

Making their passion possible abroad

THE world knows Singapore as a vibrant destination and bustling business hub. But let's not forget what makes this nation tick: our people. These are the stories of the *Little Red Book*, featuring aspiring Singaporean individuals who have taken their dreams and brought it to an international stage.

Denise draws inspiration from the frenetic pace of life in Singapore and New York City.



“ We designed the Alala brand to go from the gym to the street, to empower women in every situation.

WHO: Denise Lee, founder of Alala athletic wear brand **WHERE:** New York City **AGE:** 35 **HER PASSION:** Designing quality and fashionable athleisure wear that can be worn from the gym to the streets

Behind the successful label of Alala, a global activewear brand, is savvy Singaporean businesswoman Denise Lee. Her brand is inspired by the bustling and energetic cities of Singapore and New York City, whose women are always on the go.

Its range, made from all-performance fabrics, is built for efficiency and versatility and aims to deliver a message of confidence and strength. “[They can] be worn all day, from going to morning yoga class, to work in the afternoon, to picking up your kids after school, all the way through to meeting your friends for dinner,” says Denise.

The label has an online store - alalastyle.com and is also at more than 100 stockists including major US retailers such as Bloomingdale's and Neiman Marcus. Celebrities from Jessica Alba to Naomi Watts have donned her sweat-wicking workout wear.

Denise herself embodies the Alala ideal. Each day, she shuttles between overseeing a scheduled photoshoot, critiquing new designs and going from banks to vendors for a range of negotiations. “It's a rollercoaster every day, every hour, and it takes a certain level of confidence and mental strength,” she remarks.

LIFE IN ANOTHER CITY

Fashion and entrepreneurship were always part of the fabric of her Singaporean upbringing. Her father was an independent garment manufacturer, and her mother, an interior designer. Alala is a blend of those sensibilities, buoyed by sheer grit.

When she was 19, she left Singapore for Northwestern University in Chicago. After graduating, she went on to business school at New York University, then worked at Armani Exchange as an assistant marketing manager. Living alone in a foreign city was initially strange.

“But as time went on, I found my group and made connections - it was those connections that truly made me comfortable,” she says.

Her next job: a three-year stint as the right-hand woman of entrepreneur Chris Burch, co-founder of fashion label Tory Burch, as well as US retail brands, C. Wonder and Poppin. Denise's boss, Chris, was also lead investor in e-commerce fashion jewellery company, BaubleBar.

Armed with business savvy, she's driven Alala to success. Still, the scariest part was jumping into the unknown. “I have to thank my parents, the rest of my family, my former boss - they all encouraged me to pursue my passion.”

She constantly strives for the next level of excellence, but says what would give her the most joy is to be remembered as a boss who nurtured her team.

“ I bring an international perspective to everything I do. I work on so many genres and in different languages.

WHO: Tat Tong, record producer and songwriter **WHERE:** Los Angeles and Singapore **AGE:** 35 **HIS PASSION:** Writing and producing pop music

Producer-songwriter Tat Tong started out as the standard Singaporean boy. He excelled in math and science and started piano lessons at the age of four. He subsequently took organ and music composition classes.

He was dabbling with computer programming by the time he was nine, and eventually enrolled in Computer Science at Cornell University, a degree he completed on the SAF Merit Scholarship (from 2001 to 2005).

However, Tat did not give up on his music. While in Cornell, he joined the Glee club and a capella group Last Call, singing pop covers. “We'd sell our a cappella album, and a friend and I took on recording duties for our group. I went online on YouTube and forums, and between YouTube and experimentation, I taught myself recording.”

During his six-year bond with the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN), he started writing original songs. Parking them on local music form soft sg, he says: “I just wanted people to hear my songs.”

HOME IS MANY PLACES

Tat is concurrently based in Los Angeles and Singapore, and occasionally jets off to Taipei and Beijing. That mark of adaptability and openness has helped him put his stamp across the world.

“Singapore is global. I think our comfort with being this global all the time is something we take for granted over here, but when you live overseas you start realising that.”

“Being able to speak English well has given me the US and UK markets, and being able to speak Chinese well has given me Beijing and Taipei... I bring an international perspective to everything I do.”

He caught the attention of Universal Music Publishing Asia, which signed and gave him his big break: co-writing The City Is In Love for Taiwanese pop singer Show Luo.

The chart-topper was certified five times platinum in Taiwan, and featured in major advertising campaigns for brands including PepsiCo Frito-Lay Potato Chips and 7-Eleven Taiwan.

Then came Happy Little Pill, which he co-wrote and co-produced for Australian YouTube star Troye Sivan. It charted at #1 on iTunes and Billboard 200, making Tat the first Singaporean to enter the Top 10 of Billboard 200.

This year, his dance track with K-pop band ShiNEE, Tell Me Your Name, which will be on their upcoming album, will be featured in its ShiNEE World 2017 FIVE tour.



Tat collaborates with artiste Nat Ho at his studio.

PHOTOS: BRAND NEW MEDIA

He also co-writes in Chinese, Spanish and English as one half of production and songwriting team The Swaggernautz, with Cuban-American artist-writer Jovany Javier.

The pair, together with DJ Declan Ee, also form “live” electronic music act Trouze, which notched a Billboard Dance Top 20 hit - Age Of Innocence - with Elephante and Damon Sharpe.

“There are so many paths and new possibilities, new mountains to climb,” he says. “I would like to be remembered, when this is all over, as someone who came from a small country but managed to have a much bigger impact on people around the world.”