

about -turn

With a shopping landscape dominated by prestige brands and high street chains, Singapore may not be the world's most sartorially vibrant city. Home-grown designers still struggle to overcome scepticism of local consumers, while the likes of Ashley Isham and alldressedup had to establish themselves on the international markets first.

ACCESSIBILITY & FAMILIARITY

It explains why Goh Ling Ling's decision to base her business here is a brave one. She helms Ling Wu, which turns out lambskin and python bags that have been flying off the racks at multi-label stores like United Arrows, Vulcan, Blackmarket, A Curious Tepee and Quintessential. The 37-year-old Central Saint Martins alumnus lived in London for six years before coming home in 2002. Goh is

There's no place like home, say the Singaporean-born designers who marked their return to local fashion at the recent Blueprint show. *By Baey Shi Chen*

drawn to the thriving economic environment in Asia. It also helps that production cost is cheaper in the region, especially since her bags are made in Indonesia.

Chelsea Scott-Blackhall agrees. The 29-year-old left in 2006 for New York to pursue a career in modelling before launching denim label Dzojchen. Singapore is an excellent base for her apparel, which is produced both locally and in Hong Kong.

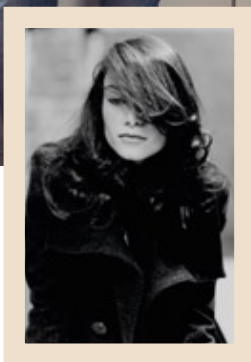
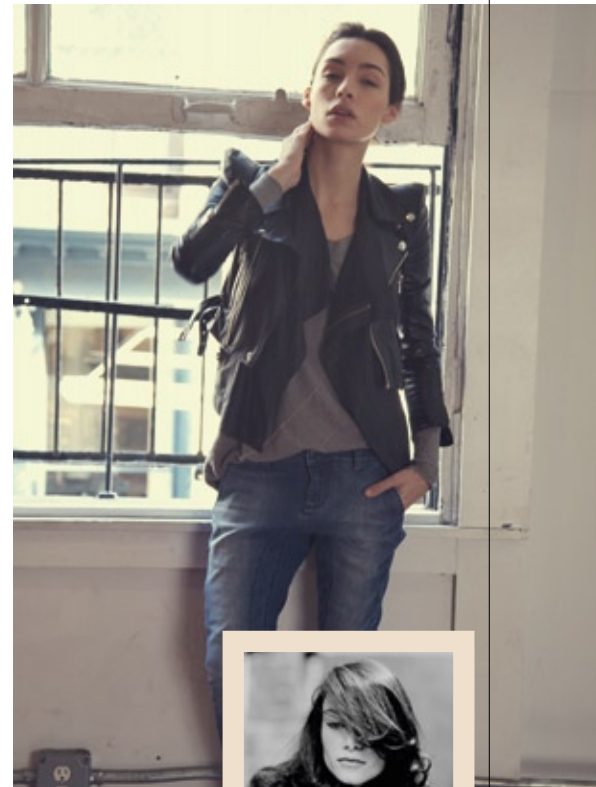
She says, "I can travel between Singapore and Hong Kong at the drop of a hat. What's more, Singapore is a fusion of global markets in every sense; there's so much buzz about it internationally. It's a blessing in disguise because it's home too."

STYLE SENSIBILITY

More importantly, the designers feel that Singapore has become more willing to appreciate different styles. Just ask New York returnee Gilda Su, who's hoping to break into the local and Asian markets with her quirky label Révasseur. The 28-year-old Bunka Fashion College and Parsons graduate has also interned at Patricia Field.

"When I first left for Japan to study fashion design eight years ago, I thought I wouldn't come back. Everyone was more interested in world-famous names," she says. "But people have become tired of cookie-cutter looks, so everyone is now more receptive to local designers."

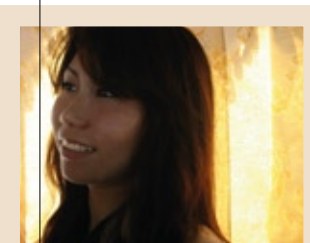
And who better to confirm this change than Farah Khan? She set up multi-label boutique The Link in 1978, but later sold it and uprooted to Kuala Lumpur. Her foray into the Malaysian market culminated in The



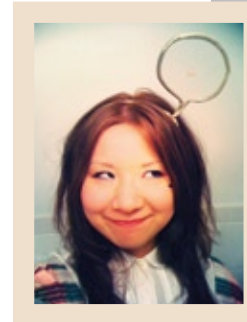
DZOJCHEN
CHELSEA SCOTT-BLACKHALL REFRESHES DENIM WITH UNIQUE FRONTAL DETAILS AND EDGY SILHOUETTES. WWW.DZOJCHEN.COM

Melium Group, which owns 30 stores and distributes over 100 international labels across the country. For Blueprint, she debuted the Cruise 2012 collection of her namesake label, as well as her diffusion line, FK.

