

# Batik

## goes upmarket

Opening its doors in one of the classiest malls in Kuala Lumpur is a boutique that houses solely batik. **SOFIANNI SUBKI** looks in.



**DESIGNER BEDAZZLED:** Sharifah Kirana admiring Jendela Batik's contemporary batik designs.



AT THE OPENING (FROM LEFT): Faisal, Endon and Farid with Jendela Batik creations.

## Stylishly Islamic

By Sofianni Subki  
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ONLY their faces were revealed, but the models at the International Muslim Women's Textile and Apparel conference held recently in Kuala Lumpur undoubtedly proved that women can abide by the Muslim dress code and still dress stylishly. The conference addressed the urgent need for Muslims to regroup their talents and resources to capture market potentials in the textile and apparel industry worth hundreds of billions in US dollars. One of its main aims is to introduce Islamic fashion into the mainstream fashion

industry through moulding Muslim designers to world-class standards and by promoting their creations.

"In general, Islamic dressing has been perceived as outdated due to a lack of publicity," said Datuk Kamalia Ibrahim, chairman of the Malaysian Muslim Women Consultative Council, in her opening speech.

"Islamic attire can easily be appealing or fashionable if properly designed and adorned," she noted. "The potential for this type of attire is expanding enormously and there is a need to create a platform for the Muslim fashion industry so that it may receive local and international recognition."

**LOVELY IN LILAC:** Models in creations in line with Islamic values



WHEN you enter the plush interior of Jendela Batik, a glorious sight greets you. An oil painting of batik fabrics draped side by side takes your breath away. It's a vibrant picture, worthy of its equally colourful surroundings.

"The pieces (in the painting) are from Datin Seri Endon Mahmood's personal

collection," said the batik boutique's chief operating officer Faisal Abdullah. "The First Lady commissioned Russian painter VI. Velichko and the result is spectacular. She chose a foreign painter to promote our culture to the world."

He said this at the recent unveiling of the shop in Starhill Centre, Kuala Lumpur. Guests included Endon, TV3 CEO Datuk Farid Ridzuan, designer Sharifah Kirana and Datin Fat Indoi. It's the first time that a homegrown batik label has set up store in the same mall that is home to luxury labels like Fendi, Gucci and Louis Vuitton.

Lumpur, the move clearly demonstrates that it is ready to take on the international market, hoping to bring the beauty of an age-old art form into the future.

The boutique features Jendela Batik's ranges — Nature, Ikat Celup, Contemporary and Asli — in metres of fabric and also as outfits for men and women. Exclusive collections include the Urban Ethnic Hari Raya line, the Batik For Fun ready-to-wear outfits and a selection of fits & fers bathrobes.

A section of the boutique is dedicated to the works of established batik artists like Masrina Abdullah and Khalid

Shamsuddin but Jendela Batik also provides a platform for budding artists in the New Perspectives section, to encourage new talents to hone their expertise and to inspire in them revolutionary ideas.

Word has it that British designer Eric Way, who shot to fame when a creation of his was worn by actress Kristin Davis (who plays Charlotte York in TV series *Sex and the City*), might soon have his batik products on display.



**NEW AND BOLD:** Fabric pieces from Jendela Batik

This positioning alone should tell you that Jendela Batik is a boutique like no other. Everywhere you turn you see batik at its finest. Its decor has a distinctively contemporary feel despite its products having their roots in the traditional.

Previously located at Plaza Damansara in Kuala

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PICTURES BY EFFENDY RASHID

**EYE-CATCHING:**

The stylish songket adds a touch of class to this evening creation

**CLASSIC:**  
Kapas Couture's songket creation

# Songket so fine

The versatility of songket was showcased recently at a fashion show. **ANTHEA DE LIMA** was dazzled by the trendy and intricate creations.

**I**n recent times, we have begun to appreciate the fine craftsmanship that is involved in the creation of batik. Thanks largely to the support given by the Prime Minister's wife, Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, batik has experienced a renaissance of sorts and has been showcased overseas to encouraging response.

