



BREAKING

THE MOULD

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HAIR, GARY LOW OF PASSION HAIR SALON. MAKEUP, AGNES NG OF VIVE SALON USING MAKEUP COLOURS FROM MAC. DRESS
BY VERA WANG FROM THE LINK WEDDING AT THE PERFECT WEDDING, SHANGRI-LA HOTEL. ALLURA DIAMOND NECKLACE
BY TIAN PO JEWELLERY FOR SINGAPORE JEWELFEST 2007. SHOT ON LOCATION AT THE DENTAL STUDIO.

Who says you can't be a Dental Director, valedictorian and animal-rights activist

and still take pleasure in being a woman? **LYNETTE NG** challenges modern

stereotypes of how the strong and confident woman should be.

inspiring

SO WHAT DOES DENTAL SURGEON DR LYNETTE NG

DISLIKE MOST ABOUT HER JOB?

“HAVING MY MAKEUP END UP ON THE SURGICAL MASK,” SHE DECLARES WRYLY.

AT THIS POINT YOU CAN IMAGINE LYNETTE’S TRUSTED FRIENDS ROLLING THEIR EYES. THEY HAD, IN FACT, FORBIDDEN LYNETTE TO SAY THAT, LEST VANILLA READERS THINK HER A FIRST-CLASS BIMBO. BUT NOT SURPRISINGLY, LYNETTE ISN’T BOTHERED.

It’s refreshing to meet a highly-accomplished woman who doesn’t apologise for being a woman, vulnerabilities and all. Sure, this 32-year-old holds a Masters degree in Dental Surgery (Prosthodontics) and is the dental director of The Dental Studio, yet she has no qualms about confessing – with almost child-like honesty – that she finds our interview questions “really tough”.

The eldest child of middle-class working parents – her mum is a retired civil servant and her dad, a division manager of a company that sells forklifts – Lynette did not get to where she is by riding on influential family connections or inherited wealth. Nothing was served to her on a silver platter.

Through hard work, she made Dean’s List and valedictorian at the National University of Singapore’s school of dentistry. It was an honour, she says, to be chosen to give the valedictory speech at the combined graduation ceremony for medicine, dentistry and engineering faculties in 1998.

Yet, spending an afternoon with Lynette is like hanging out with an old school friend. She listens to you attentively, tells you engaging stories, and makes you laugh till you’re in stitches. Over lunch, she orders a hearty plate of *laksa pesto* spaghetti, and tells you that while she’s not really into desserts, her guilty pleasure is anything potato: French fries, mashed potatoes, chicken pies.

Food is not the only thing close to her heart. This animal rights activist, who has three dogs, sits on the executive committee of Acres, a non-profit animal conservation society, where her brother is executive director.

“Animals are innocent; they have no voice of their own, but that doesn’t mean they don’t hurt or feel pain,” she says, adding that Acres is currently raising funds to build a wildlife rescue centre, the first dedicated one in Singapore.

Quick thinking and personable, Lynette exudes an easy charm and confidence. And with her penchant for heels, skirts and pretty makeup, she makes a quiet statement about how the modern Singapore woman can be feminine and beautiful, and yet not compromise on strength of character.

WHEN DID YOU KNOW YOU WANTED TO BECOME A DENTIST?
It was my grandmother’s wish to have a doctor in the family, and being the eldest grandchild, I was the one she pinned her hopes on. I’ve always been inclined towards the sciences so it was natural for me to do triple science in school.

But at 18, it suddenly dawned on me that I had to make a big decision: What I chose would be what I’d have to do for the rest of my life. So I took the six months after my ‘A’ levels to find out what life was like as a medical doctor and dentist.

I worked three months as a temporary clinic assistant in a public hospital, where I found out I was averse to dealing with death. I cried with the patient and his family when the doctor told him he was dying. After that, they had to ask me to leave the room every time they had to break bad news to patients!

I then did a stint as a temporary dental assistant in a private practice. I wasn’t too sure how much I’d like dealing with saliva, but I was immediately captivated by dentistry. I guess I’ve always enjoyed art and craft and beautifying things as a little girl. With dentistry, you really get to work with your hands and sense of aesthetics, to beautify or replace teeth, restore function and even esteem, and allow someone to smile again. That holiday job changed my life. ↪

DRESS BY GUCCI FROM PARAGON, LEATHER PATENT HEELED PUMPS BY JIMMY CHOO FROM TAKASHIMAWA LEVEL 2, MOONSTONE/AQUAMARINE RING, BLUE TOPAZ RING, AMETHYST RING AND LEMON QUARTZ RING, ALL BY POMEIATO FROM HILTON SHOPPING GALLERY, DIAMOND EARRINGS BY ELLIOT & CARMEN AND ROSARETO DIAMOND AND BRILLIANT ROSE ROSETTE BROOCH/BRACELET BY SOO KEE JEWELLERY FOR SINGAPORE JEWELRY 2007.



“IT TAKES A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF CONFIDENCE TO SAY: OKAY, I HAVE A JOB, I EARN MY KEEP, BUT I’M STILL A GIRL. I LIKE TO BE PAMPERED AND BE TAKEN CARE OF, AND IT’S NOT BECAUSE I’M WEAK.”

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OUTFIT BY YSL, WATCH AND HEELS BY GUCCI. BOTH AT PARAGON. LEATHER BELT BY CELINE FROM Ngee Ann City. Rosapretto Brilliant Rose Choker by Soo Kee Jewellery for Singapore Jewellery 2007.

