

# Wear Oh Where

(<http://www.wearohwhere.com/>)

BY KARMAN TSE ([HTTP://WWW.WEAROHWHERE.COM/AUTHOR/KARMAN/](http://www.wearohwhere.com/author/karman/)) / JULY 19, 2016

## #WOWWOMAN: LELIAN CHEW



(<http://www.wearohwhere.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Lelian-01S.jpg>)

In this month's #WoWWoman series, we get up close and in conversation with women who possess the gumption to start something that matters to them — that also makes other people happy! — thus turning their passion into purpose. They are a shining example of how to do it and do it with heart and class. Naturally, we want to know *everything*. Don't you? *In collaboration with Canary Diamond Co*

(<http://www.thecanarydiamond.com/>).

#SHESTARTEDIT

### Who:

Lelian Chew. Founder of The Floral Atelier(<http://www.thefloralatelier.co/>) & The Wedding Atelier(<https://www.theweddingatelier.co/>)

### In her own words:

"Back in school, I was this wide-eyed, bushy-tailed girl who was always championing some cause or organising yet another event. I loved performing and singing; I organised my school prom and was very passionate about the undergraduate political scene.

While most of my peers were obsessing over Shannen Doherty on *Beverly Hills 90210*, I was mad about reruns of *Murphy Brown*! Naturally,

my childhood dream was to be a news anchor. Until today, there's still a tinge of regret of not giving that dream a shot!

When I graduated, I joined a financial institution and spent time on the trading floor honing my analytical skills. I moved into an investment role gradually, managing the wealth of top families and corporations in Asia.

Not many people know that even though I was a banker all my professional career, I never read finance in school! I read business with a minor in hospitality, and in many ways, what I do now is a lot more relevant to my skills."



(<http://www.wearohwhere.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Lelian-02-1.jpg>)

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I believe the best leaders lead by example.  
When you walk your talk, you become someone your team wants to follow.

I roll up my sleeves when there is work to be done.

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**What was the “aha!” moment when you knew you have to start The Wedding Atelier, and later The Floral Atelier?**

**Lelian Chew:** Choosing to leave finance was a very conscious decision. There was a strong pull factor for me to want to learn more about being a business owner. There were many exciting ideas that came up, but The Wedding Atelier was the most compelling.

I thought it fills a void in the events-planning industry at the time – establishing a professionally run, regional-focused company that stands out from a crowd of local players. And it’s an area that I am passionate about, requiring skill sets I am well equipped with.

The Floral Atelier is a natural extension of The Wedding Atelier – I’ve always identified with the need to vertically integrate business lines to

scale. The Floral Atelier was born three years later to fill the need of having a dedicated floral and decor arm, allowing us to spread our magic to a wider audience.

**What was your thought process like once the decision was made? Were there fear, doubt and “oh-no-what-have-I-done?” moments?**

