

THE PLAYERS

LAI CHAN

FASHION DESIGNER

YOU could call Lai Chan fashionably late: a star on the local couture scene for about 20 years but only now presenting his first collection for a major Singapore event.

"Although they've been around for a long time, I've never taken part in Singapore Fashion Week or Singapore Fashion Festival," says Chan, 47, of the two events which have been amalgamated to become the Asia Fashion Exchange (AFX) this year.

"I just felt that the timing was not right. I also felt that those two events lacked direction; they were organised by different people with different objectives.

"Were they held to promote the fashion trade, or to promote tourism?" asks the designer, best known for his exquisite cheongsams, wedding gowns and evening wear.

His made-to-order pieces cost between \$5,000 and \$12,000, while his off-the-rack cheongsams sell from \$700.

The revamped AFX has given him new hope.

"Finally, various people and agencies are coming together to organise it - Spring, STB (Singapore Tourism Board), TaFf (Textile and Fashion Federation), IE (International Enterprise), as well as people from the private sector," says Chan, whose boutique at Raffles Hotel attracts a steady stream of well-heeled clients, including those from Japan and Europe.

"I also feel that the people who are working together are genuinely interested in promoting local fashion. That's why I feel I have to support it."

He will be sharing the spotlight with fellow fashion design veteran Daniel Yam and accessories designer Choo Yi Lin in a show called Luxe Collective that has generated a lot of buzz.

He will be creating eight pieces - dresses, tops, pants - for the Blueprint trade show



Veteran designer Lai Chan hopes the AFX will help boost the Singapore fashion scene. PHOTO: BUSINESS TIMES

segment of the AFX.

"There will be a lot of foreign buyers at the show, and I want to put out something which will impress them. And for me, that's elaborate and exquisite handiwork, something we could do very well here but which they can't afford in Europe or the West," he says.

He adds that the AFX should not be all about sales but must do something good for the local

fashion industry.

"I've been to many of the design schools here and I see so much talent. The problem is there is not enough local support. People here would rather spend \$5,000 on a blouse by a foreign designer instead of \$500 on a gown by a local one."

"We have to nurture and support our local talents if we want to become a thriving fashion hub."

WONG KIM HOH

the
designers