

FASHION & SHOPPING

This bespoke tailor is one of Singapore's best-kept secrets

Exacting standards, digital innovation and a father-daughter camaraderie are the keys to Meiko Tailor's longevity



Story By Ink Creative Studios

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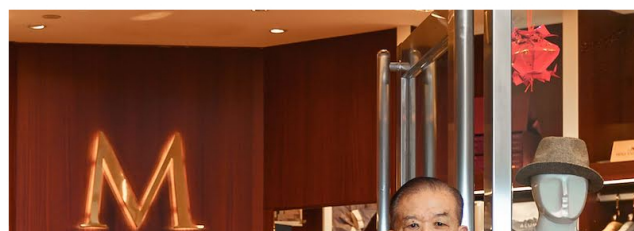
*Produced by SilverKris for **Meiko Tailor***

Though much of the world has moved on to off-the-rack fast fashion, the highest sartorial standards are alive and well in certain pockets of Singapore. One such bastion of bespoke tailoring sits within the Pan Pacific Hotel. Meiko Tailor has been in business since the 1970s, and founder Chung Chi Kwong has been honing his craft since the age of 17.



Master Chung Chi Kwong has been honing his craft since he was 17 years old. Photo: Meiko Tailor

Though he is now 74, Master Chung's work is reaching more customers than ever before, since his daughter, Adele Chung, left the corporate world in 2018 to join him in carrying on the family business. The father-daughter duo have taken this homegrown atelier to new heights, braving ever-changing demands in the fashion world, a global pandemic and the digital retail revolution while remaining as relevant as ever. This is their story.



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Adele and her father Master Tailor Chung Chi Kwong at the atelier in Pan Pacific Hotel. Photo: Meiko Tailor

Crafting new opportunities

As an enlistee in the Singapore Armed Forces' pioneer batch of national servicemen, Master Chung is no stranger to hard work. After national service, he started as an apprentice before working freelance for over 30 tailors. Specialising in suit jackets, Master Chung was often burning the midnight oil to complete client orders.



Master Chung started as a freelance tailor before branching out on his own. Photo: Meiko Tailor

Master Chung was earning a decent living but recognised that working freelance was not sustainable in the long term. With his wife – the “Mei” behind Meiko – he branched out on his own, setting up their first shop in Geylang Lorong 3 where they spent eight good years building a base of regular customers.





Meiko Tailor's first storefront in Geylang Lorong 3. Photo: Meiko Tailor

Unfortunately, the workshop was destroyed by a fire in the late 1970s, and they moved their business to the heartland neighbourhood of Kovan in 1983, where they rebuilt their business offering ready-to-wear apparel in addition to tailoring orders. Fortunately, the new location proved even better for business, and they gained the loyalty of many customers, many of whom continue supporting them even today. Three years later, Master Chung was invited by one of his regular customers – a senior executive of the then-new Pan Pacific Hotel – to set up an atelier at the hotel. Meiko Tailor has been an anchor tenant there ever since.

Striving through adversity

Located within a hotel, the business had the advantage of high tourist footfall, with many travellers making suits with Meiko Tailor during their stay. By Master Chung's estimate, about 60 percent of his clientele were local expats and business travellers, and business was brisk.

However, all that ground to a halt with Covid-19, just two years after Adele joined the business. While the atelier had survived the fallout from the 2003 SARS outbreak, the Covid-19 pandemic was on a whole other level. Not only did Meiko Tailor have to vacate the premises when Pan Pacific Hotel was designated as a quarantine hotel, their orders also dried up.



During the Covid-19 pandemic, Meiko Tailor produced and donated over 6,000 fabric masks. Photo: Meiko Tailor

Thankfully, Meiko Tailor had their production space to fall back on to serve as an interim retail outlet to continue receiving customers. "It was a very challenging period, and we had our sewers and their families to feed," Adele recalls. However, the 47-year-old clothier and stylist was not one to give up easily. Driven by her faith, Adele rallied the whole family and their sewers to start producing fabric masks to give away to the community as there was a shortage of masks at the onset of the pandemic. In all, the team produced and donated over 6,000 masks. Word soon got around and orders for masks and other clothing started pouring in, which helped sustain the business during a difficult period.





Adele and her father Master Chung work closely together to offer the best service to every client that walks in. Photo: Meiko Tailor

The art of tailoring

This indomitable spirit binds father and daughter together and carries them through tough times. With her fresh ideas and marketing know-how, Adele is slowly taking the business into the digital age with more online presence and responsive customer service. Meiko Tailor also now offers 3D body measurement technology so that they are able to extend their tailoring services to clients from all over the world.

Of course, as Adele notes, nothing beats going down to the atelier in person to ensure your suit will be made to your exacting requirements. In an era dominated by mass-produced attire, bespoke tailoring remains an oasis of exclusivity and personalisation. Steeped in history, this time-honoured process begins with a warm interaction between tailor and client.

“Every piece is individually cut and individually sewn,” says Master Chung, adding that the first consultation often spans a few hours as they take time to really get to know each client’s needs. “Understanding the client’s body shape, personality and purpose of making a suit is an important part of the bespoke process as we are creating a unique garment – individually handcrafted to be well-fitted for the wearer.”



Each suit at Meiko Tailor is individually cut and individually sewn. Photo: Meiko Tailor

Expertly hand-crafted

Beyond excellent customer care, what sets Meiko Tailor apart are the exacting standards. Each suit continues to be made using the traditional method of full-canvas interfacing. Inside every suit, there is a layer of fabric known as the “canvas” – a hidden skeleton between the outer fabric and the inner lining that helps maintain shape and structure. This layer of canvas covers the entire inside of the suit jacket – from the shoulders down to the bottom – and is not glued or fused in parts. This allows it to drape gracefully over the body, without the “puckering” or “bubbling” that occur in fused jackets.

Another advantage of having a bespoke suit made is the luxury of personalisation – such as choice of fabric composition, the desired cut, the inner lining, style of the lapels and buttons, and even personalised initials on your shirts or jackets. In fact, one satisfied client even insisted on having Master Chung’s name embroidered on the inside of his suit jacket.

Next in line

Even though Master Chung continues to be very involved in the day-to-day running of Meiko Tailor, he says he is slowly handing over the reins to his daughter and is giving her more training opportunities and freedom to explore new business ideas. For example, they now design and customise more womenswear, which runs the gamut from corporate attire to occasion wear such as cheongsams. They also have a range of smart casual menswear in the works, which will be available online.

“We’re definitely here to stay, and remain proud as a Singapore homegrown brand,” Adele says, with conviction in her voice. “We hope to make bespoke tailoring very much a part of the lifestyle here in Singapore.”

For more information on Meiko Tailor, visit [their website](#).

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