The intricate workmanship of songket, on the other hand, is largely unrecognised despite the fact that it is the textile of choice of royalty and is worn by most on special occasions.

Many Malay bridal couples choose to look resplendent in attire that comes complete with the gold and silver threads that is so typical of songket-weaving.

At the launch of the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry's *Songket Towards Elegance 2005* programme recently, Minister Datin Shafie Afdal highlighted the different objectives.

"Songket is a stylish alternative for any occasion. It need not only be used as kain sampin, for weddings or as wall hangings and accessories," he said.

A fashion show featuring the creations of Kapas Couture helped to demonstrate his point about the versatility of songket.

Models clad in traditional wear, casual wear, evening wear and bridal attire strolled down the runway in creations that bedazzled the eye because of the fine workmanship and the fashionable and trendy styles.

Among the dazzling pieces were katan-like tops worn with jeans or tailored pants.

The brightly-coloured chiffon tops were given a touch of class by its songket

trimmings while a royal blue kimono robe featuring songket pockets would enliven any morning.

The evening wear collection for women was particularly eye-catching with modern strapless tops teamed with sarong skirts.

In rich shades, such as deep purples and pinks, the silhouette-hugging modern designs in songket were further enhanced by songket wraps in matching shades.

Men can express a stylish fashion statement with short-sleeved shirts with songket trimmings that add a touch of sophistication to casual wear.

The jubah is also given a twist with sleeves and hems featuring a songket trimming.

While one would expect the Malay 'raja sehari' to be clad in songket, Kapas Couture also featured bridal attire for traditional Chinese and Indian bridal garments.

The gold sheen of the bridalwear for the Indian bride was as appealing as the deep red cheongsam in songket for the Chinese bride.

It isn't only the bride who can don songket for her special day. Grooms in tuxedos can add a touch of colour with a songket cummerbund that adds a dash of colour to the sophistication of this formal suit.

**FOR THE FASHIONABLE MALE: A short-sleeved shirt given a touch of elegance with songket trimming**

**ORIENTAL:**  
A kimono robe with songket accent

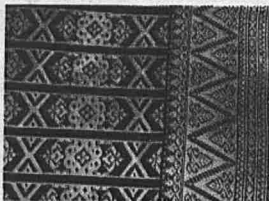
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**EVENING STAR:** A songket attire for special occasions

Once it was mainly the textile of the royalty because of its rich, intricate splendour but great heirlooms should never be overlooked for too long. **DAZMAN MANAN** speaks to Datin Seri Endon Mahmood about weaving songket into the fabric of contemporary fashion.

# Revival of the SONGKET

INTRICATE: One of Endon's songket fabrics



WHEN Datin Seri Endon Mahmood presented a long, Nehru-collared songket jacket in silver-blue to John Galiano three years ago, the renowned designer was so impressed by the piece that he had one of his models wear it at a textile show in Paris.

"He even expressed interest in coming to Malaysia to see more of such creations," said Endon, adding that Galiano's visit here did not materialise due to unforeseen circumstances.

The British designer, who is also creative director for French brand Christian Dior, put on display several batik gills from his as well at the event. But it was the songket that was paraded on the runway.

Songket is brocade textile, hand-woven on silk or cotton and patterned with gold, sometimes silver, the threads lending an elegant contrast to the usually dark-coloured cloth. That explains the rather pricey tag: a simple shawl starts at over RM100 while a men's *samping* costs RM60 and onwards.

Generally, a *baju kurung* ensemble is priced between RM5,000 and RM15,000 depending on the fabric (silk or cotton) and woven thread (gold or silver) cut, while a supreme songket attire can cost up

to RM100,000!

Endon stressed that the songket must be treated with high regard and thus worn appropriately. After all, the intricate art of songket-making was handed down by our forefathers.

In ancient times, it was the cloth for royalty and was woven by palace artisans. Gold was beaten flat, cut into thin strips and wrapped around a silk core to make the handmade gold thread visible on 19th and early 20th-century pieces.

As the Prime Minister's wife has successfully revived batik and the nyonya kebaya, she feels it is time for the songket to regain its glory.

