

BAZAAR LIFE between friends

WOMEN ABOUT TOWN. The basis of a friendship is built upon unconditional support and acceptance for former uni mates Low Chai Ling, in her 30s, medical director of The Sloane Clinic, and Audrey Tay-Ong, 32, publicist and events consultant. By Julian Tan. Photographed by Carl Pendle

CHAI LING: "We met at a party at Browns [club] in London in the early '90s. We were both undergrads then. It was hard to miss Audrey because she had the shortest and sexiest skirt on. I looked like a high school teacher beside her with my conservative outfit; it was embarrassing.

"Audrey is very adventurous, always urging me to try new things. However, she does get away with most things like new fashion trends, whereas I tend to be more of a fashion disaster when I try to keep up with her. When I was in my teens, I once turned up at a party in hot pink lycra pants with fake pearls, and my friends almost died laughing.

"She is also a very generous person, and she tends to overdo a lot of things for her friends. She thinks nothing of driving out in the middle of the night if you need her, or heaping presents to cheer you up.

"When my partner and I decided to tie the knot after dating for only three to four months, Audrey was very supportive. Unlike some of my friends who were sceptical and asked me if I was pregnant, she didn't. Instead she happily helped me plan my wedding. The way she was so accepting about me and my decisions is reassuring. It's great to have someone who understands and accepts you even when others doubt you.

"Then when I gave birth to Tyan, my first child, Audrey was there for me. I had told all my friends not to visit me as it was a weekday morning, but Audrey popped into the hospital with food in tow. It was a small thing but meant a lot to a new mother pretending to be brave and strong.

"Audrey drops by my clinic whenever she has the time or when she has a skin emergency. She has tried almost all the new lasers and products available at my clinic. She is the perfect patient and is always enthusiastic about everything I do for her. Before I purchase new equipment,

I will ask her for advice. That's how much I value her opinions.

"When I first knew Audrey, she was the ultimate party animal. Now that she is married with kids, she has proven to be an excellent mother who would go to extremes for her children. With her, I have learnt to be positive and to take life as it comes.

"Our basic ideas and moral values are the same, but we go about doing things differently. She's more spontaneous and driven, whereas I'm more cautious and shy.

"Audrey is a great strength. It was the tough times in our lives that helped cement our friendship. When I look back, I can safely say that she has been with me through all the major and trying phases of my life, from the turbulent university years, to the insecure newly married phase, through the ups and downs of motherhood, to the anxiety and sleepless nights of setting up my own medical practice."

AUDREY: "I met Chai at a party in London. We were introduced by a fellow Singaporean and decided to stay in touch. We spent a lot of our London days hanging out in our apartments, studying together and checking out the latest fashions, bars and clubs.

"She was training to become an aesthetics doctor and I was very impressed by her passion to take care of others. A lot of people, based on first impressions, tend to underestimate her abilities as she is very glamorous and beautiful, but I have come to realise that she uses it to her benefit and always comes out tops.

"Chai is a true-blue entrepreneur, running two clinics by the age of 30. She has created her own line of vitamin-based skincare products called Skin Inc., which I am a fan of. I am always game to be her guinea pig, trying out her latest innovation of skincare range. She is constantly ahead of her game in the aesthetics industry, offering the latest technology like Fraxel Laser Treatment.

"She reminds me that a woman can do anything if she puts her mind to it. We encourage each other and aspire for the best in our lives emotionally and physically. Chai stood by me when I made mistakes in my life; she does not judge me and is there for me whenever I need a hand to pull myself out of the ruts.

"Chai is a very dynamic personality and possesses a lot of drive and spirit. She can be the life of a party with her dry sense of humour and witty conversations.

"We have had many fun moments together. I remember Chai asking me to sing at her wedding. I was so nervous as I had not sung in public since my boarding school days and had to engage Jacintha Abisheganaden to give me voice lessons for three months prior to the main event. But on the actual day, I forgot the lyrics at some point and had to make up the rest of the song!

"Then when Chai agreed to be maid of honour at my wedding a year later, I felt very privileged. She made the best speech on that day, a moment I will always cherish.

