

FASHION

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Promotion of Fashion Culture from 80s to 00s

From Small Operations to Global Attention

After the war, all kinds of creative industries developed but the fashion and film industries were the first to emerge, gaining attention on the international scene.

In the 30s, the local garment industry was family operated businesses. Even the balconies on old Chinese tenement buildings known as tong lau were transformed into miniature garment factories. In the 50s, a large influx of immigrants from Mainland China provided an abundance of capital, technology and labour for the textile and garment industry. At that time, the colonial government regarded the garment industry as an important economic driver as garment exports earned substantial foreign exchange for Hong Kong.

Soon, many countries implemented trade barriers and restricted the garment quota from Hong Kong. Local manufacturers had to come up with innovative ideas. By the late 60s, the Hong Kong Trade Development Council began promoting Hong Kong garments overseas. The local fashion industry began to attach importance to original designs, leading to an increase in production of man-made fibres such as nylon, mixed yarns and other new fabrics. Design and production were also combined to provide a one-stop service. 'Dress well to gain respect' was a popular maxim at that time and soon the Western suit gradually replaced Chinese shirts and pants. Department stores such as Wing On and Sincere sprang up. The Hong Kong Brands and Products Expo organised by the Chinese Manufacturers' Association of Hong Kong attracted many garment manufacturers such as Crocodile and Goldlion. In 1966, The Trade Development Council was established to promote Hong Kong as an international fashion centre.

Even though economic and social conditions were favourable, Hong Kong required visionaries who dared to take the risks. In the 70s, two industry pioneers David Shee Kwan and Ragence Lam came into the scene with far reaching impact for a new generation of Hong Kong fashion designers. David gained experience from Paris and New York and was eager to cultivate new talents. His protégés include Walter Ma and William Chang Suk-ping. Ragence Lam is one of the first Hong Kong designers to emerge in the international fashion world. His bold experiments on different fabrics infused with Chinese concept created a major breakthrough for the local fashion industry.

Hong Kong is a place where East meets West; Shanghai Tang, Blanc de Chine and other brands successfully modernised the cheongsam and other Chinese garments. Considered as the 'Godmother of Fashion', local style trendsetter Joyce Ma singlehandedly brought cutting-edge European and Japanese fashion brands to Hong Kong. Her Joyce Boutique provided a platform for an emerging middle class who wanted to dress the best, a must-visit for those who want to find out about the latest trends. Young fashionable people in the 80s and 90s would also remember Esprit located in Hing Fat Street in Causeway Bay.

Fashion requires the interpretation of a group of influencers and heroes who work tirelessly behind-the-scenes. These include models, singers, actors, designers, tailors, hair stylists, art directors, photographers, make-up artists and assistants.

While selecting works and figures for 'VERY HONG KONG VERY HONG KONG', we hope to highlight important timelines and re-discover once again classic fashion designs that excite and fascinate us. Whether under the spotlight or designing behind the scenes, we need to continuously infuse new energy to those who are passionate about fashion. We hope this colourful industry would continue to shine and prosper.

Contemporary Design of Cheongsam

Cheongsam or qipao was a popular attire for women of all classes in the Republican period. Since the 1990s, the cheongsam's popularity seems to have receded. Not completely forgotten, the cheongsam today is reserved only for one or two specific occasions. Through Shanghai Tang's retro-chic branding, Sir David Tang successfully revived the cheongsam and Chinese clothing that pays tribute to the golden years of Shanghai. Also established in the 1990s, Blanc de Chine has grown from a design workshop into a full-fledged retail brand that modernised traditional Chinese wear into haute couture.

Designers delved into the motifs and styling of the period and resurrected classic dresses to be worn on more formal occasions. Modern, ready-to-wear lines of cheongsam incorporated unconventional patterns to breathe new air into an old fashion heritage. Veteran art director William Chang Suk-ping's sensibilities for cinematic aesthetics, which nostalgia and cheongsam play an important part. Cheongsam Connect, a social club by professional women founded in 2015 also contributed to the revival of Cheongsam's legacy. They organised workshops, talks, field trips, and social activities promoting the love of cheongsam.



