



Tan Yoong

Be Spoken Of

Women's quest to express themselves sartorially reaches its peak with made-to-order pieces, as **Dan Koh** discovers.

When it comes to bespoke tailoring for women, men of a certain age still conquer. The designers that Singaporean women trust to create their one-of-a-kind garments—Tan Yoong, Francis Cheong and Goh Lai Chan—all made their first cut in the 80s. In our current age of takeaway fashion, does bespoke have a future? And are Singaporean women still interested in investing in unique dreams?

It's a resounding 'yes' according to the designers that I-S spoke to. In fact, more and more young professional women are engaging in their services and getting one-off threads made, contrary to the perception that bespoke caters only to tai-tais and socialites. Thirty-two-year-old Keith Png, one of the few bespoke designers of his generation, counts local celebrities, models and young professionals among his clientele. But he sympathises with other designers who steer clear: "A lot of designers don't want to do bespoke, because it's very troublesome. You don't feel like a designer at all because you're just drawing for your client."

So whether bespoke survives remains to be seen. In the meantime, designers like Tan, Cheong, Goh and Png continue to offer an experience that is second to none, creating one-off gowns, suits and outfits perfectly crafted to suit every individual's shape and taste.

The city's best couturiers:

The Grand Doyen: Tan Yoong

Singapore's first real couturier, Tan Yoong is a veritable pioneer of the craft. Yoong's the go-to designer for brides and women looking for distinctive gowns. His delicate pieces give off a "dreamy, feminine feel" when worn.

Trained in fine arts, Yoong got his start in advertising: "What I learnt in art school left me with a strong artistic sense; creating a new look, sketching, choosing the right fabric and color." Expect nothing less than the best at his atelier—personal attention, professional advice and only the finest imported fabrics and trims. Just be prepared to wait for four to eight months for your tailored accoutrement to arrive. \$5,000 upwards for a simple gown. #02-50 Lucky Plaza, 304 Orchard Rd., 6734-3783.

Singapore's Galliano: Francis Cheong

Couturier Francis Cheong has a big personality and the skills to match. "I'm avant-garde myself, I wear the strangest things in the world, but my women are always classy, sexy and sensuous—I love curves and I love busts." It's no wonder that the 50-year-old still attracts spunky women like socialite Celina Lin and actress Andrea De Cruz.

Known for his flamboyant creations, Cheong has a different take on style: "I always start with a simple silhouette and clean lines. From there, you can add extravagant details or complicated pleating."

Be it wedding or evening gowns, dresses or suits—Cheong's pieces are always lavish and unique. He even provides customised jewellery to go with the gowns. From \$3,000-\$40,000. #01-09 Orchard Hotel Shopping Arcade, 442 Orchard Rd., 6734-9898.

Mr. Culture: Goh Lai Chan



While he's known mainly for his exquisite cheongsams, Goh also offers a range of bespoke services from party and cocktail dresses to evening gowns. Within 15 minutes of meeting his customers—a mix of local professionals, socialites and foreigners—he draws up event-specific sketches on the spot. Goh's bespoke designs are rooted in Asian tradition, featuring tableaux of Chinese classical motifs on exotic snakeskin. "Some people ask me why I don't venture out, but if I haven't even cleared my own backyard, how can I?" The earnest designer is also deeply involved with the local theater scene, having tailored Margaret Chan's kebaya for her recent role in *Emily of Emerald Hill*. The man tasked by the late Mrs. Ong Teng Cheong to create the Singapore Dress plans to retire in three years' time, so you had better grab him before he hangs up his measuring tape. \$5,000 upwards for gowns and cheongsams. #02-10 Raffles Hotel Arcade, 328 North Bridge Rd., 6338-4806.

New Kid on the Block: Keith Png



The bespoke designer to the stars is fast becoming one himself. His label Koops has outfitted everyone from Taiwanese model-actress Lin Chi-Ling to our very own Fann Wong (her ROM dress, no less). Koops bridges the price and style gap between tailors and high-end designers and offers up "pretty dresses" for those special occasions. "My style's timeless and understated," Png says, "I design for the girl whose favorite label is Marchesa or Vera Wang."

Get ready to do your homework by clipping out pictures of dresses you like. Once he knows your style, Png does a mock-up. Fabrication is done in-house to ensure there is no scrimping on material (he's one of the few who uses silk lining). If you are short on ideas, Png will tweak his ready-to-wear pieces and turn them into one-offs. \$1,000 upwards for a knee-length dress to \$10,000 for a gown. 176 Telok Ayer St., 6221-2825.