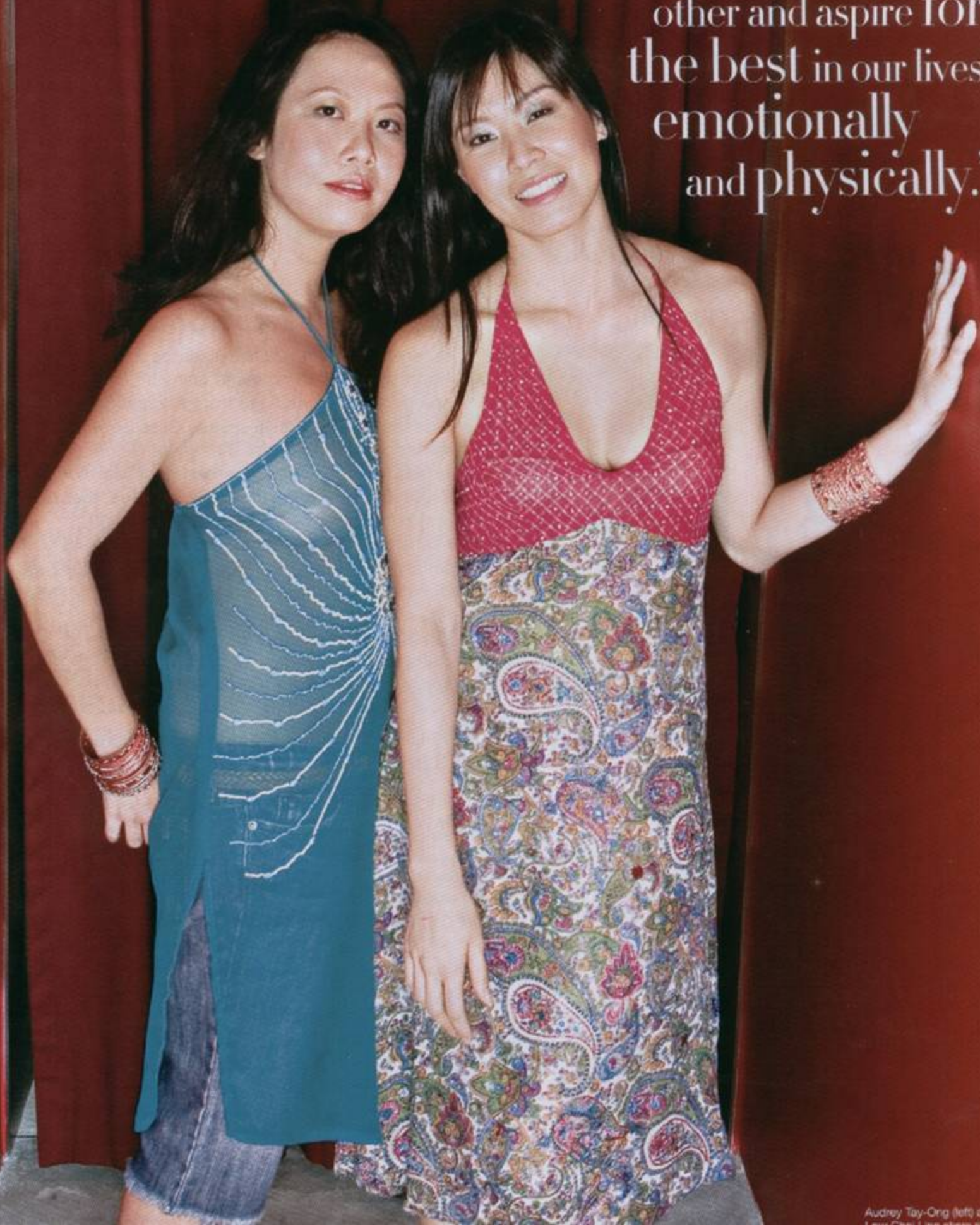
"We have mellowed out with more life experiences and responsibilities over the years. Instead of parties and shopping, we now talk about our careers and families, such as how to improve our businesses and finding the best schools for our kids.

"Chai and I are different in the sense that she is very logical and more conservative, but I am more exploratory and free-spirited. Sometimes when we disagree on an issue, we still respect each other's opinion on the matter.

"We have been friends for so long and are very comfortable with each other. We have sworn to stick together through thick and thin, sickness and sin. This is a friendship that will last a lifetime." ■

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Audrey Tay-Ong (left) and Lisa Chen (right) at the time.