bike commuters who move around the city with a lot of stuff—its frame is designed to carry your load without it interfering with the performance of the bike, alleviating the cargo from sticking to your sweaty back or banging against your sides. “Our solution is to take away all the weight and centralise it on the bike and put it as low as possible. We consider the wheel size, the spacing between your legs when you pedal and also the different components to make it work,” Tan says.

The toughest part of the business, according to Tan, is to come up with new ideas that work. He’s always looking to improve the biking experience and listens carefully to what fellow cyclists and customers have to say. Another model that will launch soon has thick tires inspired by snowmobiles, offering greater stability for first-timers. There’s also

a model developed specifically for children—the prototype of which Tan created for his daughter. And one for Asian women. “We reduce the wheel size and drop the back, so if you’re wearing a skirt it won’t get stuck. We also reduce the distance of the pedal from the ground, so you can tiptoe while you are sitting on the saddle—it has a psychological effect that assures you that you won’t fall,” he says.

Apart from bike designs to suit everyone and a cyclists’ social hub, Tan envisions the 280 square-metre space as an experience centre where each visitor who walks in will walk away with intimate knowledge of biking, and the brand. “With the expansion of the city, most of us live far away from the centre while the cost of public transport has gone up and the cost of owning a car is sky-high. Biking is a great alternative to these, and sometimes we find unexpected paths by biking. It’s a ticket to freedom.”



(THIS PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM)
 Coast & Company cafe. Workshop in
 Coast Cycle. US-made Gates Carbon
 Belt Drive System. (OPPOSITE)
 Coast Cycle showroom.