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Bamboo Beacon for Peace in the Bangsamoro Wins the Philippines' Top Design Prize

Banwag, a community pavilion in Parang, Maguindanao del Norte, receives the Grand Prix Malasakit Award — plus Gold and Red Awards — at the Good Design Award Philippines 2026

PARANG, MAGUINDANAO DEL NORTE, PHILIPPINES — Banwag, a bamboo community pavilion built as a safe gathering space for Muslim, Christian, and Lumad communities in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), has won the Grand Prix Malasakit Award, the highest prize of the Good Design Award Philippines 2026, conferred by the Design Center of the Philippines. The structure received three distinctions in total — the Red Award, the Gold Award in the Place Making category, and the Grand Prix Malasakit Award.

The jury called Banwag "among the most direct expressions of malasakit the award has seen" — a design whose entire purpose is to hold space for people who have long been kept apart.

Banwag — Cebuano for "beacon," to illuminate, to enlighten — was conceived by the Sarmiento family of the PS Group of Companies and designed and built by Studio Impossible Projects (SIP), a design-and-build practice with studios in Rotterdam and the Philippines. It stands in Parang, Maguindanao del Norte, a municipality at the heart of a region marked by decades of armed conflict — and now home to the new Bangsamoro Regional Government Center.

The pavilion was designed as neutral ground. Its trimmed lamella dome draws on the sacred geometry of both early Christian cathedrals and Islamic architecture — the Pantheon and the Blue Mosque among its references — so that each community recognizes something of its own tradition in the structure. Six identical entrances ring its perimeter: there is no hierarchy of entry, and everyone arrives the same way. At night, LED lighting turns the bamboo lattice into a literal beacon visible across the surrounding landscape.

"In a region mired in intergenerational conflict and deep mistrust, the question is: how do you build peace?" said Oscar "Jun" Sarmiento, Jr., Chief Operating Officer of PS Group – Mindanao. "Banwag was conceived to hold space for safe conversations and gatherings, so that true dialogue can happen. It is a beacon of hope that peace is possible — and proof that the world needs more safe spaces. Physically, mentally, emotionally. Let's build more of them. And while we're at it, let's build them beautiful."

Banwag was built with radical simplicity. Each of its 127 bamboo poles (Bambusa blumeana) was digitally mapped, numbered, and pre-cut to specification under SIP's "Build by Numbers" system, then assembled across 26 anchor points in two and a half weeks — with no heavy machinery and no specialized drawings on site. Every pole was sourced from local farmers, and the structure was assembled entirely by local hands. Bamboo, connected by SIP's patented steel nodes and sheltered by a breathable marine-grade membrane, was chosen for its resilience in a typhoon-prone tropical environment — a material that teaches that to be truly strong, you have to learn how to bend.

The award carries personal weight for the Sarmiento family. The structure honors the memory of Bambina Sarmiento, who first fell in love with bamboo and co-conceived Banwag with SIP's Rick and Jasper before her passing, and Pablo Sarmiento, the Group's founder, whose birthday fell on the day of the win — June 29, also World Industrial Design Day, themed this year on resilience.

For PS Group, Banwag is the first built expression of a larger commitment to the Bangsamoro.

“Banwag is the thesis behind everything we are building in BARMM, made visible,” Sarmiento added. “Development here only works when communities can gather, agree to disagree, and still move forward together. Every project we build starts from that same conviction.”

About PS Group of Companies

The Pablo Sarmiento Group of Companies (PS Group) is a third-generation, family-held group that has lived, worked, and held land in Mindanao for generations. Named for its founder, Pablo Sarmiento, the Group builds and invests in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), guided by its values of Family, Respect & Empowerment, Service, Integrity, and Synergy in Diversity.

About Studio Impossible Projects

Studio Impossible Projects (SIP) is an international design-and-build practice with studios and workshops in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, and the Philippines. SIP specializes in parametric design and engineered bamboo construction, including its patented steel node connection system.

About the Good Design Award Philippines

The Good Design Award Philippines is conferred by the Design Center of the Philippines (Department of Trade and Industry). Its 2026 edition was themed around malasakit — compassion and deep social care. The Malasakit Award is the program’s highest recognition, presented to the Gold Awardee whose design exemplifies innovation while advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals and improving quality of life for communities.

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Note to editors: High-resolution photography of Banwag (exterior, interior, night lighting, and construction) is available on request. Interviews with Oscar Sarmiento, Jr. and Studio Impossible Projects can be arranged.