At a media gathering she hosted at her residence in Putrajaya recently, Endon disclosed that through her foundation Yayasan Budi Penayang (Penyayang) and TV3, various programmes and activities will soon take place to rekindle Malaysians' interest in songket and establish its relevance in contemporary textile use.

"What we are doing is merely to complement the Government's songket promotion initiatives and the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage will lend its support to our activities," she explained.

She added that there were also plans to set up a textile museum

## Documentary and promotions on songket

FOLLOWING the success of the recent *Nyonya Kebaya Splendour* event, TV3 will again collaborate with Datin Seri Endon Mahmood and Yayasan Budi Penayang to promote another Malaysian fashion heritage, the songket.

Among the promotional activities that TV3 will implement are a symposium, seminars, workshops, fashion shows, exhibitions and a songket design award.

According to TV3 CEO Datuk Farid Ridzuan, there are also plans to bring songket to the international market to give songket weavers the opportunity to showcase their works.

The television station, he noted, is currently doing research with academicians and songket makers as it plans to produce a documentary on songket.

"We are also planning to do a series of encyclopaedic books on the songket with a publisher of international repute," he said at a Press gathering with Endon at her residence in Putrajaya recently.

He added that the promotion on songket which will be held in three phases throughout the year will kick off with a television programme in about a month from now.

MEDIA EXPOSURE: Endon with Farid at the media gathering



EXQUISITE: Endon's songket attire and shoes by Jimmy Choo Couture

where songket, along with other national heirloom fabrics like batik, kain lama and pua, can be preserved and displayed.

Endon, who has more than 200 pieces of songket attire and fabrics (including vintage ones that date back 100 years) in her personal collection, added that she would gladly part some of them on exhibit at the museum.

"We need to share the information we have so that hopefully we will not only be able to spread the knowledge of it to the masses but also find more creative ways to incorporate songket into modern lifestyles."

In her collection were many pieces from Terengganu, in colours ranging from fuchsia to grey, some accented with intricate beadwork while a few came with matching songket mules courtesy of shoe designer Datin Jimmy Choo.

Apart from making songket into baju kurung and kebaya, the house-proud First Lady has hung some of her songket fabrics creatively on the wall.

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**AZRENE** Abdullah wears many hats — as wife, mother and business-woman. She is director of holding company Kamarene and Alya & Co. a jewellery company.

Married to Kamaluddin, the only son of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, she embraces her role as "First Daughter-in-Law" with ease.

Down-to-earth and approachable, this youthful mother of four children, aged three to nine, prefers life in the quiet lane. But her marriage to Kamaluddin ended all hopes of an obscure life in the suburbs.

A tireless fund-raiser, she is only too aware her phone calls to big corporations are received only by virtue of her position. She has had to abandon her styness upon marriage and now takes responsibilities in her stride.

It was a trip abroad that *Walk with PRIDE*, a charity extravaganza this July 31, was conceived. She and Datin Paduka Seri Endon Mahmood had just returned from Los Angeles in October where the First Lady underwent treatment for breast cancer. They stopped over in London to attend the charity gala for Breast Cancer Care United Kingdom, chaired by Cherie Blair.

"The models in the fashion show were not professional models but ordinary women who had battled cancer and survived. Some were still undergoing treatment. There was even a man on the catwalk, even though breast cancer is predominantly a 'woman's disease'," recalls Azrene.

"When the models nervously walked down the stage, the audience started clapping and cheering. This marvellous show of support gave them more confidence. My mum-in-law and I were so touched by such display of support.

"That's when we decided to have a similar event in Malaysia. We asked Cherie Blair if she could come as guest of honour and she accepted graciously."

Back in Kuala Lumpur, Azrene quickly made calls to put the *Walk With PRIDE* project together.

"I am now quite thick-skinned when it comes to asking for donations and support" she grins. "I spoke to some friends who jumped at the idea of a charity gala cum fashion show and they said, 'Go for it, we will back you all the way.' The PRIDE committee now has 35 volunteers working around the clock."

