

THE BUSINESS, CULTURAL, SOCIAL & SPORTING LIFE OF SINGAPORE

SINGAPORE TATTLER™



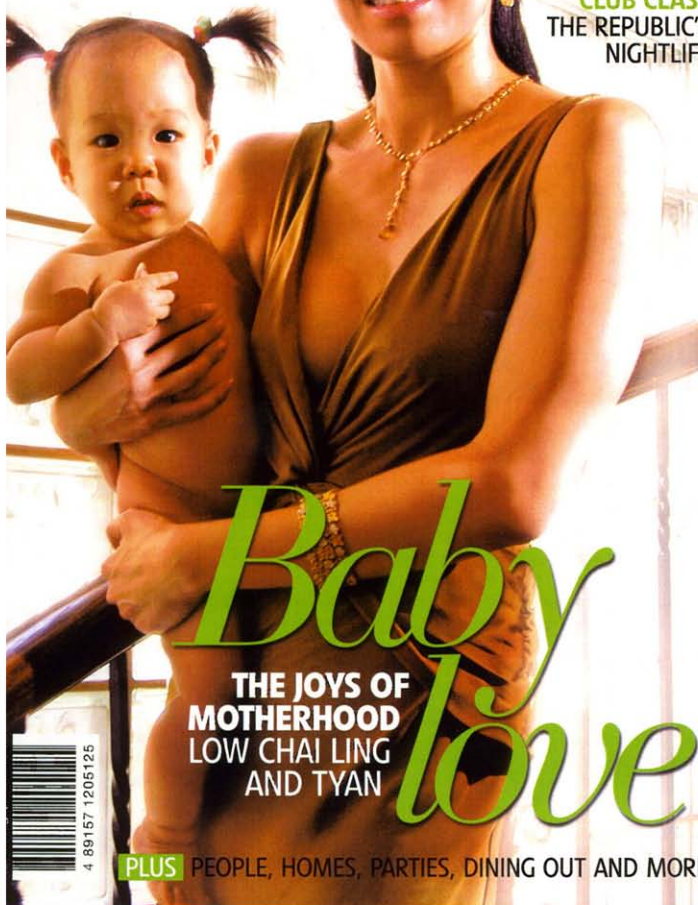
MAY 2005 \$8.00 (INCL. GST)

FEELING THE HEAT
HOT HOLIDAY SPOTS

FRUITFUL EXPEDITIONS
FABULOUS FOOD MARKETS

STAGE FIGHT
THOUGHT-
PROVOKING
THEATRE

CLUB CLASS
THE REPUBLIC'S
NIGHTLIFE



**THE JOYS OF
MOTHERHOOD**
LOW CHAI LING
AND TYAN

Baby love

PLUS PEOPLE, HOMES, PARTIES, DINING OUT AND MORE

Daum

Crystals in the heart of the Republic

Phone: 31 400 200

la prairie
SWITZERLAND

Unit 10 ground floor, Marina Mall, Marina Bay Sands, 401, South Bridge Road, Singapore 048963. Tel: 65 6 733 8888

FLOWER
DIAMOND BOUTIQUE

101, Orchard Road, #02-07A
Nellie Ann City Tower B, Singapore 238873
Telephone: 655 9 718221 | www.flowerdiamond.com

BEZEL
THE WATCH COLLECTORS' GUILD

#01-01 Park Road, Singapore

ORVA
jewellery

100, North Bridge Road, Singapore 079103

Coutts

Singapore: 653 425 3338



Often clad in classic Chanel suits and subtly glamorous Armani jackets, with carefully lined eyes and not a strand of her shoulder-length hair out of place, Chong-Tan exudes refinement. As director of Smile Inc Dental Surgeons, an established local dental practice, she speaks with carefully measured words, which reveal a sharp business intellect beneath the sweet face. At the same time, she maintains a gentle demeanor, which belies a strength that is not detectable on first sight – determination.

