

Clear vision TRIUMPHS

Lasalle College of the Arts graduate Justin Chua wins this year's Singapore edition of Harper's Bazaar Asia NewGen Fashion Award

Jeffrey Yan

The latest edition of Harper's Bazaar Asia NewGen Fashion Award has just wrapped, with the top prize going to Justin Chua, a recent graduate of Lasalle College of the Arts.

The 25-year-old took home a \$10,000 cash prize, a scholarship for a master's degree course at the London campus of Istituto Marangoni worth £30,000 (\$55,000), a fashion spread in Harper's Bazaar, and the opportunity to develop his final-year project into a full collection.

Now in its eighth year, the award started as an initiative to discover and nurture the region's best new design talent and saw a network of South-east Asian Harper's Bazaar publications coming together for that purpose.

Due to travel restrictions, the 2021 edition was a Singapore-only affair, but the talent pool was no less rich.

The finalists – all from LaSalle – were shortlisted on the strength of their graduate collections, before they created an exclusive one-off look for the award.

Alongside Chua, four other finalists were shortlisted.

They were Wiyah Ismail, 26, who ruminated on time and memory through her dyeing processes and fabric manipulations; Irene Calista Wiratma, 20, who paid homage to the imperfections of the human body via a use of graphic cut-outs and panelling; Sheree Toh, 24, a textiles specialist who enriched hand-bleached denim with her vividly coloured "paint brush" embroideries and foil treatment; and Mia Zhang, 24, who celebrated femininity with dainty florals and giant ruffles.

Chua triumphed with a sleek, black two-piece nylon and taffeta look that encapsulated the designer's preoccupation with polymorphism – the ability of a garment to shape-shift and take on different forms.

The outfit consists of an asymmetrical, zippered dress that can be turned into a top and a skirt, and a cropped jacket with an inner layer that can be converted into a crossbody bag.

His interest in transformative, multipurpose garments is a reaction to overconsumption in fashion today, and there is an architect-

tural quality to his work.

Says Chua: "As we learn to adapt to our environments, so must our garments. Taking conceptual and aesthetic cues from Brutalism, my work embraces ergonomic functionalism."

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In addition to being mostly gender-neutral, all the pieces in his collection can perform multiple functions or be converted into different designs.

The judges, who included Mr Kenneth Goh, editor-in-chief of Harper's Bazaar Singapore; Lai Chan, fashion designer; Ms Vanessa Lim, general manager of communications for Chanel Singapore; and Rebecca Ting, creative director and co-founder of fashion label Beyond the Vines, were impressed – not just with Chua, but also with this year's crop of talent.

Mr Goh says: "Our plan this year was to 'shark tank' all the graduates with intense courses and classes to prepare them for the outside world. There was a consistency and a purpose in what they designed and it was coherent with the business plans and strategies they had moving forward as fashion design graduates."

In the end, it was Chua's vision that proved most compelling.

Mr Goh says: "Justin has a clear vision and he doesn't veer from it. It's important to understand what your brand is about and what it stands for. His values were consistent with his designs, and his tailoring and craftsmanship were good for someone who did it by himself."

"I hope that the master's degree programme will further push him and help develop his understanding of design, business, marketing and branding, so that he emerges as a design tour de force for Singapore. I have every belief he will do Harper's Bazaar Singapore proud as one of our NewGen winner alumni."

Of his NewGen experience, Chua says: "This journey has been meaningful in terms of discovering more about myself as a fashion designer and the different possibilities of expanding my concepts and ideas through the brand that I want to create."

He adds: "The different mentorship programmes have also guided me in several business aspects – from marketing to product development to branding – which are all needed for me to run a label in the future."

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Justin Chua (far left) came out tops with a sleek two-piece nylon and taffeta outfit that consists of an asymmetrical, zippered dress (left, on model) that can be turned into a top and a skirt, and a cropped jacket with an inner layer that can be converted into a crossbody bag. PHOTO: HARPER'S BAZAAR SINGAPORE

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DESIGNER JUSTIN CHUA



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