“Cheongsam gives Chinese people a distinct look. I wish the Cheongsam culture can be passed on to future generations. William Chang brought Cheongsams into the nostalgic cinematic world of Wong Kar-wai, re-interpreting the aesthetics of Cheongsams.”

— Stanley Wong



David Sheekwan



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“David Sheekwan was a brand that excelled in minimalist aesthetics. The luscious and expensive sweaters were sold in the Pedder Building store that offered a top-notch experience. Not a big fan of woolen sweater but buying the item made me feel like owning a piece of the brand.” — Alan Chan

Esprit Branch Store on Hing Fat Street

(1983 - early 1990s)

The fashion brand Esprit's store on Hing Fat Street in Causeway Bay was the mecca of young and hip crowds who developed their wardrobe and sense of style cultural mixing is the norm. How popular was Esprit in the 90s? It is evident from the lyrics "Forever remember Esprit on Hing Fat Street" by popular local Chinese rap duo Softhard. Esprit was founded by Susie and Doug Tompkins and introduced to Hong Kong by Michael Ying in the 1980s. Besides apparel and accessories, Esprit's visual installations were also benchmarks of stylish living. One always find something trendy and new during every visit. The store's interior was the work of the late Japanese designer, Shiro Kuramata, who was renowned for his use of industrial materials and whimsical mix of forms and colours. Philip Kwok from the Illustration Workshop, the famed creative team that designed a series of covers for City Magazine, provided art and image direction for the store experience.

"The Esprit concept store on Hing Fat Street in Causeway Bay was at the time a sensation in Hong Kong. The popular cultural landmark where fashion, home decors and lifestyle met was made possible by an avant-garde team letd by Shiro Kuramata." — Alan Chan



Joyce Ma

Fashion Kingdom



Joyce Ma is synonymous with luxury brands. It would be an understatement to say that this fashion pioneer has influenced, if not taught, a generation of Hongkongers to dress elegantly and playfully. Joyce Ma is the founder of Joyce Boutique and previously CEO of this Hong Kong listed fashion group. She is also a fourth-generation member of the renowned Kwok family in Hong Kong. In 1970, Joyce opened the first Joyce Boutique inside the Mandarin Hotel in Central and introduced fashion labels such as Giorgio Armani, Donna Karan, Dolce & Gabbana, Jil Sander, Romeo Gigli, Sonia Rykiel, Yohji Yamamoto and up to 200 world fashion brands to Hong Kong. The trendsetter of fashion has also successfully turned lifestyle into numerous business ventures, often with her sister Bonnae Gokson, before virtually everyone else. For instance, Joyce Cafe pioneered a dining trend, as well as Joyce Flowers, which introduced French style flower boutique to Hong Kong. Combining good taste, business acumen, and a vision of future trends, Joyce's influence can still be felt today.

“In the 80s and 90s, almost every fashion and lifestyle enthusiast would visit Joyce Boutique religiously to take note of her curated looks and style.”

— Stanley Wong



“I worked at the advertising agency located at Prince’s Building in 1970. I have been very particular about my outfit. I earned less than one thousand dollar a month at that time, so I would wait and shop only during big sales. I bought my first blazer at Diamond 7 Boutique inside the Wing On Department Store in Central, which was opened by Joyce Ma. Later on Joyce Boutique was launched. Bringing fashion and lifestyle into Hong Kong, Joyce Ma is truly a unique and influential legend, also ‘Very Very Hong Kong’.”

— Alan Chan

Regence Lam

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“In 1980s, I thought Regence Lam’s design was ahead of its time. A true creative spirit and attitude, his works broke traditional boundaries in the business world. Even today, I still find his creations shockingly contemporary.” — Alan Chan

Kim Robinson / Ben Lee / Jacky Ma / Suiki Lor

Hairstyle Creations

Hairstyling can transform a person's appearance and is regarded as a high art form. From the Shanghainese tai tai's simple luxury, hairstyling in Hong Kong has become an important and unique economy to support fashion, design, performance arts and film industry. Four prominent figures from different periods, Kim Robinson, Ben Lee, Jacky Ma and Suiki Lor transformed the future of Hong Kong hairstyling.

