

ELITE PEOPLE

Entrepreneur Ming Chiang
Living by
his
Values

幸運並非偶然

專訪玉山家具、Casual Home公司總裁江明信

*English text by Angela Feng and Irene Luo | Chinese text by Astrid Wang
Photography by Xuehui Zhang*

In the past decade, the furniture industry has seen many top players flounder and disappear with the decline of the retail store business model and the rise of digital marketing. Nevertheless, Ming Chiang, CEO of Casual Home Worldwide, Inc. and Yu Shan Co., has not only managed to keep pace with the rapidly evolving furniture industry—he's managed to flourish, as his company has grown into one of the biggest players in furniture on Amazon.

But what truly distinguishes this Taiwanese-American entrepreneur is not his skill as a businessman, but his heart to positively impact his customers and

初見江總裁，臉上掛著謙和的笑容，他細心地打點所有的招待環節，後來才知道，這份總是為他人設想的表現，是他一貫的親切。

身兼「玉山家具」(Yu Shan) 與「Casual Home」公司總裁的江明信，經營公司的這些年來，有著三次讓他在商場致勝的關鍵時刻，原以為那是他幸運抓準了時機，但在他娓娓道來這數十年的過程裡，才發現藏在這之中的關鍵，遠比運氣來得更加珍貴。

捨夢承父業 企業轉型堅持信念

1977年，江明信舉家隨父親從台灣移民至美國，一家人住在紐約州東邊的長島 (Long Island)，父親一手

Left page: A Taiwanese-American businessman and philanthropist, Ming Chiang is the CEO of Casual Home Worldwide Inc., one of the biggest players in furniture on Amazon.



his community. Imbued with this philosophy, Casual Home sells 100 percent solid wood furniture, made from completely sustainably sourced materials. With top-quality furniture and consumer-centric designs, Ming's company aims to foster community and provide the best for families and homes of all sizes.

Besides a businessman, Ming is also an avid philanthropist, serving as a regional director of the American Red Cross on Long Island. He is the first Asian in the greater New York region to hold such a position. In every facet of his life, Ming stands by his values and seeks the betterment of society through his actions.

A PIVOTAL MOMENT

In 1977, when Ming was 12 years old, he immigrated with his parents to the United States. Growing up, Ming and his siblings regularly helped his parents' furniture company, Yu Shan, with tasks like unloading, taking stock, and moving furniture.

After college, he started working for the sales team at Yu Shan, which was primarily selling outdoor furniture. In 1989, Ming and his father traveled to Indonesia to see their manufacturer's factory. It was Ming's first time witnessing the wood sourcing process—and what he saw shocked him.

Trees were downed on a massive scale, with little consideration of the long-term consequences. He was aghast to witness the destruction of the environment, and he felt ashamed at his own implicit involvement. "What else can we do; the market is the way it is," his father said to him. But Ming was unwilling to accept the status quo, and he sought a solution.

While traveling in Thailand, Ming noticed people extracting rubber from the many rubber trees there, killing the trees in the process. He realized he could use the wood from these trees, which would otherwise be wasted, to produce furniture. Although rubber tree wood is less durable than other woods, using it to make furniture would be far more environmentally sustainable and would save natural resources. As a result, Ming persuaded his father to transform the entire business from selling outdoor furniture—which

操持家具事業。初至異鄉，一切都需重新整頓，當時家境不是很好，因此他和哥哥、妹妹就學期間都會到公司幫忙。

江明信求學期間對電子與電腦深感興趣，但他最終放棄了早已錄取的電子公司，隨了父母心願接下家族企業。如今面對當初的抉擇，他堅定表示：「我不後悔。」

由於北美市場的客戶群分散，江明信從跑銷售開始，隨父親走訪美國各地。1989年，江明信和父親同赴印尼勘查配額廠商的工廠，不料這次出差後促使他做出重大的改變與抉擇。

玉山家具一直都以販售「戶外家具」為主，這次遠赴印尼親自參觀採集原料過程，江明信驚訝發現工廠一次砍遍整座山的樹木，相較於美國砍伐樹木有嚴格的限制與規劃，印尼工廠不計日後代價的行徑，使他無法接受。他認為和這樣的廠商合作，有如親手毀掉這片山林。