**There is life after breast cancer**

"Almost everyone knows someone who has been struck by cancer. It is a major killer and a terribly insidious disease," says Azrene.

"My mother-in-law is a stellar example of a cancer survivor. Her tenacity and determination are an inspiration to all. She tries to attend all functions so people can see how well she is doing."

Endon attended KL Fashion Week's Gala Night and Editors Awards in early May and is the recipient of the inaugural Friend of Fashion Award.

"Chemotherapy is not only painful but makes the patient feel helpless and vulnerable," says Azrene. "It is such an ordeal for both victim and family. In Malaysia, we are lucky that medicines

are subsidised by the Government. Even then, one chemotherapy treatment costs about RM100 and you need at least eight treatments. "While we try to help everyone, there is a limit to what we can do.

"Female victims are now braver and more willing to talk about themselves.

Previously, most felt ashamed and humiliated, as if getting breast cancer was their fault. Malay women used to be shy about discussing their affliction and only now are speaking up."

Statistics show that one out of 17 women here may be prone to breast cancer, while one out of four Chinese women might develop it in their lifetime, says Azrene.

"So far, we have around 25 cancer patients and survivors who will take to the catwalk. They will wear designer outfits from Louis Vuitton, Dior, Fendi, Celine and Loewe. The emcee will be Lorraine Hahn and 15 ministers and 10 international celebrities will each host a table."

Stars attending include Datuk Michelle Yeoh, Jackie Chan, Shirley

# Walking tall

On July 31, PRIDE (Pink Ribbon Deeds) and Yayasan Budi Penyang will host a charity gala called *Walk With PRIDE*. It will be attended by royalty, international celebrities and special guest Cherie Blair, wife of British Prime Minister Tony Blair. KEE HUA CHEE spoke with Azrene Abdullah, the chairman of PRIDE.

Bassef and David Hasselhoff, Jude Law, Paris Hilton, Pamela Anderson and Ivana Trump may also turn up.

"We are hoping to sell 40 to 45 tables and each will be hosted by a VIP, cabinet minister or international celebrity.

"We want to reach out to as many as possible. There will be 1,000 tickets sold for a few hundred ringgit each."

*Walk with PRIDE* will be held at the JW Marriott Ballroom. At the same time, Shook! Restaurant will be transformed into a gigantic party place with food, drink and entertainment for the 1,000 ticket buyers. "W

□ For more information, call 012-488 7629, (03) 2782 9095 or fax (03) 2782 9094.



Azrene Abdullah, chairman of PRIDE. (Above left) Azrene with her mother-in-law Datin Paduka Seri Endon Mahmood.

SUNDAY 16 January 2005

StarMag

MEMORIES of a gentler and slower era were rekindled at the launch of the exhibition, *Nyonya Kebaya: A Living Art* at Galeri Petronas, Suria KLCC, on Thursday when the social elite swapped Italian designer outfits for that most quintessential of Malaysian dress, the kebaya. The art world's regulars, too, showed up to appreciate the beauty and elegance of the kebaya, whether in authentic or contemporary form.

The importance of traditional dress in defining a culture was summed up by Arts, Culture and Heritage minister Datuk Seri Rais Yatim, who remarked: "We are what we wear".

Within Galeri Petronas - which usually hosts high standard artworks - visitors will be charmed by the creative displays that show off Nyonya attire to good effect.

Dioramas depicting the daily routine of Peranakan families have been set up, showing the kebaya in a more realistic light. Old Malay, Peranakan and Portuguese folk songs as well as the chirping of birds have been piped into the gallery to create a home-like atmosphere. The aroma of freshly cut pandan leaves adds to the sensory experience.

A total of 75 kebayas from Datin Paduka Seri Endon Mahmood's 400-piece collection (the country's largest) and complementing bone Chinaware from the Nori series are the main attractions of the exhibition.

What catches the eye, however, are kebayas that are rarely seen outside of old Peranakan (and, by extension, sometimes Hokkien) homes.

