



Batik Inspirations

featuring top batik designers

QuaChee & EM.K



QuaChee

Malaysian-born photographer, writer, and model, currently based in Singapore. An accountancy graduate, his interests in writing and photography have resulted in travel articles and photographs being featured in magazines. His other passion - to be in front of the camera, has made him model for international brands, while his entrepreneurial spirit makes him combine interests and dreams into a business model.

Black Edition
Front cover
from jacket designed by Eric Choong

Back cover
from design by Tom Abang Saufi





batik is about being lively and free

Eric Choong



*i like nature
- the flowers,
trees, and birds*

I liked art since young, beginning with Chinese painting and oil painting which I learnt since the age of seven. As for fashion design, it was my make-up artist mother who cultivated the interest and ... is the main source of influence in me.

In the late 1980s, I went on to pursue my studies in fashion design in Hong Kong. I'm grateful to have given the working experience in the fashion capital, which has in a way inspired my designs and creations.

I started my own label in 1990 focusing on bridal gowns, haute couture, and batik. However it was in 1999 after meeting with Datin Seri Endon Mahmood (the Prime Minister's wife), during a fashion show, that I got more involved in batik. I am proud that she was impressed with my designs.

That moment will always be a truly memorable moment, because besides selecting me to be among the Malaysian designers to promote batik internationally, she also became my client. Her profile adds to my list of clients from local celebrities like Sheila Majid and Camelia to Hong Kong actress Petrina Fung Po Po.



My clients who come from all over the world (from North America, England, Australia, Middle East, China, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore and many more) like my batik designs because they are unique. I like nature - the flowers, trees and birds; and that's where I incorporate these elements to my creations. To me, batik is about being lively and free.

I not only blend western elements like its vibrant colours and modern cutting, but from the east itself, I mix the rich Malay culture with Chinese elements like the bamboo and lotus flower motifs. An great example is my range of batik bridal gown designs.

I get my ideas first and draw the designs before buying the batik fabric, which is then complimented with other fabric. The batik is the main 'star' of the design, while the other fabrics play the 'supporting roles'. The final finish is still a batik inspired design, but with a very modern touch to it.

I am proud to see that Malaysian batik is getting more recognition now. I can foresee that batik fashion will be a leading fashion form in the near future, and I hope to be one of the designers who will be in the forefront for it.

My dream would be to see my boutiques in major fashion cities of the world like in London, New York, Dubai, Sydney, Tokyo and Shanghai, where clients will be able to appreciate my work in general, and batik, in particular.

*batik inspired design,
but with a modern touch to it*





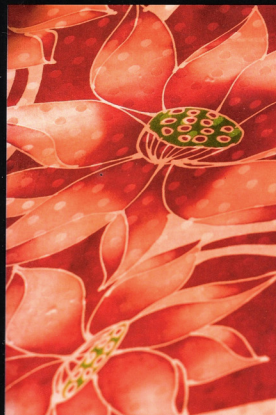












The Batik Inspirations Project was especially exciting for us. When we started, there were some guidelines we set.

First, no one will look into the camera. We wanted to capture models doing something in everyday life, talking, drinking, walking, meeting friends, going to restaurants, or just thinking or reflecting the events surrounding their lives. They would just happen to be wearing designer clothes. No usual fashion shoot with models jumping crazily, doing silly things people would not ordinarily do, or fake paper backdrops as if they were floating away.

We wanted movement, and tried not to have static posed shots, unless details needed showcasing.

We wanted something realistic, in beautiful surroundings like restaurants, in historical corners like the Stadhuys Melaka, walking along streets, or chatting away on the verandah of a typical house. To make it realistic, we scouted locations for shooting, and did not rub out elements in the streets like green electrical boxes, bicycles, or people standing watching us. We wanted reality, not artificially synthesized backdrops.