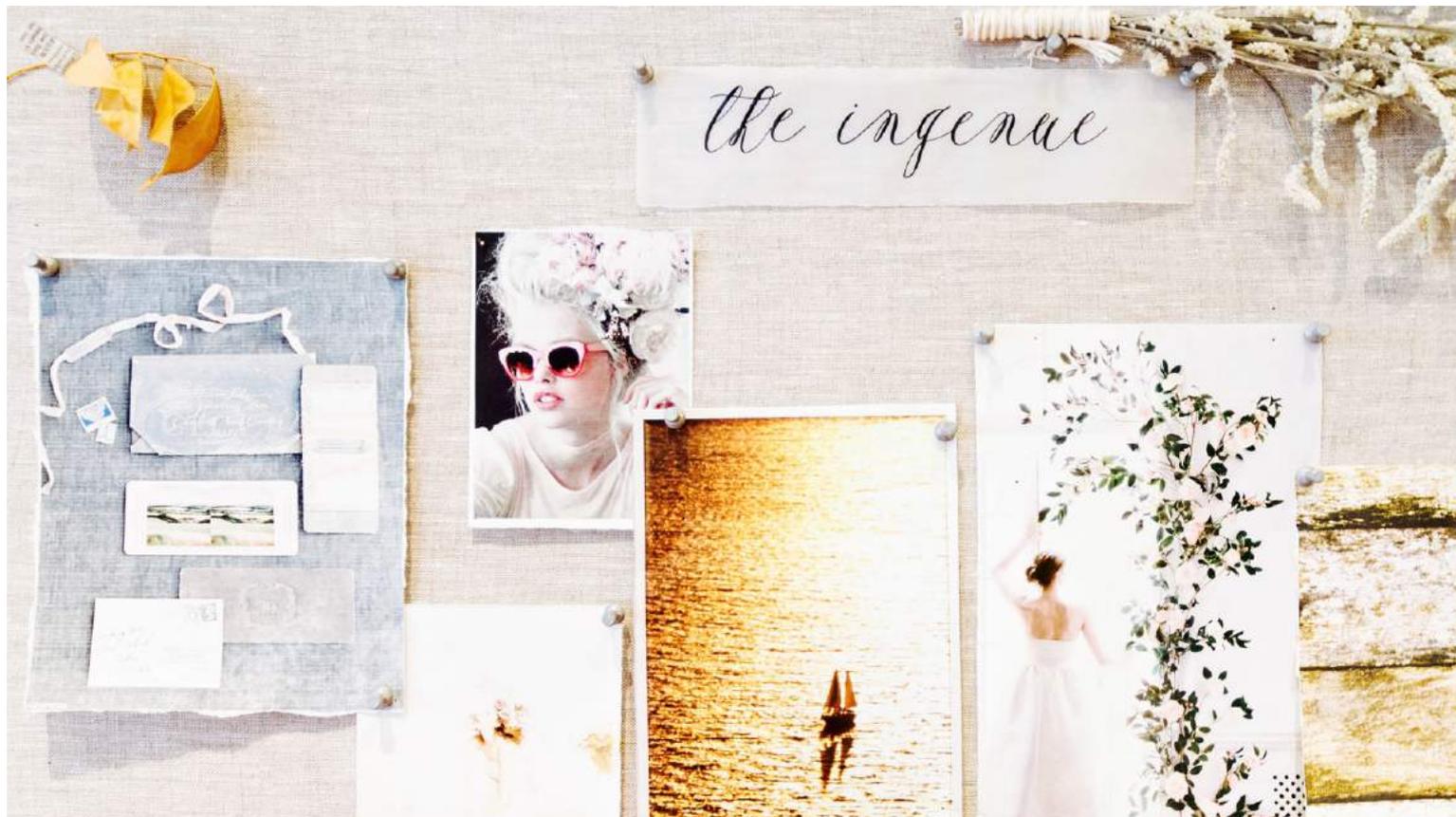
**LC:** Absolutely! There is still fear daily, and I think this fear never leaves a business owner no matter how young or seasoned the business is. This journey has been extremely difficult on all counts – emotionally, financially and physically!

We are all brainwashed to think that having a high-flying corporate job is the ultimate symbol of success. Making a change to start something as obscure as a wedding-planning company came with its fair share of detractors from family and friends alike. It was emotionally draining that I not only had to convince clients, but my closest ones, too. “Why leave the ivory towers of Goldman Sachs to plan celebrations?” they’ll ask. “Why not?” I say.

**How did you deal with any doubts you had, or doubts that other people put in your head?**

**LC:** It’s so important to have a clear vision of where your business will take you. Having enthusiasm is a great starting place, but to elevate your passion from a mere hobby to a successful business, you need structure and discipline. When things get tough or when you start feeling lost, remind yourself why you’re doing this.

Entrepreneurship is a long and lonely road, and having support definitely helps. I’m so grateful that through it all, the one source of constant support I can always count on is my husband. From preparing stacks of financial analysis to hoisting sofas up the office, to being my most ardent cheerleader, he has always been here. All the success I now have and will have, I dedicate to him.



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**What was the hardest thing starting out?**

**LC:** In my previous job, I had support for everything from assistants, a full tech team, pantry ladies, but with a start-up, I have had to do it all: Assembling tables from IKEA, painting the walls of my shack-like office, queuing for hours at a bank to convince them my company was worthy of a credit line – my days were filled with endless tasks that used to be so well taken care of. When the monthly pay checks stop coming in and the endless start-up bills start to pile up, there will be so many moments when you'll ask yourself if all the blood, sweat and tears are worth it.

**Looking back, what were the most important things you wish someone would have told you before starting the business?**

**LC:** The word “entrepreneur” has become so romanticised in recent years. It's associated with freedom, glamour and empowerment. I wished someone had told me how far from the truth this was. In reality, entrepreneurs have the job security of zero-hour contract workers, the money worries of chronic gamblers and the social life of hermits. If you already know this and are still raring to go, you'll stand a fighting chance.

**What is your vision for The Wedding Atelier and The Floral Atelier, and what sets them apart from others in the business?**

**LC:** Both the event-planning and floral businesses are extremely competitive and saturated, largely due to the industry's low

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<http://www.wearohwhere.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Lelian-06S.jpg> barriers to entry. Everyone thinks they can be a wedding planner after a fun bridesmaid experience, or a florist after posting a beautiful DIY arrangement on Instagram.

Instead of being turned off by the saturated market, I saw it as a prime opportunity. Amidst a sea of mom-and-pop shops, I



wanted to be the one professionally ran, inimitable company that stands out from the crowd. The Floral Atelier has the best design capabilities you can find in this part of the world, and we collaborate with the strongest names in the industry.