Born in Australia, Kim Robinson was trained by Vidal Sassoon and Alexandre de Paris in what he describes as "the old school way." Rather than blindly following fashion trends, Kim stresses communication with the client to find out their needs by bringing out the personality of each client he has served. Boasting the late Princess Diana, as well as numerous actresses from the Greater China Region such as Brigitte Lin, Josephine Siao, Gong Li, and Maggie Cheung and Sandy Lam are among his clients. His signature "drycut" and pioneering hair colour technique have greatly influenced Hong Kong hair stylists since the 1980s. He also co-founded Salon Esprit in 1999, before opening his flagship Hong Kong salon in 2002, to join its sister salon and hair academy in Singapore.

Ben Lee and Jacky Ma are Hong Kong's homegrown celebrity hairstylists, and through their bold cut and ground-breaking work, showed the general public the limitless potential and possibilities of hairstyling. Both Lee and Ma have lasting contributions to the entertainment industry in Hong Kong. The pair has also dedicated their time to train a new generation of local hairstylists, maintaining and elevating Hong Kong's hairstyling industry to high standards of expertise.

Suiki Lor was a seaman before he enrolled in the Vidal Sassoon Academy. He later taught at the same academy in San Francisco as the first Chinese technical director and planted seeds for the new generation of local hairstylists to maintain top standard regionally. Later he opened his own chain of hair salons in Hong Kong, Beijing, and the United States and has trained many hairstylists. In recent years, Suiki has been dedicated to promoting professional hairstyling, and nurturing new talents in Greater China region and Asia. An avid fan of jazz, soul, and funk music, he is also a renowned amateur DJ.



