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ROMA
PRESENTS

FLOWER POWER

Celebrating the spirit of the season and with spring just around the corner, we ask three dazzling personalities on the local business and lifestyle scenes how they harness the power of what they wear and project it into their work. Talented young Malaysian photographer **Nadirah Zakariya** interprets the individuals' signature style, juxtaposed with the august Roman luxury house **Bvlgari's** high jewellery creations, using her famed floral accents.

ASSISTANTS: JUNAD M NOT, HADI KOH + ZIZI AZWANDI
HAIR: STEVE WONG OF 176 AVENUE, USING L'ORÉAL PROFESSIONNEL
MAKEUP: KRISTAL LEE FOR YSL BEAUTÉ
LOCATION: THE RUMA HOTEL KUALA LUMPUR



Bernard wears Bvlgari's Diva's Dream High Jewellery earrings in white gold and set with diamonds and emeralds. Around his neck are a High Jewellery necklace in white gold with a cushion emerald and diamonds and the Serpenti High Jewellery necklace in white gold set with pear-shaped emeralds and pave diamonds.

On his fingers are a High Jewellery ring in white gold set with a cushion emerald and pave diamonds; the B.zero1 Rock two-band ring in 18-carat rose gold with studded spiral and black ceramic inserts on the edges; the B.zero1 Design Legend four-band ring in 18-carat rose gold and black ceramic; the B.zero1 Rock two-band ring in 18-carat yellow gold with studded spiral and pave diamonds on the edges; and the Serpenti Viper 18-carat rose gold ring set with pave diamonds.

Datuk Seri Bernard Chandran

Marrying style and success comes easy to Datuk Seri Bernard Chandran, who is often nicknamed Malaysia's King of Fashion — with good reason. Celebrated for his unabashedly sumptuous approach to dressing up, the designer is a living testimony of avant-garde opulence. He combines swagger with street and Far Eastern grandeur with edgy leather touches. It is hard not to be charmed by Bernard's personal style. Professionally, though, it is no less captivating.

A visit to his couture salon in the heart of Kuala Lumpur is an invitation to journey on a magic carpet ride, opulently lined with lace, organza, sequins and silk.

"I love texture and mixing and matching," says the designer. "Even if you have to wear a jumper and track pants, I would mix it up with shimmer and netting ... anything to give it an edge and a bit of drama. Who says sportswear has to be utilitarian or boring?"

The last adjective is also the most unlikely word to be associated with the house of Bernard Chandran. A quick look at any of his collections — be it Spring/Summer, Autumn/Winter or even Petang Raya, which was created to celebrate the country's cultural and sartorial identities while pushing the boundaries of style — puts paid to any lingering doubts about his art form being dull. This is of particular importance to Bernard, who, being of mixed heritage himself, is always keen to create a look that celebrates and champions Malaysia's richness and diversity.

Born in Kuala Lumpur in 1968 to an Indian father and Chinese mother and growing up in a multiracial nation with Islam as the official religion, Bernard was exposed to a rich understanding of cultures. Despite toying with the idea of becoming an accountant

initially, fashion design held sway and the budding young talent pursued further studies at a local fashion college before taking a leap of faith and moving to Paris, where, in 1993, he graduated first, in fine arts from the Paris American Academy, and then pattern-making from the Union des Chambres Syndicales Parisiennes. Awards and accolades duly followed; he was the first non-European designer to bag both the coveted Silk Cut Young Designers Award and the Open European contest for Look of the Year.

Bernard Chandran creations have since been worn by royalty and a host of international celebrities, including actor Tan Sri Michelle Yeoh and performing artistes Lady Gaga and Tori Amos.

