

STYLIST GOES WITH THE FLOW

By Toni Ip

Wouldn't it be cool if you could shop for a living? Not for groceries or socks or diapers, but Bloomingdale's, Saks Fifth Avenue, Prada, Armani, the toniest boutiques on Rodeo Drive. That's what shopping really means, and that's what all celebrity fashion stylists do. This kind of high-end shopping largely defines their job. But for local stylist star Nelson Cheung Hok-yun, the job means more than shopping.

"Everyday you spend nine hours running around shops to buy things for clients and carry up to 20 bags of clothing. Would you say that's not tiring?" Mr Cheung said in a slightly grumpy tone. After having a sip of cranberry juice, he continued, "Buying things for yourself is easy, whereas buying things for others is difficult!"

This renowned stylist is not just famous for his unique fashion sense, but also his outspokenness.

Whenever there are any major entertainment events, either music or movie-related, Mr Cheung serves as the “fashion judge”, harshly passing sentence on celebrities’ style of clothing with merciless critiques. Since a lot of his comments are straight to the point and often expressed in a humorous manner, more and more newspapers and magazines have invited him to give comments on celebrities’ outfits. Due to his fearlessly outspoken character, the media nicknamed him the “executioner of fashion”.

However, there is a price for being a standout. A lot of people being criticised are not pleased with Mr Cheung’s “unfriendliness”. However, Cheung is only being himself. “How others feel is something beyond my control,” he said with certainty. “What I criticize is just the outfit, not a particular person.”

His unsympathetic comments also come with his belief in one’s potential to look better and that there is always room for improvement.

“Some people do possess the qualities to do well,” he said, “The more pathetic I think they look, the harsher I comment.”

Though he is renowned for his harsh criticisms, he has never used the word “ugly” to label anybody. “Is it that the renowned beauty of the town Michele Monique Reis symbolises beauty while the local TV supporting actress Yu Mo-lin symbolises ugliness?”

Mr Cheung believes that there are no guidelines to judge between beauty and ugliness. “Even Yu Mo-lin can be made to show her most beautiful side,” This is the work of image design, Cheung added.

“Image-design or styling is more than just spending spree for buying clothes,” Mr Cheung said, with a beam of professionalism in his eyes. “When the client is not as good-looking as others, how are you going to make him or her stand out by styling?”

While many people misunderstand a “stylist” is merely a person who cuts hair and applies makeup, Mr Cheung believes a stylist’s job is more about creating an image that sends a message about the person.

Among the artists he has styled for, local singer Aaron Kwok Fu-shing is the one he finds the easiest to work with, since he looks good in all kinds

of clothes. “You won’t think he looks feminine even with women clothes on,” Mr Cheung said jokingly. He suggested that Kwok’s inner masculinity contributes to his versatility.

Singer Shirley Kwan Suk-yi is another artist he enjoys working with. Despite her petite figure, Cheung said, she was able to carry different styles of clothing well. Artists like her and Aaron are most welcome as they provide larger room for the stylists to try new ideas.

Mr Cheung said as he styled for an artist, instead of simply dressing the artists up, he would research extensively on things like the songs sung by the artist, the style of the album, the artist’s character and other competitors. A successful image designer was not just making the client look absolutely beautiful, but exposing the true sides of him/her in front of other people, Cheung said.

Having built up his profile and connections in the entertainment industry, Cheung recently has set up a company of public relations and marketing which organises social functions for companies.

He is also turning to be an artist, as he has acted in a few movies. In the first film that he worked as a costume stylist, Cheung was invited to play a role in it.

Cheung said it would be beneficial to his career as he could observe how other colleagues work and it helped him maintain good relations with them.

After graduating from Vancouver Vocational Institute in Canada in 1988, Cheung came back to Hong Kong. Quite unexpectedly, he was introduced to Liu Juan-juan, a model-turned-stylist, through a friend.

Miss Liu later invited him to be an assistant image designer for the 1989 Miss Asia Pageant. This was how Cheung, then 25, started his career.

After working as stylist in several beauty pageants, a friend asked if Cheung was interested in directing costume for films. With his strong willingness to try new things, he accepted the invitation. In the first few projects, he worked with big names of celebrities such as Andy Lau Tak-wah and Gigi Kwan Chi-lam.

In 1993, one of his friends who worked in a records company invited him to style for an emerging female artist. This girl who later developed a close friendship with him was Karen Tong Bo-yu.

“I am just thankful for the opportunities given by my friends,” Cheung said, with a big smile on his face.

But the turning point of his career came in 1998, when he got a call from a local actress/singer Maria Cordero, nicknamed as “Fat Mom” while he was travelling with friends in America.

“When will you come back?” he playfully imitated “Fat Mom” by raising his tone. He went on, “Go to Cable TV when you are back!”, he continued the impression.

Once he arrived in Hong Kong, he went straight to the TV station, bringing his luggage with him! He was hired to host a show with “Fat Mom” in which they gossiped about celebrities and he was also tasked with commenting on their clothes. From that point on, the audience started to know a person who had long been behind-the-scene only.

He was surprised that Miss Cordero picked him as a co-host of the TV show.

“Because no one dares to make fun of me, only you do!” She told him. He added, “I often make fun of her, saying she was fat and looked like a seal.” Though Mr Cheung treats her like a friend, from the bottom of his heart he feels grateful for her bringing him onscreen.

Regarding his career path as a mix of coincidences, Mr Cheung commented that it was not easy for newcomers to enter the business. “So I mean to help those who want to enter the industry,” Cheung said.

Cheung said he would go with the natural flow of matters in the future, as he did in the past. “Actually I don’t plan much. I don’t even know what I am doing next year,” said Cheung in a carefree manner.

He said he was content with what he was at present. “It doesn’t matter whether you know me or not,” he said. “As long as my meals are secured and I have money to buy clothes, there’s nothing I crave.”



COURTESY OF NELSON CHEUNG



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TONI IP



TONI IP

Mr Cheung does not care how others feel, he is just being himself.



TONI IP

Mr Cheung was grateful for Maria Cordero bringing him onscreen.



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Mr Cheung loves cranberry juice, mascara and fashion.

Nelson Cheung Hok-yun said it was not easy for a stylist to set up a right image for an artist.