The book is about fabric and designs, and we wanted the pictures to capture the feel and the texture of the fabrics. In some instances, we did not even bother to stretch out the fabric for the photos; after all, fabrics crumple, crease, and fold in a natural state. So please look out for the details and secrets in the pictures on close study. I will highlight some of these in a later section.

Further, composition ranked high on the list. Almost no retouching was done except for one picture when it was too dark due to low light levels.

The artwork director was told to crop minimally, as we wanted the moment captured as is. And most of the pictures remained uncropped. So the reader gets to visualize what I saw through the lens.

The designers were also a surprise! Their creations were so colorful, lively, so wearable, and so attention grabbing, that it turned out to be an effortless splash of colours, with wonderful mind-boggling patterns never seen.

Indeed, this project was a wonderful educational experience, revealing the splendors of an ancient art supposedly dying, but now modernized in the hands of the new practitioners of Batik, and revived to living life.

I never thought Batik was so dynamic till we started out on this adventure, changing our concepts of boring repeated patterns in dull formal colours, to vivid dynamic geometrics, and bold sweeping graphics, in simple or opulent designs.

The experience garnered from our exposure to Batik Inspirations is a revelation that Batik is colour, is alive, and there for discovery and adventure. So let's look into reviving and supporting this ancient art form, now revived.

As photographer for this project, I must share some ideas, secrets and stories behind the photos which should no longer be kept secret because they are so entertaining. Let me take you on the photo journey on some of the more interesting pictures, and also include pictures we left out, but must show you for sheer interest.



Book's Front Jacket (Black Version) - shows detail on the front of the jacket designed by Eric Choong.

He used many pieces of old Batik, 10 years or more, cut into pieces, rearranged, and outlined with elaborate embroidery, and affixed it to highlight a wonderfully cut jacket in black. The patterns of flowers were thus brought to life and is the sole dominant feature of this magnificent jacket.



Shows Tom's main feature - her spirals. This is inspired by ideas from her Sarawak Iban background. The spiral is also found in New Zealand, where it is a symbol of the spiral of life. Her clients feel so soothed by these spiral designs, which dominate her work. It makes such a unique photo to showcase Batik.

Note the depth of field. I used a large aperture to make the foreground blurred, to give it more life, and it has resulted in the feeling that the centre of the spiral looks depressed 3-D fashion, and looks lower, like the centre of a shallow bowl.

Detail on antique batik more than 10 years old. Eric had cut extracts from it, stitched these onto the fabric, and then had them richly adorned with embroidery.



Could not resist framing the model with the beautiful orange-glass windows dating from 1924.



Note the beautiful shoes designed by Eric to complement the dress. Also the richly embroidered old Batik motifs on the wedding gown.



To show how hard QuaChee worked (see the bead of sweats on his temple). It was a hot day, and hard work.

Actually, he was standing in for the other models during test shots for the final picture.



Batik flowers studded with beads on Christine's dress, and Carol's red dress featuring bamboo, Eric's favourite motifs, with sequins.



Intricate floral designs on Carol's sleeves (pink dress) and lotus flowers on Christine's dress, flower motifs frequently used by Eric, Chinese-inspired. Note the details on the top of the wall.



荷兰街

去西文
Heeren Street
The Dutch Quarter

荷兰街是阿姆斯特丹最著名的街道之一，也是这座城市的心脏。这里有着悠久的历史，也有着迷人的风景。在这里，你可以感受到阿姆斯特丹的独特魅力。

Beautiful lighting from the window highlighting Christine's face, casting a shadow on her figure. Interesting framing by the old tricycle seat and handlebars.

A warm exchange of glances
by the riverside framed by
the sunset-cast sliding doors
with antique-finished orange
glass.





Swooning for a
refreshing drink

Flower motifs
on QuaChee's
and Carol's clothing
- rich in detail,
typical of Eric's
work. Consists of old
batik cutouts, framed
with embroidery, on
simple fabric.



Carol caught adjusting
her hair, while resting.
The background shows
the setting and location
of the shoot.

Most of the lighting came from
her left side,
but we augmented it with
softbox lighting.