"People inspire me. My clients inspire me ... their work, their lives, their lifestyles, their attitudes. Now, it is even more important to pay attention to what you wear. After all, if you look good, you feel good. 2020 has been challenging for everyone but we should harness the power of clothing and accessories. Many people have started to give up and this shows in the way they go about their daily lives. Don't ignore your wardrobe as clothing is part of your personal expression. From the time I was young, way before I became a designer, I always looked to clothes to change or enhance my mood. You don't need expensive or designer labels. You don't need to buy something new. Find an item — an accessory, a vintage top — anything that gives you the spark to live out the day with flourish. Find something you like and look good in, put it on and you will find it will change the entire day for you; from your mindset to the way you approach a situation or when you have to meet someone. There is a popular saying: Dress for success. Do it! I promise you, you will feel better and radiate the power of style. Trust me. I know."

Melissa Sin Tze Yi

At just 33, the young and dynamic executive director of SKB Shutters Corp Bhd adopts a most contrarian approach to work and life. During official working hours, Melissa effortlessly takes her place as the third-generation scion of a well-established listed company that specialises in manufacturing and supplying storage systems, roller shutters and steel doors, where she is responsible for the group's overall business development. Once corporate work is done for the day, Melissa takes time to indulge her creative side, putting on the mantle of founder of The Bag Atelier, which specialises in customised crystal-embellished minaudières — an extreme contrast from her days spent in what is still a male-dominated industry.

“Manufacturing remains a man's world, but it is slowly and surely changing,” she affirms. “So, I do dress more seriously when it comes to work. Not because I need to prove a point but it's just more practical to do so. After all, a white shirt and smart pants is just so much easier to run around in versus a pretty dress. Having said that, I truly believe in the power of dressing up. I don't mean that it changes my persona in any way but it is something that I really enjoy and makes me feel good and happy.”

Citing a love of colours, texture and volume when it comes to dressing up, Melissa acknowledges that it is an extension of her personality, one which embraces life. “I am quite an outgoing person, so I can tell you, the first few months of the Movement Control Order were impossible for me. It was hard, [and] as things [in Malaysia] were getting so much better and near normal in July and I was beginning to feel good, hopeful and upbeat again, all of a sudden, it went downhill once more.”

Finding solace in simple, feminine pleasures is one way of coping for her. “The right attire, the right style at the right time, affects the entire experience you are going to have. Style-wise, I love local brands, but two countries in which I really enjoy dressing up in are Japan and Italy, where I feel there's more scope for self-expression. The destination I am in definitely dictates the way I dress. For example, athleisure is not my thing as a rule but when I was in Los Angeles, gym wear became par for the course.”

When it comes to accessorising, Melissa is equally exuberant about the process. “It is exactly my thing,” she says. “I love stacking rings and wearing more than one pair of earrings and layering my necklaces.”

On a more serious note regarding dealing with the effects of the lockdown, Melissa reverts to her business-like self, taking a proactive approach. “No one is spared [the economic fallout] ... unless you are a glove maker,” she cheekily quips. “I now have a newfound appreciation and respect for mothers. I am not yet one myself but I am in awe of the way they need to juggle so much and multitask. In a way, I am very privileged that I just need to focus on work. But I did make it a point to take up e-learning.”

Her course of choice? High-impact speaking. “I do a lot of presentations and pitches, so I wanted to improve and have more control over my hand gestures and facial expressions. The e-learning course I signed up for has helped me a lot.”

On what lies ahead, Melissa, true to her nature, is optimistic. “I'm definitely looking forward to a better year. But it is something all of us need to do, to work together globally, to make it safe for all.”



Melissa wears Bvlgari's Fiorever High Jewellery necklace in white gold and diamonds complemented by the Serpenti Seduttori watch with an 18-carat rose gold case, 18-carat rose gold bracelet, 18-carat rose gold bezel set with diamonds and a white silver opaline dial. She also wears Bvlgari's High Jewellery earrings in white gold with one cushion emerald, one round brilliant-cut diamond, 16 buff-top emeralds, two round brilliant-cut diamonds and pave-set diamonds; and a Fiorever High Jewellery ring in white gold set with diamonds and emeralds.