HOW HAVE YOU USED YOUR SKILLS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO SOMEONE? I did whitening and veneers for this patient who had crooked and yellow teeth. For a long time, she felt helpless with her smile and she did what most people would do – she smiled less.

When I gave her a new smile, she took one look in the mirror and started clapping in delight and posing like a model on the chair. She made my nurse and me laugh so hard! Now she tells me that even when she is mad, she scolds with a smile! I'd like to think I've made a difference in her life.

WE HEAR YOU TREAT PATIENTS IN SKIRTS AND HIGH HEELS. IS THAT TRUE? Well, I do put on a disposable gown and mask when I'm treating my patients, but when I meet or talk to them, I wear my own clothes – usually dresses, bubble skirts, pencil skirts, pants... But I always wear heels. I even have slippers with heels! I just think

you look better, and I like to greet my patients in something nice.

IS THAT IMPORTANT, FOR WOMEN NOT TO APOLOGISE FOR WANTING TO LOOK BEAUTIFUL?

Ya! I mean, you only have this one life. It's nice to feel good about yourself, so I don't apologise. I earn the money, so if I want to make myself pretty, why do I need anyone's permission? The way I see it, if you don't believe in it, then don't do it. I don't judge you if you don't, so don't judge me if I do.

But having said that, I'm also not the Paris Hilton type. I can get ready in 15 minutes. I don't do my nails because it's not practical in my line of work. And my hair is always tied up so there's no point doing it up. I'm also not a collector of jars of creams... If I've used something once and it works, I stick to it.

ARE YOU A BELIEVER IN ANTI-AGING TREATMENTS? I am. To me, it's like owning a car – if you don't wash or take care of it, you know it will →

inspiring

WITH HER PENCHANT FOR HEELS, SKIRTS AND PRETTY MAKEUP, THIS INTELLIGENT AND ACCOMPLISHED DENTAL SURGEON MAKES A QUIET STATEMENT ABOUT HOW THE MODERN SINGAPORE WOMAN CAN BE FEMININE AND BEAUTIFUL, AND YET NOT COMPROMISE ON STRENGTH OF CHARACTER.

deteriorate, right? But if you can get it shined once in a while and maintain it, why wouldn't you? So it's the same for me: If I can slow down the process, why not? Why should I choose to let things deteriorate?

Some women would say that if you are confident and self-assured, you won't need to resort to aesthetics, that it's being vain and shallow. I think if you're confident, you do it for yourself, because you want to, and not because someone else says you should.

But if you pursue beauty because you want people to accept or approve of you, then it's a whole different issue altogether. That's why with my patients, I always make it a point to find out what's their motivation behind seeking a treatment – that's very important.

DO YOU SEE DENTISTRY GOING PAINLESS? Well, there are painless injection techniques out there and laser dentistry, which is touted as being painless. Practitioners say they can do small fillings, surgery and even cut a crown with minimal anaesthesia. In fact, there are reports that patients who do these gum surgeries didn't even have to take painkillers.

You can get that in Singapore, but it's at a very high price. I'm not sure patients here are willing to pay two or three times more for a filling, even if it's painless. But I do see a trend towards painless dentistry and anti-aging treatments.

WHAT'S YOUR IDEA OF A STRONG WOMAN? Well, I don't think you need to be a take-charge sort of woman to be strong, although it seems many modern successful women have that perception. I think it takes a stronger woman to show her vulnerable side. It takes a certain amount of confidence to say: Okay, I have a job, I earn my keep, but I'm still a girl. I like to be pampered and be taken care of, and it's not because I'm weak.

A woman may choose to stay home, cook for her husband and so on, and other women may say she's backward, subservient... like it's a weakness. But I think if she's confident and she believes in what she does, then she's strong! Because she does it simply because she's happy doing it, and that's fine.

YOU SOUND LIKE SOMEONE WHO SCOFFS AT CONVENTION.

I like a little recklessness in life... makes life more interesting. But I do not aim to break convention. I can be quite a stickler for rules. And I can really obsess about things – I can mull over a problem, weigh the pros and cons, map out all the consequences... my friends always say, 'Stop being so anal!'

When we travel, I will read three or four guidebooks, surf the Internet, compile stuff and then, a whole itinerary comes out! Like there's a schedule, a checklist. (*laughs at herself*) My friends say it's like Lynette is taking an exam! But if I didn't do it, that would stress me out.

ARE YOU A PERFECTIONIST? I used to be more so. I would nit-pick at everything. But when I was 27 and doing my postgraduate studies, I came down with thyroid. In many ways, thyroid is stress-related, so I had to learn to *breathe*.

I had to take time off school. I actually missed the exam, so I was delayed one year. After that, I realised that health is more important than perfection. If certain things are not important, let it go. Not everything has to be done now.

YOU LOVE SAILING AND WAKEBOARDING. AREN'T YOU WORRIED ABOUT THE SUN? (*Sighs*) I worry *lah*, but *aiyah*... what's the point? Sure, you spend the money and you want to maintain perfect skin, but if it means losing out on life, then it doesn't make sense to me. I'd rather just have a few more freckles or a bit more wrinkles.

You can't let one area stop you from living other areas of your life – you need a balance. So if you know you are going to be out in the sun, then you try to put a bit more effort in the maintenance part – just put on more sunscreen.

WHAT'S YOUR PHILOSOPHY IN LIFE? To live life with gusto! It's not so important to me to be seen as a successful woman who leads a perfect life. I'd rather be remembered as someone who was not afraid to experience life in its fullness, even if it means failure as well as success. After all, life is a journey. Or as Horace puts it: *Carpe Diem!* 🍷



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