The Wedding Atelier just won *Luxury Travel Guide's* "Wedding Expert Of The Year" – a first for an Asian company. In September, we'll be in Bali to host our inaugural Asia-Pacific Wedding Masterclass where professionals from all over the world will come hone their floristry and event-planning skills. A local presence with a global voice – that's what makes The Wedding Atelier and The Floral Atelier distinctive and inimitable.

**More women are starting their own business. What is your advice to women who wish**

**to follow in your footsteps?**

**LC:** Launching a business is about so much more than the potential pay out. It is about giving a voice to what you feel the world lacks. So, carefully identify that difference you and your business can bring to the table, then be brave and take that leap of faith. Unfortunately, I have no secrets or shortcuts to success to share – it boils down to working very, very hard.







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I AM ALL FOR THE MODERN WOMAN BUYING JEWELLERY FOR  
HERSELF.  
WHY WAIT TO BE GIFTED WITH SOMETHING YOU DESERVE?

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<http://www.wearohwhere.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Lelian-08S.jpg>

**What do you think it takes to make to build not just a successful business, but also a successful brand?**

**LC:** When building a brand for your business, think of it as a person. Just like a person, the brand should be made up of core values, beliefs, what we stand for. Stay true to this person and ensure it consistently defines how you tackle situations, how you connect with clients and how it drives your business.

**How would you describe your leadership style?**

**LC:** I believe the best leaders lead by example. When you walk your talk, you become someone your team wants to follow. I roll up my sleeves when there is work to be done, and like a general leading an army into battle, I ensure I'm there for every pitch we try to win and every roadblock we try to overcome.

**What about your personal style? What are your wardrobe staples these days?**

**LC:** I'm very petite, so to ensure that my clothes don't wear me, I tend to go for very tailored outfits. I'm almost always seen paring down a formal ball skirt with a classic white shirt. This favourite combination is versatile enough to take me from work meetings with clients in the day to dinner with friends.

**Jewellery has a significant role to play in your work. Can you recall what was the very first piece of jewellery you bought yourself and the first one from your husband?**

**LC:** Jewellery plays such a big role in my line of work (there is no better gift to commemorate milestones!), and I am all for the modern woman buying jewellery for herself. Why wait to be gifted with something you deserve?

I remember clearly that my very first serious jewellery crush was a pendant from Chopard's Happy Diamonds collection. I scrimped and saved to buy myself a tiny one. That was definitely my coming-of-age piece! It holds so much meaning and is definitely something I'm passing down to my future daughter.

My husband has very classic taste and his first gift of jewellery to me was a beautiful tennis bracelet. I still wear it daily, and it'll always be special.

**What's the most precious/special piece of jewellery in your possession?**

**LC:** Definitely my husband's proposal ring! There will always be newer, perhaps better items to add to my collection, but nothing will ever replace the meaning this holds for us both.

<http://www.wearohwhere.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Lelian-05S.jpg> **If you had to pick:**

**Heels or flats?** Flats. I've grown to appreciate its subtleness over heels.

**Morning or night?** Morning.

**Coffee or tea?** Neither! I have a self-imposed no-caffeine rule that I try to keep to.

**Yoga or pilates?** Pilates. I've been doing it for years, and it's transformed my body.

**Email or letter?** Email. I love being efficient.

**Night in or night out?** My husband and I love cooking, hosting and entertaining at home, and the best nights are definitely nights in these days.

**Diamonds or pearls?** Diamonds.

**Netflix or a book?** A book.

**What is the very first thing you do when you get up in the morning?**

**LC:** I start and end my days with the same ritual – a long, hot shower to clear my head.

**How do you unwind?**

**LC:** Cooking is strangely therapeutic to me. My husband is a great cook as well, and when we have the luxury of time, we love spending hours together in the kitchen. The



rhythmic chopping and lullaby of water bubbling are my kind of meditation.

**Complete the sentence: When sh\*t happens...**

**LC:** Remember that sh\*t doesn't define you. It's how you react to the sh\*t that does.

**Do you have a quick trick for an instant confidence boost?**

**LC:** Get your hair done. A trim, a colour change or just a quick blow dry always does the trick.

Diamond necklace, earrings, bracelets and rings, [The Canary Diamond Co](https://www.instagram.com/thecanarydiamond/)

**CREATIVE DIRECTION:** Karman Tse

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Karman Tse & [Daniel Koh](http://www.danielkoh.co)

**ASSISTANCE:** Charnice Lim

**LOCATION:** [The Floral Atelier](https://www.instagram.com/thefloralatelier.co/)

[The Canary Diamond Co](http://www.thecanarydiamond.com/gallery/) is located at Delfi Orchard #01-12 (402 Orchard Road). To make an appointment, go [here](http://www.thecanarydiamond.com/contact-2/).