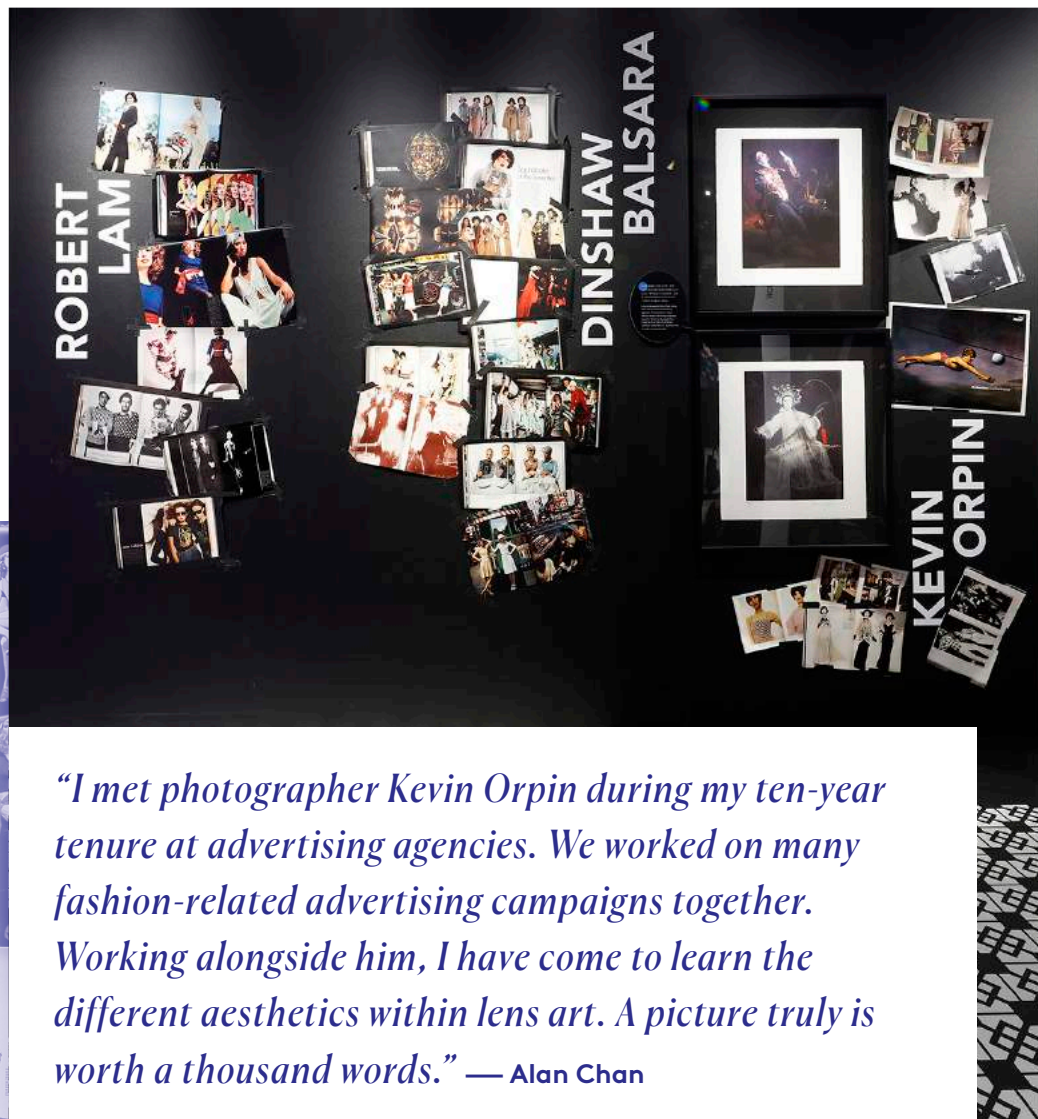
Supermodels' in Hong Kong after 70s

The fashion industry cannot do without supermodels. Hong Kong boasts an open, bilingual culture and enjoys the geographical proximity to major Asian markets nearby and becomes a natural gathering place for talents to show off their catwalks locally. Among all the supermodels, Paulona Chai, Carroll Gordon, Ellen Liu, Janet Ma, Judy Mann, Qi Qi and Tina Viola are some of the most celebrated.



Dinshaw Balsara / Robert Lam / Kevin Orpin

Fashion Photography



As Hong Kong's economy began to boom in the 1970s, the vibrant media scene and great demand for marketing materials contributed to a skillful pool of photographers. Among them, a number of photographers made notable contributions to the fashion industry.

Dinshaw Balsara, a.k.a. Balsi, was a sharp-eyed perfectionist who left nothing to chance. A much sought-after photographer from the 1960s all the way to the 1980s, his portfolio included high-budget advertisements, portraits of the rich and famous, fashion show assignments, and hotel portfolios.

Robert Lam is known as one of the top Chinese commercial and fashion photographers who helped many products launch in the international market since 1970s. He is also known as a portrait photographer, his portrait subjects included President Ronald Reagan and Michael Jackson, among other celebrities. His photo printing labs in Hong Kong and Tokyo are known for top quality large-scale prints in the industry.