出生於台灣嘉義的江明信，從小就喜歡自然環境，親眼看到大自然遭到如此破壞的那一刻，他決定不再做戶外家具。他退出了銷售團隊，離開公司發展他的貿易事業，在1989年於紐約成立了公司「Casual Home Worldwide Inc.」。在他離開期間，「玉山」的銷售額明顯下降，他父親眼看情況不妙，找他回來商量。

一次，江明信到泰國出差時，發現當地運用「橡膠木」製作小型室內家具。大批的橡膠木在取完膠後已失去最大價值，當地人卻替它們找到了新用途。雖然它不如一般樹木耐用，但卻是個環保、節省資源的好原料。他受此啟發，靈光乍現：「我們也可以轉做室內家具。」他和父親商量取得共識，引領企業走向巨大轉型。

帶領事業邁向高峰的關鍵時刻

從「戶外家具」轉向「室內家具」誠然是一大挑戰，因為這兩種家具的客戶群、生產廠商截然不同，一切猶如重頭來過。後來，他以「Casual Home」為名在泰國設立了一間公司，並在當地興建工廠。

轉型之初固然舉步維艱，但隨後江明信的事業遇上了空前的起飛機會。1997年泰國暴發金融危機後，泰銖貶值致使他們產業的出口利潤暴漲了30%，這筆錢成了日後擴展事業的資金。

時間推移至2008年，這一年美國發生金融風暴，房產土地市場一片混亂，導致許多伐木場被迫關閉。江明信看準時機，主動拜訪伐木廠商提出合作機會。廠商見有人願意在他們面臨艱困的時期，替他們搭建販售通路，自然是相當樂意。



Almost all of Casual Home's furniture is made from 100 percent solid wood. It's durable, versatile, and exudes a natural, timeless beauty.

requires cutting the largest and strongest trees—to selling indoor furniture instead, made from the wood of Thailand's rubber trees.

VALUING QUALITY OVER PROFITS

At the beginning, the company struggled to start over. At this point, Ming was also managing Casual Home,

協商成功後，江明信以優惠許多的價格買到品質優良的美國木材，並把木材運到國外加工，最後送回美國販售，這批產品深獲客戶喜愛。他與廠商攜手度此難關建立的情誼，是商場上最可貴的一道風景。時至今日，他仍與一些廠商保持著良好的合作關係。

2008年江明信還做了一件事，使「玉山」在大型家具企業崛起之際仍不被擊垮。江明信早在網路零售平



After Hurricane Sandy, Ming helped the town of Amityville recover from the tragedy through his involvement with the American Red Cross.



Ming is a regional director with the American Red Cross on Long Island, making him the first Asian in the greater New York area to hold such a position.

a new furniture trading company he had established. But in 1997, the Thai baht suddenly fell, and Yu Shan had two surprisingly prosperous years, allowing it to greatly expand.

Fast-forwarding to 2008, Ming turned the financial crisis in the United States into another opportunity by contacting the lumber yards that were previously supported by the burgeoning real estate market. After the real estate market crashed, the lumber yards were in distress, and many were forced to close. Ming successfully negotiated with them to secure large quantities of first-rate American wood at discounted prices. Now, Yu Shan could create furniture of the best quality. A decade later, these lumber yards continue to offer Ming unbeatable prices, as a token of appreciation for how he helped save them from bankruptcy.

台亞馬遜（Amazon）成為企業龍頭前，就將家具放上該平台販售了，可謂是亞馬遜上的「元老」商家。他洞悉市場的觀察力，再次引領企業走向另一高峰。

深諳網路市場弊端 積極改變

在網路銷售商品的這些年來，他有許多深刻的體悟，他語帶無奈地訴說著所憂所感。

由於網路市場的競爭性多取決於「價格高低」，這導致廠商對於產品的生產策略跟著轉變。「很多時候（廠商）就會從產品下手，所以偷工減料的情況非常嚴重。」江明信直指關鍵問題。

此外，網路購物的時代，商品的銷售量取決於顧客在網上的「反饋」評論。然而，對講求耐用度的家具而言，這些反饋並不能真實反映商品價值。

江明信分析：「這東西能在1年、6個月的時間內用得好，那這產品就會賣得好，這導致整個產業都會想：

Also in 2008, the company started selling on Amazon, an important transition toward online retail. Because of his interest in the tech industry, Ming had been a consistent follower of Amazon since it first started selling books and music online. Through observing Amazon's explosive growth, he realized the vast possibilities of online retail and rapidly increased sales online.