During her adolescence, Chong-Tan was very close to her father: “He was a magnanimous person who was always involved in community and charity work, which imbued in me a sense of care and concern for others, and the respect for everyone as individuals.” When he passed away suddenly and unexpectedly in 1998, she found herself the only person willing to go to Vietnam to negotiate deals to complete his metal and light-fitting manufacturing projects. Equipped with only determination and her husband’s support, and without any technical knowledge or know-how, of the business or Vietnam, she pulled herself together for a tough bargain.

Schooled at the finest institutions – St Anthony’s Convent, Raffles Junior College, National University of Singapore and the London School of Economics and Politics – and the daughter of a PBM (public service medal) recipient, this Masters degree holder has a superb pedigree to enter the political and public arena. However, she opted instead to support her dental surgeon husband Ernest Rex Tan in setting up Smile Inc nine years ago.

Now, she has developed the business into two fully computerised clinics. But even state-of-the-art technology has its glitches. When the system crashed one day, even the computer technicians threw in the towel. But not Chong-Tan. She simply stood back and said, “Okay, we did steps A, B and C. Let’s go back and do steps A, B and D.” The next day, the system was up and running.

She had “not an ounce of experience or knowledge” when she took up the new portfolio. “I believe there is not a single situation that cannot be worked or improved upon. It all

depends on the mindset and tenacity. When I finally solve a difficult problem, I’ll feel like, ‘Oh, that was good!’” To her husband and his colleagues, it was their lucky day when she left the CEO’s office in the Singapore Tourism Board for Smile Inc.

“I believe there is not a single situation that cannot be worked or improved upon”

Both at home and at work, Chong-Tan and her husband are very like-minded, he reveals, “Sometimes when I walk into a meeting and

There is another side of Chong-Tan, to which only her dear ones have access. But today, we are lucky. Her husband reveals an incident that Chong-Tan’s late father fondly spoke about. On a family outing to the zoo, impending rain suddenly threatened. When the senior Chong passed a handkerchief to the then five-year-old Chong-Tan to cover her head, the young girl took it to cover her three-year-old sister head’s instead. “She has a lot of positive energy and a very big heart for everyone, which endears her to most people.”

The pressures put upon women today is an issue close to Chong-Tan’s heart. She laments that working women who still contribute to community work have to juggle many tasks, “I really hope the world can judge a woman

Polished

She took over a project she knew nothing about in a country that she had never visited and outwitted computer technicians at their expertise. This is Grace Chong-Tan beneath her genteel façade

ask a question, people will tell me ‘Your wife just asked the same question one minute ago!’” When they are not thinking alike, they are almost perfect complements, “He’s very visionary, so he thinks broadly on a big platform; I’m very detailed, so I get to the ground to execute his vision into reality.”

Although this career woman only had her first child in her 30s, she is now the devoted mother to four-year-old Matthew. “I take care of him myself and devote my weekends to him. Matthew is in love with the outdoors but we also like to cuddle in front of the TV. He can now understand when we have to work, but we still bring him abroad with us, even at conferences.”

on a fairer and more objective basis.” Nonetheless, she maintains a multi-faceted modern life competently. She has a fervent interest in cooking, which she finds therapeutic, and eating, which she enjoys at Michelin-starred restaurants such as *Les Ambassadeurs* in Paris, and at hawker centres like the Zion Road hawker centre for her favourite prawn noodles. And she enjoys whipping up five-course meals with whatever ingredients are left in her refrigerator. “I just like finding new ways to do things. I’ll always try something different and let my husband taste it – for instance a lemon chicken that is not really a lemon chicken!” she laughs. □

A portrait of Grace Chong-Tan, a woman with short dark hair, smiling and sitting on a patterned sofa. She is wearing a red blazer and a dark skirt. The background features a framed picture on the wall.

Grace Chong-Tan: a detailed person who can execute a vision

Performer