

PORCELAIN
art of skin refinement



face TIME

For Jenny Teng and Pauline Ng, co-founders of Porcelain, the Face Spa, every day is like Mother's Day. Designare's ADIBAH ISA speaks to the mother and daughter duo on putting their best face forward.



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All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy," said Oscar Wilde. The 19th Century's favourite cynic may have gotten some things right in his literary lifetime, but we at Designare would rather see the silver lining behind every cloud, and the light at the end of every tunnel. We have to- life's too short to spend it focusing on the negatives.

Which is why we're celebrating the mother and daughter duo behind Porcelain, the Face Spa, 48-year-old Jenny Teng and 26-year-old Pauline Ng. The company recently bagged the Best Luxury Beauty Spa in Asia Continent award at this year's World Luxury Spa awards, a title they share with the big boys such as Angsana Spa and The Heavenly Spa by Westin. While some spas or beauty spaces boast sprawling venues, water features and an abundance of flora and fauna elements, Porcelain keeps its compound tight and intimate. Candles line the walls and walkways of the narrow shophouse it is based in, and the rooms, while small, remain cosy and inviting. A personable service which starts from your reception throughout the treatment completes the Porcelain experience.

Not only that, they've branched out into providing their own skincare solutions, and are also active in the community. They're working with Beyond Social Services, an association that assists lower income families.

"I kind of invited myself into the business."

The story behind how this boutique beauty centre came about weaves itself into quite a comedic plot line, with the duo and their respective characters recalling clichéd acts from your favourite television comedy series- the slob vs. the neat freak, the businessman vs. the artist, the wild child vs. the authoritarian. Yet it's a dynamic that works.

Before Porcelain, Teng ran JPhiline Beauty & Slimming House, which had a smattering of outlets around the island. Then the economic recession of 2000 happened, and the business was hit hard. With clients less willing to indulge in skincare, she exited the industry for two years, going on to pick it up again from home for a few years. It wasn't until much later that Ng came into the picture.

"My mom was not a business-savvy person," says Ng. When she started driving her mother around to check locations and pick up equipment and furniture, Ng realised that her mother was doing everything wrong.

Initially, Teng was not keen to work with her daughter, thinking that Ng's expectations were too high. "She thought I was giving her way too much stress," Ng recalls. "Mom was passionate about her trade and craft as an aesthetician, but I wanted to start something from scratch."

Ng's pet project turned serious. Porcelain debuted in 2009 with a handful of clients and a single supplier contact. Now, Ng handles the business side of things and brings in new clients, while her mother is responsible for matters relating to treatment and retainer of clients.

"The biggest challenge for mom is to respect some of the tough managerial decisions I make," says Ng. "She still regards me as a child sometimes."

"You'll be surprised how much people can bond over housekeeping."

Mother and daughter duos aren't a novelty in the beauty industry. In fact, we can name a couple of boutique beauty brands founded through the meeting of two such minds, like June Jacobs Spa Collection, Chantecaille, La Bella Donna and Chivas Goat Milk Soap and Skin Care.

The gaping generation gap between such acts can be both a detriment and an asset. For Ng and Teng, it's been a shuffle between both. Before their joint venture, the mother and daughter duo never had a strong or good relationship. Living separately from each other some eight to ten years, they would often fight due to personality differences...or similarities.

"We do look alike," Ng muses, "and we have the same fiery temperaments and are equally professional and perfectionists."

Where there are similarities, differences also emerge. "I'm a slob, whereas she's extremely neat. I'm fearless, whereas my mom is the scarey-cat, always worrying," divulges Ng.

According to Ng, Teng also plays the "Mom card" pretty frequently. "Even if she's wrong we have to simply agree because she'll say, 'I am your mother', and that drives me insane," Ng says.

Despite these differences, the duo started rebuilding their relationship from the start- with the help of housekeeping. "When we first started, we would be cleaning up the premises every morning. You'll be surprised how much people can bond over housekeeping," reflects Ng.

"Great skin should radiate from deep within."

When it comes to skin care, the duo shares a similar belief system and regimen. "It should be natural and allowed to breathe," Ng says of healthy skin. Porcelain's philosophy is three-fold; they believe that no two skins are alike, that skin care is an ongoing process- meaning a long-term commitment with your selected provider and that good skin is clear and radiant from within.

In fact, Ng has stopped using any foundation for a while now, opting for a more thorough preparatory method instead. Make-up is minimal, kept to just a drawing of brows and tinting of cheeks.

"We often tell clients that when they find a product that's suitable for them, stick with it," advises Ng. "Avoid adding or using new products all the time. Many people do not know that all it takes is one unsuitable product for their skin to go awry."

Pauline Ng and Jenny Teng

"Skin care is an ongoing process- meaning a long-term commitment with your selected provider and that good skin is clear and radiant from within."

The faces behind Porcelain, the Face Spa share their beauty regime.

• For the Day

- Cleanse with a hydrating cleanser
- Tone with an anti-oxidation toner
- Balance your skin's pH
- Soothe the skin with an anti-oxidation gel
- Cover up with a tinted moisturizer with SPF

• Twice a week

- Exfoliate with a natural plant enzyme with hydration
- Renew with Porcelain's range of premium bio-cellulose masks

Porcelain, the Face Spa is located at 15 Cantonment Road. Tel: 6227 9692