Away from glitzy functions, kebayas for everyday use tell of the Bibiks and

Nyonyas who spent much of their time at home, cooking up large quantities of spicy delicacies in their day-tiled kitchens. The diorama, *Nyonya Kebaya at Home*, shows a typical kitchen scene, with three women seated around a marble-topped table, preparing *bungs rampai* - a local potpourri comprising pandan leaves, perfume concentrates and shredded colourful flowers.

For comfort and practicality, the Nyonyas wore relatively plain-looking kebayas that had three-quarter sleeves. These were usually made of cooler and easy-to-clean cotton fabric, and sometimes came with a Chinese collar. Some "house kebayas" were made of checked, striped or dotted voile. Minimal scalloped embroidery decorated the hems of these house kebayas and only a small number of accessories and jewellery would be worn.

Visitors are also shown kebayas constructed from patterned fabrics of the time. Exhibits include a fine voile black top that, in place of kerawang (embroidered lace), is printed with white, lilac and purple flowers, and cane green leaves -



A selection of Nyonya kebayas from contemporary patterned and textured fabrics of the time.

# Nyonya wear of life

Old and uncommon insights into the Nyonya kebaya and the Peranakan home are on offer at Galeri Petronas. VERONICA SHUNMUGAM takes a peek.

the sight of this kebaya transports you into sepia-hued photos of Malaysia in the 1960s. A pastel mint green top made of three-petal eyelet cotton cloth and a fine voile top of red and white stripes are pretty examples of bygone fashions.

Kitschy kebayas done up in embroidered versions of Peter Rabbit, flamenco dancers and music scores and a guitar tell of the sense of humour behind the Nyonya grace.

"Normally, these bright-coloured kebayas were all the rage with younger Nyonyas," said Bibik G.T., who, along with Bibik K.T., will be at the gallery for *pannan* (Malay poem) recitations. "Women in the 40 to 50 age group tended to wear lighter coloured kebayas while Nyonyas past middle age would favour even more subdued colours, motifs and fabric patterns."

The exhibition also has a corner showing blue and white and all-black kebayas worn during periods of mourning. Here, an uncommon lime green fine voile top patterned with white borders and light

green squares shows the Nyonyas' desire to stand out, even in times of grief.

The secrets of the Peranakan Cina dress-makers - privy to a worryingly small number of tailors - are also revealed in this exhibition. Visitors will love the lit display of tailor's swatches and infobits on the various stitches used for embroidering motifs and the now rare *ketuk lubang* (a stitch with gaps at perfect intervals that is used to join pieces of cloth used to

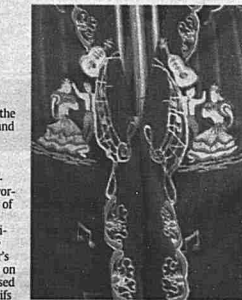
make a kebaya) and French voile (also known as *kasar rubia*). There is also an antique Singer brand sewing machine that has been donated to Endon's collection by kebaya embroidery specialist, Lim Swee Kim from Penang.

Lim, who attended the launch, said that her mother bought the sewing machine in 1913 for a few hundred ringgit and estimated the machine's present value at around RM20,000.

These old and uncommon insights into the Nyonya kebaya make Galeri Petronas a place you must bring the whole family



The vintage sewing machine, valued at around RM20,000, takes pride of place in the exhibition.



Embroidered flamenco dancers, music and guitar hint at the younger Nyonyas' sense of humour.

(especially Grandma).

Among the activities planned are *dondang sayang* and Peranakan shows, pantun recitation by Bibiks, advice on the correct way to wear the kebaya and the art of sewing beaded shoes and kebaya embroidery.

■ *Nyonya Kebaya: A Living Art* is on at Galeri Petronas, Level 3, Ampang Mall, Suria KLCC, until Feb 20. Opening hours are 10am to 8pm from Tuesdays to Sundays. Entrance is free. The exhibition will go to Singapore in March. For details on the exhibition's activities, call 03-2331 7770 or fax 03-4270 1955.



The scent of fresh pandan leaves, Peranakan Cina tunes and the sound of birds chirping add life to the kitchen diorama.