

Haute Couture Eric Choong Could Put Malaysia On World's Fashion Map

By Manik Mehta

KUALA LUMPUR, March 1 (Bernama) -- One of Malaysia's top 10 fashion designers is on the verge of breaking into the international markets with his wide range of fashion creations gestated from ideas that are endemic to Malaysian culture but also with some "outside help".

In this city's posh district of Bangsar Baru, Eric Choong has set up his company called Wedding Treasures Sdn Bhd, which caters to an exclusive clientele of winners of beauty pageants and top-notch personalities from politics, culture and what have you.

Some of his customers have included the late Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, the wife of the Malaysian prime minister, Sheila Majid, Paula Malai Ali, Soong Ai Ling and Miss Malaysia/World 2004 Gloria Ting.

The 42-year-old Choong, a Malaysian Chinese, with a 20-year experience in creative designs, says that the influence of his mother, a make-up artist, set him on the career path in fashion designing.

"I have grown up in an artistic environment since age seven and this has, naturally, had a profound impact on my creativity," Choong says in an interview with Bernama.



HAUTE COUTURE! Eric Choong, one of the top 10 Malaysian fashion designers, is on the verge of breaking into the international markets with his wide range of fashion creations gestated from ideas that are endemic to Malaysian culture. Pix: Manik Mehta

A product of the Hong Kong Institute of Fashion Design, Choong launched his own label called "Eric Choong Kuala Lumpur". He was invited by Parkson Grand to participate in the "Contemporary Designers' Show" which showcased designs by Malaysia's top 10 designers.

Indeed, the Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board designated him as one of the country's top 10 designers for the year 1991/92.

Choong recalls his "great moment" when he participated in the Malaysian Songket Designers' Show in 1993, showcasing the songket-based clothesline.

The foreign media, which covered the event, rated Choong as one of Malaysia's promising fashion designers.

Choong also officially represented Malaysia in the Asean Designers' Fashion Show held in Singapore in 1997 and, again, in the following year in the Asia-Pacific Young Designers' Show in Hong Kong.

Aside from his own niche, the fashion designer has also worked closely with fashion cults such as Cartier and Bvlgari; his millennium bridal and evening collection themed "Underwater Garden Fantasy" at the Regent Hotel in 1998 was a coup of sorts.

Subsequently, Tiffany & Co. invited him in 2000 to design outfits for a fashion show which displayed the company's jewellery at the Carcosa Seri Negara, whose chief patron was Endon.

Endon, claims Choong, was so impressed by his works that she invited him to design the "baju kebaya" and evening gowns for the launch of Yayasan Budi Penyayang Malaysia.

"I owe a great deal to the late Datin Seri Endon who spotted me and promoted my products," acknowledges Choong.

In her fervour to promote batik, she was also promoting those who created batik-based products.

Choong says that although batik has long been in vogue, its application has only recently been upgraded to a more modern level of use.

He has also represented Malaysia in Beijing at a fashion show under a broad-based expose of Malaysia in 2004, held to mark the 30th anniversary of Malaysia-China diplomatic relations conference.

Other milestones in his career include participation in the Southeast Asia International Fashion Show in Nanning in the Guangxi Province of China.

Aside from being judged by others, Choong has himself participated as one of the panel judges for the Miss Malaysia/World competition, and was also the official designer for the "Evening Gown Design" category worn by Miss Malaysia during the Miss World competition of 2004.

Indeed, he was the fashion director in the Malaysian celluloid hit called "The 3rd Generation".

But he is also taking an avante garde approach while creating new designs.

"My products are a blending of eastern and western cultures and I am particularly fond of the exquisite saris worn by Indian women.

"The sari is becoming a very popular attire and many Asian fashion designers are using it as a base to create new designs," he says.

Asked why he had created the "Eric Choong Kuala Lumpur" brand, he says that this was necessary to create an "international appeal".

"This is one way to attract foreign buyers. Indeed, I have even sold my products to Americans. I know there is demand for my products in the United States and I am therefore looking for representatives in that country to open my franchise," he adds.

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