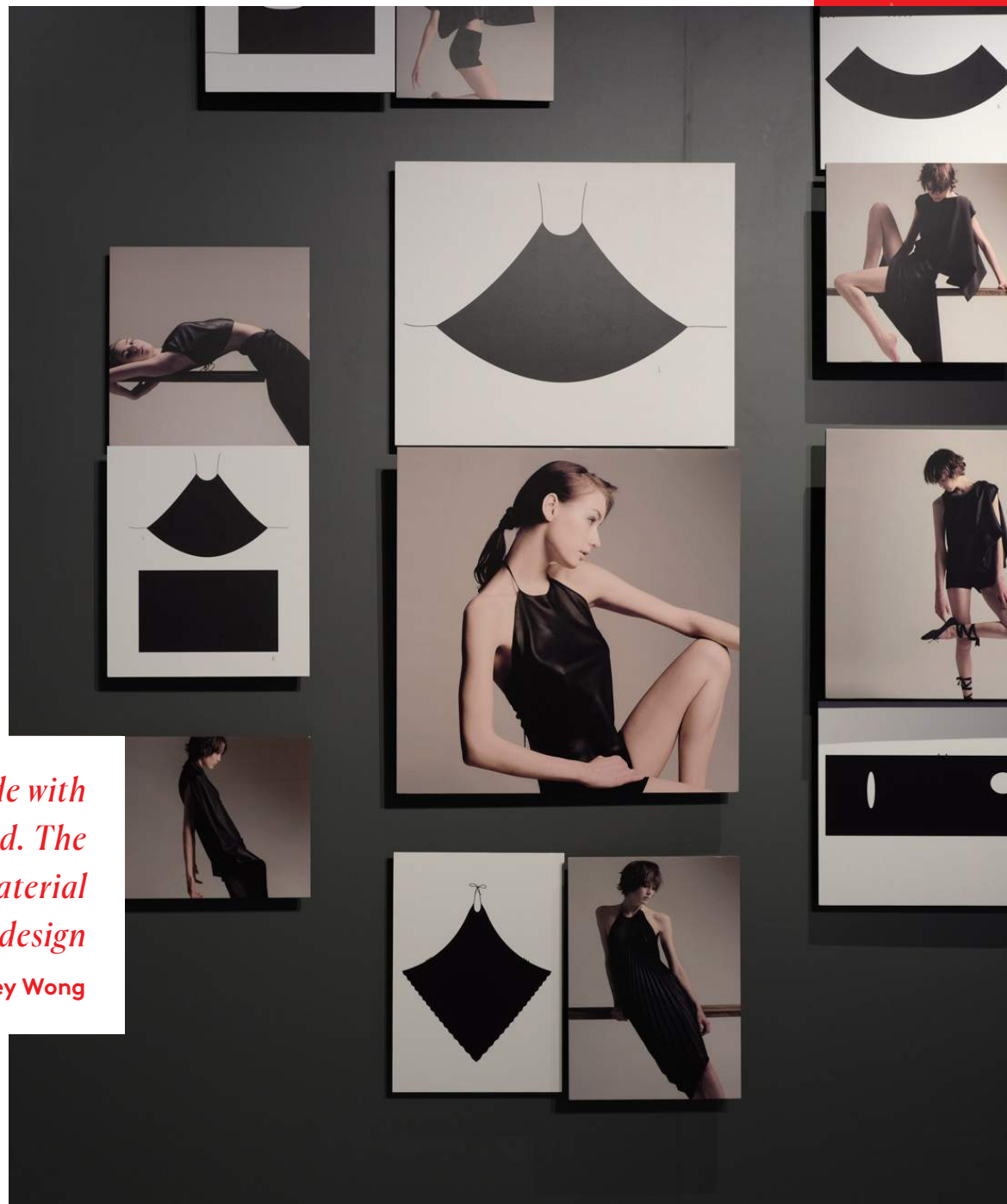
Australian-born Kevin Orpin was an influential photographer in the 1970s and 1980s. As an art director himself, he is extremely knowledgeable about design and art, as reflected in his photography. He indisputably brings great photography to the advertising industry as his projects with Puma and many other brands set an unmatched standard for visuals for the next generation of photographers.

Blanc de Chine

Dao Collection

Established in 1986, Blanc de Chine relied on word of mouth and customer testimonials rather than advertisements to promote their contemporary wear that drew inspiration from traditional Chinese garments. Meaning “way of life” Dao is a modern reinterpretation of the traditional clothing such as dudao halter-top blouse, and was made from a single piece of luxurious fabric. As the two dimensional fabric takes on the three dimensional form of the female body, the garment expresses the timeless notions of fluidity and simplicity.

“Blanc de Chine’s Dao line features garments made with one single piece of fabric almost uncut and unstitched. The idea which explores traditional wisdom and elegant material demonstrated the beauty of oriental feminism. This design philosophy is still inspiring for creatives today.” — Stanley Wong



Winifred Lai

Promotion of Fashion Culture from 80s to 00s

A sharp critic of fashion, popular culture music and style, a highly respected image consultant, and also known as the “Godmother of Fashion”, Winifred Lai was fashion magazine Amoeba’s editor-in-chief following her editorship at City Magazine. Before selfies were popular, she had been taking pictures of what she wore everyday incessantly for years. Through her works and living by example, she elevated fashion to the cultural level. She was also a radio DJ and columnist, and definitely was a cross-media culture expert full of enthusiasm for fashion.

