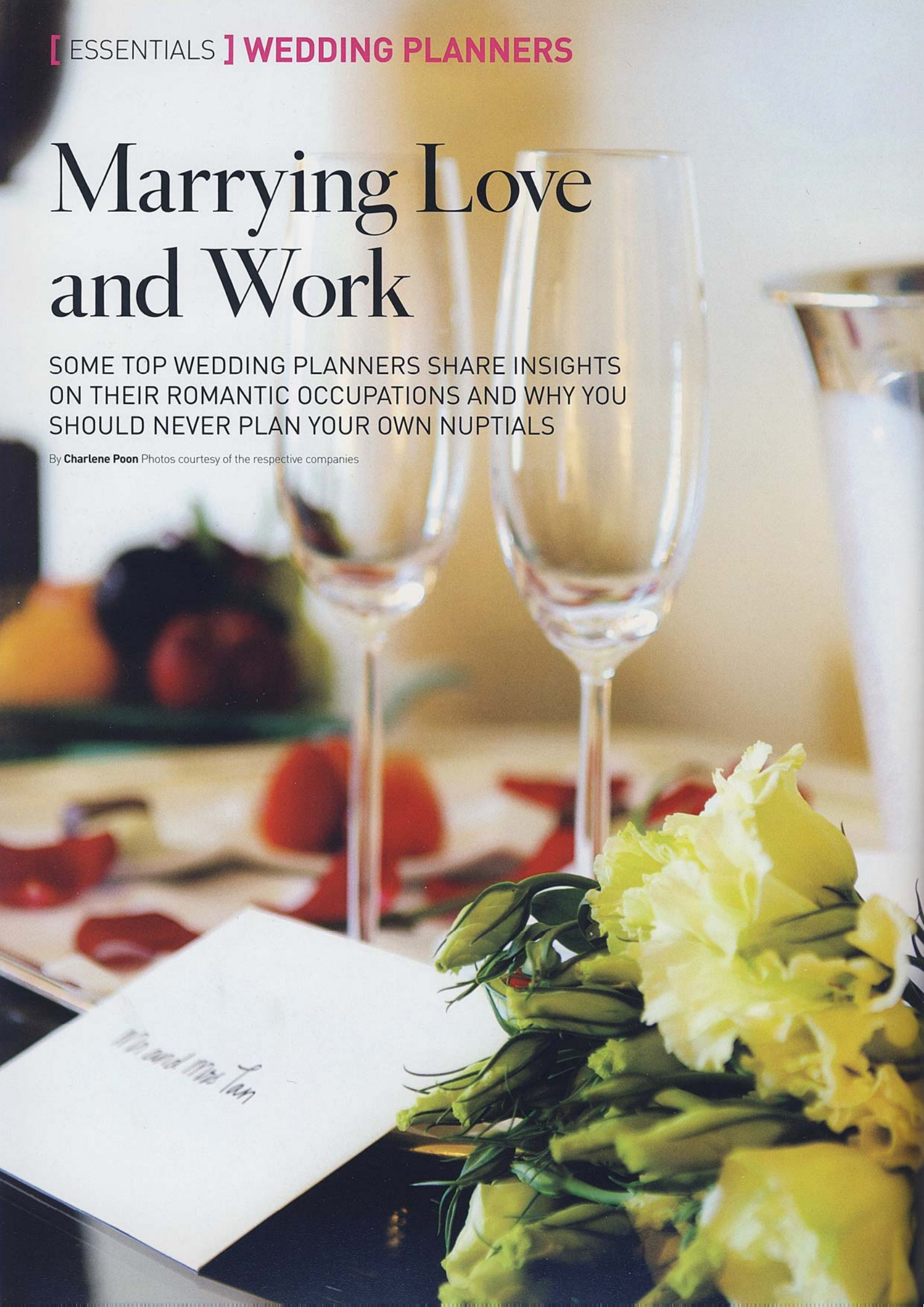


[ESSENTIALS] WEDDING PLANNERS

Marrying Love and Work

SOME TOP WEDDING PLANNERS SHARE INSIGHTS
ON THEIR ROMANTIC OCCUPATIONS AND WHY YOU
SHOULD NEVER PLAN YOUR OWN NUPTIALS

By **Charlene Poon** Photos courtesy of the respective companies



Hannah Chong, Executive Wedding Specialist, Heaven's Gift



When Hannah Chong decided on the spur of the moment to leave her job as group account director at Raytheon Professional Services, Heaven's Gift was born. "My job required that I travel frequently, and I wanted to settle down as I missed home," Chong explains. "Also, I had been helping friends with their weddings on and off for a while, and a particular conversation with one of my bride-to-be friends allowed me to see into the inner world of a bride—her dreams, joy and anxieties. That really fascinated me." Four years on, the decision has paid off with a highly successful wedding planning service which is in demand both in the local and international scenes.

Heaven's Gift is no stranger to planning high-profile weddings, as Chong has planned for clients such as Tycoon Oei Hong Leong's daughter and Dato Dr. Leslie Lam's daughter. As a certified consultant with the Association of Bridal Consultants in the United States, the world's largest and most highly regarded bridal association in the wedding industry, Heaven's Gift has the international stamp of approval for possessing the expertise and dedication to plan weddings to perfection.

Chong's personal belief is that every wedding needs to be personalised and real, down to the tiniest details. "Every fantasy is different—it can be lavish or intimate. Every part of the wedding moment should be meaningful and relevant, and ultimately should reflect the host as much as the planner," she explains. For instance, a bride who loved to paint and wanted a cottage wedding formed the basis for creating the perfect setting. "We sourced Changi Cottage as the venue, and had the wedding ceremony under a tree with pots of flowers hanging from it. We painstakingly painted individual eggs as

place cards for the guests and customised a special menu for them as well." A couple who preferred something glamorous and flamboyant was crafted a Magical Cabaret theme. With feathery boas for the lady guests, handkerchiefs customised with the couple's initials for the male guests, cabaret dancers, magicians, a band, and everyone dolled up to the nines, the fantasy was complete down to the smallest touches. "No matter what their fantasy is, we can make it happen. After all, weddings are weddings — they have to be beautiful," Chong declares.

The biggest challenge in wedding planning for Chong comes when there is a short turnaround time given for a big task. "One time we had to make live three-dimensional cherry blossom trees in special lighting hues, without utilising the hotel lights at all." Her floral and lightings team camped out at the Ritz from midnight to morning to set up the stage and programme and test the lighting. "It was such a sight — behind the closed doors of the ballroom our floral team was working hard on the setup, and in front of them I was running the church ceremony with my planning team. No one other than us saw the intensity and extent of our work. But the result was magical," she recalls smilingly.

Chong's own personal perfectionism and compulsion to make each wedding ensures that she is devoted to completing and perfecting every task. "Take the champagne pouring pyramid for example. It's a traditional moment practiced in a lot of weddings. I'll always ask my clients if they want to do it because it's wedding protocol, or something they really want as part of their wedding. Do everything with the right attitude, and the wedding will become special and not predictable."

GIVING IS RECEIVING

Heaven's Gift takes on approximately two to three weddings a month and to date, they have planned about 100 weddings — both big and small.

All wedding stationery for Heaven's Gift weddings — from invites to place and menu cards — is customised.

The company recently launched an online wedding shop, offering customised wedding favours and invitations to couples.

Hannah is one of the first formally trained and certified wedding consultants in Singapore, having undergone a years' training with Weddings Beautiful Worldwide, and receiving the title of Professional Bridal Consultant with the Association of Bridal Consultants in the United States.

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