"Singapore is extremely global now, so



LING WU
GOH LING LING'S BUTTERY SOFT CARRIERS FEATURE GATHERED LEATHER AND BEADED TASSELS, AS WELL AS LUXURIOUS LININGS OF LEATHER OR SUEDE.



RÉVASSEUR
INSPIRED BY ENID BLYTON'S *THE MAGIC FARAWAY TREE*, GILDA SU TURNS OUT ZANY PRINT DRESSES, MIXED-TEXTURE SHIRTS AND FUNKY HAREM PANTS. WWW.REVASSEUR.COM



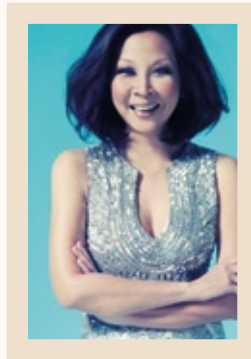
we are more exposed to fashion. Design schools here offer great education for fledgling designers, while platforms like Blueprint show that the government understands that fashion can 'sell' a city. It's definitely not the same place as when I left," says Khan.

CREDIBILITY

Foreign exposure and affirmation have made homecoming more favourable too. Khan launched her trademark glamorous gown in Paris in 2007 as a way to build a successful resume before establishing herself in Asia. Her designs have been spotted on Japanese supermodel Ai Tominaga, Russian tennis ace Anna Kournikova and American actress Ashley Tisdale.



FARAH KHAN
KNOWN FOR HER SEQUINED CONFECTIONS, KHAN LAUNCHED A SECOND LINE, FK, AT BLUEPRINT. IT IS AVAILABLE AT BOUTIQUE AND PARLOUR BY ASHLEY ISHAM



litmus test is, however, still in Singapore. Scott-Blackhall says, "Many people think I'd be proud to succeed in Europe and US. Obviously I'm more confident, but I'm also more humble, because I want my label to succeed here more than anywhere else."

Clearly, there are challenges associated with being based in Singapore too. Chief among them is the lack of available resources. Su, who hopes to open her first shop here in the next one year, says, "We must have adequate resources, or we will have to constantly seek them out elsewhere."

Local labels FrùFrù & Tigerlily and Hansel revealed that it was the greatest hurdle they had to overcome.

Says Jo Soh, who launched Hansel in Australia in 2003 and has a boutique here, "Sourcing for materials and manufacturers was tough. I had to really think laterally and creatively to solve the problem of limited resources. Apart from generic prints like stripes and polka dots, I couldn't buy readily printed fabric as they might be used by another label. So I began using colour blocking and contrast trims to create visual patterns and details in my clothing."

Ginette Chittick, co-founder of FrùFrù & Tigerlily, recalls not being able to find a seamstress to churn out samples of decent quality at a reasonable price. It was especially essential that she had to understand their aesthetic vision as well.

"As it is, the pool of seamstresses was very small and many designers weren't willing to share their seamstresses. These were mostly housewives in their 40s who worked from home. We were lucky enough to find one through recommendation, whom we stuck with after trying out three others," she says.

Khan sums it up aptly, "I'm very proud of Singapore, but we still have a long way to go. The young designers are talented but we have to support them and help them to understand how to improve and grow their brands. Nonetheless, I have high hopes for the future."

SORRY, NOT AT HOME

L'Officiel finds out why these designers are staying put (for now at least!) in foreign lands.



ANDREW GN
Luxurious and colourful, Andrew Gn's designs have been worn by stars such as Emily Blunt and Anne Hathaway. His Autumn/Winter 2011 collection focuses on intricate cuts and seam work that flatter

the female silhouette. Based in Paris, Gn recently opened an opulent couture salon in Marais. Although he admits that Singapore fashion has evolved "a lot" since he left, it may be some time before he decides to return to our shores. "The local industry is extremely sophisticated now but it is not big enough to support and nurture young designers...I must look for the right partner and launch it at the right time," he shares.



EUGENE LIN
"Singaporeans are still hesitant about Asian names unless they are established like Jimmy Choo or Alexander Wang," says London-based Eugene Lin, a Central Saint Martins alumnus,

who has worked for Roksanda Ilincic and Ashley Isham. Now helming his own label, he has presented at London Fashion Week and Paris Fashion Week. Describing his personal aesthetic as "slim, sophisticated, and elegant", the 29-year-old wants to concentrate on the European and American markets for now. "I want my work to be appreciated for its cut, fit and high-quality finish, not a trendy, throwaway garment," he adds.



TZE GOH
Tze Goh's minimalist, structured designs are stocked in hip multi-label boutiques such as Sien, Alan Journo and LN-CC - not bad for someone who's only on his third collection. He trained at Parsons New

School of Design in New York and Paris, before completing an MA at Central Saint Martins. The energy of London fuels his imagination: "There are so many creative people here, which is inspiring." Goh insists that "we are taking a very considered approach in positioning the brand for growth internationally", but there are plans to bring the label back to Singapore next year.