

Royals for A Day...

Having a little trouble planning your dream wedding, the one day you're meant to be a queen? Then leave it to the professionals...

TEXT A. YOGESH + CHOW HUI PING

PHOTOGRAPHY SHARON LAM

WHEN JAMIE CHAN DECIDED TO GET married, she visualised hues of fiery red for her wedding theme. Precisely. As she walked into the hotel ballroom on her wedding day, handmade maroon bookmarks and heart-shaped chocolates greeted her. Escort cards for the guests were decorated with dried chili, while a bonsai bouquet throw of single red roses doubled as the couple's wishing tree (where guests leave their wishes for the couple). Flower stands flanked the aisle, its carpet strewn with red rose petals...

SPELL BOUND

It was the perfect wedding. And Jamie had one person to thank – her wedding planner, Leticia Hsu of Event Wizards.

Jamie admits that having a wedding planner left her stress-free to enjoy her wedding. "I have always loved the colour red, but I didn't want it to be very Chinese." So she left it to Hsu to keep the theme contemporary, yet stylish. "She was our walking checklist, and I left everything to her," says Jamie.

Nevertheless, for Leticia, despite having ample time to come up with the theme and to source the relevant items, last-minute mishaps were bound to haunt her. "It was the guest list that created some last-minute ruckus," she recalls. Since the finalised list reached them three days before the



wedding, the team had to work on 300 handmade book-marks and escort cards. "For three days and nights, I did nothing but cut and paste!" exclaims Hsu.

Jamie confesses that a guest list can cause a couple's break-up. "My parents insisted on inviting relatives that I didn't even know. Six months down the line, and we didn't even come close to the perfect list. Thank God Leticia was patient," explains Chan. She loved Hsu's kiddie-pack plan, too: colouring books and goodies to keep children occupied.

Did everything go according to plan? Recalls Hsu, "Well, it literally 'rained on her parade', and everything was delayed. We had a tea ceremony and the ushers were held up there, so there was no one to usher in the guests." Hsu was scuttling back and forth trying to get the guests seated. "But everything was sorted in the end."

Chan affirms that having a wedding planner works well for couples who are busy with work. With Hsu running the wedding, the bride simply had to show up and get married. Even though the concept of a wedding planner is still in its infancy in Malaysia, Hsu predicts a change in people's mindsets soon.

TURNING TIDES

Pushpa Jothikanthan is truly *muhibbah*. She's been planning Indian, Chinese and Malay weddings for the past 10 years. Modern Indian couples, she reveals, are opting out of austere ceremonies, preferring Bollywood themes instead. This includes the henna ceremony, replete with the Indian version of a 'bachelorette' party. This is where all the women of the wedding party have their hands and feet painted with henna.

Munni Ellwood was one of Pushpa's clients. Her recent ceremony went off without a hitch. A Singapore-based investment banker, she let her parents handle most of the arrangements with Pushpa. "But we liaised regularly on what were my preferences," explains Munni.

Pushpa was initially stumped. Since Munni was marrying an Australian, Pushpa had to come up with an ideal theme that would complement both cultures, though the groom was particularly fond of Indian culture. But Munni insisted on the ceremony being one of a kind, without being tacky. "So I came up with a modern bridal dais, decorated with fresh flowers such as lilies and imported champagne roses," beams Pushpa.



Pushpa asserts that one has to be patient when it comes to being a wedding planner. In the last analysis, her client's wishes precede everything else – but reasonable compromises do help...

Apart from the wedding hall décor, Pushpa was given the task of decorating the wedding car – and Munni's home, too. The charming wedding planner finds decorating homes rather taxing. Why? She explains that adjustments have to be made in terms of space. You also have to ensure the flowers are fresh throughout.

this page – Flower arrangement is another skill required of Pushpa. *opposite page top* – Leticia is making sure everything is in its proper place. *bottom* – God is in the details...