Nadia wears Bvlgari's Serpenti Tubogas single spiral watch with stainless steel case, 18-carat rose gold bezel set with round brilliant-cut diamonds and an 18-carat rose gold and stainless steel bracelet. Around her neck is the Diva's Dream High Jewellery necklace in white gold set with diamonds and emeralds, paired with matching Diva's Dream High Jewellery earrings in white gold and set with diamonds and emeralds. On her finger is the Fiorever High Jewellery ring in white gold set with diamonds and emeralds.

Nur Nadia Nasimuddin

“Talented multitasker” barely begins to describe Nur Nadia Nasimuddin. The youngest of the late Naza Group founder Tan Sri SM Nasimuddin SM Amin’s five children somehow manages to carry out her exacting roles as wife, mother and entrepreneur with effortless ease. With a keen interest in the worlds of food and fashion, Nadia looks after the group’s first wholly-owned F&B brand, Dotty’s, which specialises in pastries and coffee, and acts as creative director of Portluxe, a platform set up in 2014 to serve as a marketplace for buying and selling 100%-authentic pre-owned luxury fashion items.

The former is a well-loved brand that is found in the heart of the KL city centre as well as the leafier enclave of Taman Tun Dr Ismail. Nadia — having studied abroad and become enamoured of Western coffee culture and artisan breads and pastries — was the obvious choice among the enterprising band of siblings to forge its path.

Ever since Dotty’s’ establishment in 2015, locals have been steadily making a beeline for its jolts of caffeine accompanied by breakfast burritos or its extensive selection of delectables featuring the iconic Benelux spiced biscuit known as speculoos. But anyone operating in F&B will tell you that 2020 has been the industry’s undisputed annus horribilis, where once-healthy revenues have gone into freefall and how even the simplest standard processes like obtaining supplies and fresh produce have had giant-sized monkey wrenches thrown into the operating systems, particularly when the Movement Control Order — which only allowed F&B operators to provide food delivery or takeaway options initially — first came into effect in March.

“I am thankful to say that Dotty’s is still doing well as F&B is still a very important part of everyday life,” she says, shuddering slightly when we recapitulate how drops in restaurant sales were reported to be as high as 90% due to the restrictions suddenly and fiercely coming into effect. “F&B has never been easy but the immediate great challenge for us this year was, for want of a better word, to pivot quickly to the takeaway and food delivery platform. We are glad to be working with [food delivery apps] Grab and Beep, I can tell you!”

With regards to Portluxe, Nadia is also happy to report that “business is better than in the pre-Covid-19 days. I think a lot of it has to do with awareness and education. In Europe, people appreciate the beauty of pre-loved items. And at Portluxe, everything — from designer clothes to shoes and accessories — are all authenticated before being put up for sale. Buyers can have complete peace of mind. We also tell people it is okay, even better, to buy and wear pre-loved — for the wallet as well as the planet”, she laughs.

It goes without saying then that fashion, style and dressing up are important to Nadia. “You can’t deny how it makes a difference in the way you feel. I still make it a point to go into the office at least twice a week and I make full use of the opportunity to look and feel good.”

Despite having four young children to care for and a household to run, she says it is not an issue or impediment. “It is all about planning and balance. I more or less know what I want to wear the night before and it all falls according to schedule. I exercise a lot to start my day right and get it out of the way so I can then focus on the children and work.”

On what 2021 has in store for her, Nadia says assuringly, “I believe things will be better. This new normal has already forced us to change and adapt while the pandemic has shown us clearly what has been neglected. You know what has really helped me navigate this uncertainty? Podcasts! Seeing how going digital in a big way is the future, I found Guy Raz to be simply the best.”

For those unfamiliar with the acclaimed radio and podcast personality, Raz’s show, *How I Built This*, offers priceless insights and inspiration from the world’s top entrepreneurs — including the founders of Airbnb and Lululemon — on how to start, launch and build successful business ventures.

“I find him super inspiring,” she adds. Nadia might not know it but people could well be saying the same thing about her.