But over time, Ming also discovered the underbelly of online retail. In today's profit-driven world, instead of striving to craft a high-quality product and then setting an appropriate price tag, companies "first set a price, and then make products within this price range," he said. "So problems with poor-quality workmanship and shoddy materials are extremely severe." The problem has been further exacerbated by the fact that online retailing is based almost solely on customer reviews. Thus, manufacturers focus on making products that give a strong first impression and function well in the first few months or a year, so the products can amass favorable reviews and become top-sellers. They no longer concern themselves with ensuring that their furniture will endure for 10 or 20 years.

"This is not good for us, not good for anyone," Ming said, as products deteriorate in quality and customers must frequently dispose of the products and purchase new ones, squandering the environment's resources.

To go against this trend, CasualHome.com sells only high-quality furniture guaranteed to last at least five years. This approach "does not earn us much profit," he confessed, but for Ming, it's worth it.

NOT JUST A BUSINESSMAN

"Ever since I witnessed the damage to the environment in Indonesia, I felt we needed to do something to give back to society," Ming said. Beyond seeking to promote environmentally sustainable practices in the furniture industry, he also serves his community as regional director with the American Red Cross. He has heavily involved himself with relief efforts after natural disasters like Hurricane Sandy and frequently participates in philanthropic events in New York. Through his example, he hopes to encourage more

fellow Chinese- and Taiwanese-Americans to engage with their communities.

Recently, Casual Home kicked off its 2018 Corporate Partnership with North Shore Animal League America (NSALA)—the world's largest no-kill animal shelter and rescue organization—by donating 174 plush pet mat beds to the nonprofit.

For Ming, his aspirations go far beyond building a prosperous business as he strives to do his part in serving his customers, uplifting his community, and inspiring positive change.

我們是否不需要做到10年、20年那麼耐用，我做得再好也沒人在乎。」選擇偷工減料的廠商只要確保他們產品在短期內不出問題，就能用更誘人的低廉價格販售。

如此一來，不僅廠商不願生產優良產品，也使得資源消耗地更加快速，因為不耐用的家具很快就會進入垃圾場，當人們重新購入同樣劣質的產品，就形成惡性循環。對此江明信一心想為這令人失望的現狀做出一些改變。

去年開始，他組建一個新團隊，致力於搭建一個銷售平台，目的是帶給消費者更優質、有保障的購物環境。他以其開辦的企業「Casual Home」為名，在網上販售具有5年保固的商品，無法有此保障便不能在此銷售平台販售。「這樣的做法是不賺錢的，但我們這麼做是為了鼓勵市場投資多一點心血，把東西做得好一點。」這是江明信的願景，也是他未來引領企業的方向。

從一而終的心念 服務回饋社會

「我總是向前看。」江明信的話語予人一種溫厚、踏實的正向思維，他就像是一扇堅韌的帆，迎風領船駛過一次次的驚滔駭浪。他秉持著一貫的信念，不做違背良心的事，並在令他失望的局面裡，積極開創一個對他人更好的環境。

除了事業上的發展，江明信一直都很重視回饋社會。他加入了紅十字會親上火線協助賑災，並且積極參與各項活動。今年他成為紐約地區台灣商會會長，他認為唯有親自參與這些組織活動，才能融入西方主流社會，從而替民間團體反映真實需求。

或許正因他懷有如此善念，才使他在每一次外在環境發生巨大變動時，乘勢而成了受益者。在抉擇時刻聽從良心的一念，終有一天會被看見，江明信的故事就是最好的例證。