"Most Indian wedding planners try to shove extremely traditional ideas down your throat. But Pushpa was very receptive to my feelings," enthuses Munni. Pushpa agrees that it's difficult when dealing with the older generation. However, she always insists on dealing with one party from the beginning, as it helps to alleviate unnecessary problems, mainly due to miscommunication. "Too many

cooks spoil the broth. I only deal with the couple, or sometimes the parents. They are the final decision-makers," states Pushpa firmly.

The only last-minute request that Pushpa was subjected to was the preparation of handmade bouquets for Munni's special guests. She was unsure about the number of bouquets till the final moment. And preparing the bouquet is quite a tedious task since you have to use fresh flowers. But they pulled through.

The *rangoli* (floor art) was another aspect of the wedding that required much work on Pushpa's part, since Munni wanted something unique. Most guests appreciated Pushpa's efforts.

Pushpa asserts that one has to be patient when it comes to being a wedding planner. She adds that, in the last analysis, her client's wishes precede everything else – but reasonable compromises do help...

THE TWO-WEEK CHALLENGE

With only two weeks to organise it, John and Jagdish's wedding proved to be one of the most challenging yet for Leticia. The groom is Scottish and the bride Punjabi. The first day of this 3-day affair takes place at Thean Hou Temple, with a guest list of a thousand people!

It's a hot day at Thean Hou. Marquees have been set up, trucks are arriving every hour, and the humidity is unbearable. With a hand-phone cradled between her shoulder

Not only is Leticia getting the hall ready for the guests, including settings, caterer, and transport. When asked about the most difficult aspect of her job, Leticia replies emphatically, "The weather! Because you can't control it!"



and face, Leticia is shouting out instructions while she looks over her all-essential checklist strapped to a clipboard.

Leticia is a blur of movement as she zips around the hall and to the marquees outside, checking on things done, directing staff to set the tables accordingly and clear out extra chairs, placing flower arrangements on the tables and hanging garlands of jasmine at the entrance.

It is essentially a Punjabi wedding, with separate dais near the stage for the bride and groom. However, as guests are from diverse ethnic backgrounds, tonight's event incorporates elements from different cultures. For example, two roasted pigs have been ordered, as well as *halal* dishes. Although it's a 'rush job', with only two weeks to plan, there's a keen camaraderie with everyone laughing as they work, while grabbing the odd bottle of mineral water.

Not only is Leticia getting the hall ready for the guests, including settings and caterer, she is also organising the transport for some of the guests from their hotels. It seems incredible that all this can be arranged in two weeks. When asked about the most difficult aspect of her job, Leticia replies emphatically, "The weather! Because you can't control it!" The other essential ingredient is to have a wide support network of good suppliers. "You have to trust they won't bail out at the last minute," remarks Leticia.

MOMENTS BEFORE...

Held at the hall next to the Scotts Road Indian Temple on a Sunday morning, Vignes' and Vapini's wedding ceremony has a tranquil quality to it. The weather is still cool from

the night. The dais and marquees have been set up.

Pushpa and her team arrive at 8am for the finishing touch. With only an hour to go till the groom arrives, Pushpa calmly walks into the hall carrying an armload of wedding items. These last touches were traditionally applied by the couple's family, but since Pushpa has been hired to plan for this wedding, they don't have to worry about it.

She is soon mixing the saffron and *kum kum* into a con-

tainer used to welcome and 'mark' the guests attending the wedding. At the entrance is an elaborate and beautiful setting of *rangoli*, oil lamp, light stands, and basins of water. She explains that the four elements of life must be represented at a traditional Indian wedding, "You must have fire, water, wind, and earth, which is represented in the setting here," affirms Pushpa.

The hall is filled with the fragrance of fresh flowers, as garlands hang from the entrance. Pushpa calmly directs her staff to tie more fresh flowers to the columns of the dais and the stairway leading to the hall upstairs, even as 9am approaches. Chairs are quickly cleared away, and the floor swept as Pushpa talks to the groom's family when they



arrive. Everything looks perfect and the ceremony begins... **V**

this page – Pushpa brought her own oil lamps. The oil lamp is beautified with decorative marks made from traditional ingredients such as saffron and *kum kum*.
opposite page top – The finer details of the bride's attire is part and parcel of the job.
bottom – A pyramid of roses...