



LOFTY AMBITIONS

First step: bridal boutique. Next step: the world. Business is flourishing for JACQUELINE AU of *The Loft Bridal* and CHRISTINA KO finds out why

PHOTOS: (THIS PAGE) JENNY TONG; (OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP) DANIELLE FRANKEL; KAY LAI



IT MIGHT COME as a surprise that the owner of Hong Kong boutique The Loft Bridal has, in her own words, been feeling a little bit like a headless chicken these days. After all, most weddings slated for 2020 have been postponed at least once (if not twice) and with social-distancing guidelines in place, dress-shopping isn't necessarily a priority for the recently betrothed.

But Jacqueline Au has taken advantage of this slow season to strategise and pivot, expanding her business based on customer demand and playing to her business strengths. The former *Vogue Australia* bride founded The Loft Bridal three years ago after receiving considerable social-media attention for her own Giambattista Valli gown. Harnessing a background in fashion-buying with Celine, Givenchy and Lane Crawford to source frocks a little more fashion-forward than the norm, she grew her boutique to become a must-visit spot for brides seeking an alternative to lace, frills and sweetheart necklines.

This year sees her dipping her fingers into even more pies, all of which capitalise on her discerning taste and unflappable work ethic. When the effects of the pandemic began to take their toll, delaying most brides' decision-making processes, Au began conceptualising a business idea for hapless grooms-to-be: an engagement ring consultancy in which she'll guide gentlemen through the ring-shopping process to find the perfect size, cut and setting for their Mrs-to-be. "It's just like hiring a golf coach," explains Au. "An expert can teach you how to improve your game. We coach you through one of the most significant purchases in life, offering a well-curated industry edit of designers. This has always been The Loft's key strength."

While this idea was in its conceptualisation stage, Au's hands-on approach to helping her brides brought forth a second idea. Though most Hong Kong boutiques

Opposite page:
An image from a fashion
shoot for The Loft Bridal

This page, from top:
Some of the available
accessories at The Loft
Bridal; Jacqueline Au,
founder of The Loft Bridal

charge for appointments and forbid photography, Au is her customers' personal stylist and snapper, giving her honest opinions and flooding clients' WhatsApp messages with shots from every angle so they can make an informed decision. Some of them began to ask if she could style their pre-wedding photographs – and it was an opportunity she jumped at.

Working with a frequent collaborator, photographer Kay Lai, the two decided to create a full-service session that gives couples that fashion-editorial experience, complete with hair, make-up, floral and dress styling, with concepts that certainly don't include holding hands on the steps of Duddell Street. "We wanted to do something for brides who are stylish and exacting, but more importantly, value originality," explains Au. "Those who gravitate to the unique, exclusive and one-of-kind experience – she simply doesn't want to spend all this money to have the exact same set of photographs everyone else has."

These two services are set to form the backbone of The Loft Bespoke. And who knows what will come next? While bridal is the common thread now, Au envisions that perhaps the ring-buyers might need jewellery for anniversaries, or that brides might book styling sessions that don't relate to the big day. After all, for this issue of #legend, Au teamed up with Lai for a fashion editorial that uses The Loft's gowns with no wedding references in sight.

Between that venture, consulting for a wellness-retail start-up she describes as "Goop meets The Row" that will launch in December, and raising her one-year-old daughter Avery, it's no wonder this chick is feeling just a little headless. But as long as what's below the neck is Maticevski, Au has no complaints. #

