

26/01/2004

Keeping tabs on batik trends

Sharifah Sakinah Aljunid

Samasa, a batik manufacturer with a 93-year tradition, stays current with fresh and exciting designs, and luxurious fabrics. SHARIFAH SAKINAH ALJUNID writes.

WHEN former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad attended Malam Puisi Patriotik ke 4 in Putrajaya last year, he donned a Samasa batik shirt.

At the Barisan Nasional silver jubilee celebrations last year, the top officials were also wearing Samasa batik.

With so much exposure, it is surprising that little is known about this batik manufacturer.

"It's a wrong impression," said Intan Nabilah Ghazali, owner and designer of Samasa boutique in Kuala Lumpur, who operates it with her husband Mohd Faizal Su Shaari.

She said the label is well-known in Kota Baru, its place of origin. This is only to be expected as the Samasa factory in Jalan Kuala Krai has been around since 1911, making it almost an institution. However, through the years, the factory has expanded to accommodate increasing orders.

"We upgrade to keep abreast of technology but we don't compromise on authenticity and tradition," said Faizal, whose great-grandfather started the business.

Samasa opened its first boutique in Kuala Lumpur about four months ago, offering fresh and exciting designs. "The pieces here are designed exclusively for the boutique. You won't find a duplicate anywhere," he said.

Intan's women batik tops with quaint Oriental details are the shop's bestsellers. At the interview, Eby (as Intan is fondly known as) was wearing her own creation - a full-patterned red and pink short sleeve top with Mandarin collar and Chinese frog buttons.

Most of the garments found at the Samasa boutique are single pieces such as men's shirts, women's blouses and dresses. Nevertheless, it has a full range of ready-to-wear batik as well as fabric of Chinese silk mostly.

"Since the boutique opened, the response has been encouraging," said the 23-year-old mother of one. "Eighty per cent of our customers are Chinese and what they love most are the men's silk batik shirts," she said, adding that the outlet received many orders for apparel with dragon batik motifs for Chinese New Year.

Batik cheongsams are also one of Samasa's specialities. Other garments include the kebaya Nyonya with kerawang (latticework) in sheer and sexy opal silk. For the young, there are sleeveless or spaghetti strapped casual dresses.

Colours range from cool pastels to warmer hues.

"We use dyes from Germany and the United States," said Faizal, adding that this is why batik silk from Samasa boutique is machine washable. "The colours will not run," said Eby.

So if one finds the creations a bit steep in price, it is because the batik is of "superior quality", as Faizal put it. "Sometimes it is unwise to buy something at a lower price when the product is inferior," he said.

As a new entrepreneur, Eby feels that the promotion of batik being spearheaded by Datuk Seri Endon Mahmood, wife of the Prime Minister, is timely for her.

"Batik is our heritage," she said, "I just hope its popularity will continue."

Samasa boutique is located at 8 Jalan Tun Mohd Fuad, Taman Tun Dr
Ismail, Kuala Lumpur.

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