



PHOTO: BLACKFRANGIPANI

FASHIONABLY PRECIOUS

AS TOLD TO JACQUELYN CHEOK

Flower lovers – especially those who know their frangipanis – will know that this sweet-smelling, funnel-shaped species comes in no less than five colours: white, pink, yellow, cerise and red – and most certainly not black. But Christina Lim (above), founder and designer of Blackfrangipani, a maker of designer fine fashion jewellery, had always fancied a frangipani in black. So she decided to create one, albeit only in name. She shares how the black frangipani reflects the jewellery that she designs – non-existent until she creates them; and not settling for the same old same old.

HOW DID BLACKFRANGIPANI BLOSSOM?

Ms Lim: Blackfrangipani was founded in April 2015. The beginnings of the company came some years ago when I started a blog to sell an assortment of handmade jewellery pieces, including a range of Victorian purse necklaces that were bead-knitted with fine quality Czech beads. I enjoyed modest sales during those blog days but was greatly encouraged that people who bought my handmade pieces were so happy with them that they later bought them as gifts for family and friends.

Looking back, I was really just dipping my toes into the water, so to speak. I was just doing what I loved, more than trying to see if I could make a business out of it. Where I am today with Blackfrangipani is the natural progression of my growth in designing and making jewellery. I began working on new designs and materials, and eventually started designing and making what I call “designer fine fashion jewellery”, using sterling silver, gemstones and pearls. These are being marketed under the Inizi brand, *inizi* being the Italian word for beginnings.

We all have numerous and assorted beginnings in our lives. Beginnings are the start of something – something new or fresh. A relationship comes to mind, or a journey, an adventure, a new day, an important next

step. Beginnings are full of promises and opportunities; of life and living; optimism and hope; challenges and change; wonder and discovery. We embrace all that Inizi means, and all that it suggests. For us too, the name reflects the start of new collections of jewellery, the sparking of design ideas and creativity, which are the beginnings of every piece of jewellery.

WHY DESIGNER FINE FASHION JEWELLERY?

Ms Lim: From a business perspective, I saw a market for designer fine fashion jewellery – where fine jewellery meets a keen fashion sense. I believe women want more choices in fine jewellery. We want the real thing with precious metals and quality gemstones. But we also want pieces that are fashionable and have a strong sense of design and style: contemporary pieces that we can enjoy with evening wear, work attire or just T-shirt or tank-top and jeans – stylish and fun jewellery that we can enjoy everyday, and that doesn’t cost as much as the more traditional fine jewellery.

HOW DOES BLACKFRANGIPANI STAND OUT IN THE MARKET?

Ms Lim: There aren’t as many players yet in this segment as there are in either fine or fashion jewellery. So, women have fewer choices when it comes to fine jewellery that are also fashionably stylish. I think there is great potential for growth in this segment of the market.

Inizi jewellery is made by hand with a strong design focus. This means a few things, which we see as our strengths. Because Inizi jewellery is handmade, our production numbers are low – at most, fewer than a hundred per design. This means a level of exclusivity that most other brands do not offer. Also because Inizi jewellery is handmade, they have a certain artisanal aesthetic that mass-produced pieces do not have. And as handmade items go, no two pieces will look exactly alike. No one else will have a piece that is exactly the same as the one you have.

Along with our strong emphasis on design, we also look at traditional as well as nonconventional ways of designing and putting a piece together. For instance, among our current collections are pieces that involve weaving gemstones with wires; and using wire-wrapping as a design element.

I like surprises, so we also try to include elements of surprise in our design. We do this through the use of colours, form, including unexpected twists. It’s all a very personal expression of my design inspirations. In line with this, we do not follow trends. We want Inizi to be known as being different, in a good way. We want to be known for great designs and for highly wearable and versatile quality jewellery that is timeless.

WHO ARE YOUR CUSTOMERS?

Ms Lim: Our target end-buyers are women who are in the 25-65 age group. Within this group, we see the strongest segment being in the 35-55 age group. These are women who have already settled into a career or have risen to become successful at what they do. They are women who are more relaxed and more comfortable, and confident about their own styles and personalities. These women are looking for designer fine fashion jewellery pieces that are more stylish, more fun and less formal. They want quality pieces that are also more wearable, with more options for pairing with different dress styles and suitable for more than formal wear.

WHAT ARE BLACKFRANGIPANI’S PLANS FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

Ms Lim: We do not foresee a brick-and-mortar retail set-up in the near future. We will maintain an online presence for B2B and retail sales, and branding and product awareness and market reach. And we will continue to participate in top international trade shows to reach out to more resellers.

In the near term, we are targeting a greater portion of B2B sales to retail sales. Apart from the sales element, we see our jewellery pieces in stores as creating greater visibility and helping to build consumer confidence. In the longer term, and with the trend of increasing online purchases, we expect online retail sales to have an increasingly greater share of total sales. Singapore will remain our base for design and production as well as for marketing and administrative functions. ■

UNIQUE PIECES
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