



## The Connector

ACCOMPLISHED PIANIST **KATHRYN YAP** WEARS MANY HATS: MOTHER OF THREE DAUGHTERS, CAREER WOMAN AND WIFE. **ALEXANDRA KOHUT-COLE** ADMIRES HER PROFICIENT JUGGLING ACT

**A**FTER 15 YEARS EXPERIENCE as a leading headhunter, Katherine Yap says, "I will probably continue in headhunting until the day I die." Indeed, Yap, who is now Asia-Pacific managing partner of executive search firm Christian & Timbers, likes to connect with people, finding it one of the most gratifying aspects of her job. "You help find people who help the company grow," she explains. "A few of your many candidates then become your friends because you are like-minded."

Smart and sassy, Yap is one woman who, in respect of her career, broke the mould. At school, studies always came first. From an academic family of doctors and professors, she grew up in Singapore, attending Hwa Chong junior college. At 17 she left for the United States to complete a double major in biology and French at the University of Oregon. "One subject fed my right brain and the other my left, so it was perfect," she says. Yap found Oregon cool in a Bohemian way, remarking that it brought out her artistic side. "The people you hang out with shape your life," she says. "I loved school and studying. I wish I could spend my whole life studying."

Yap's grandparents were of the mind that neither prettiness nor beauty would be rewarded. She says, "It was never a trump card in my family. Family gatherings were more about who did well and who was talented. If someone said you were pretty you were embarrassed about it. It was not something you were proud of." Nevertheless she embraces music, art, fashion and style effortlessly.

Of her maternal grandmother from China, she says, "She was modern for her time. She went to college and did Chinese painting. She sings Chinese opera, plays the piano and was previously a teacher and a vice principal. So you can see why

the family is like it is."

Imposing oil paintings grace large areas of the walls of Yap's home – she painted them herself. During this period she spent a lot of time in the company of her grandfather: "He had these secret recipes on Chinese medicine," she says. "He was busy writing them down for my uncle to publish before he died." Yap sat with him while he was writing, rather than watch television. "That explains how I turned out to be such a nerd, I guess!"

Describing her family as high-achieving, Yap says, "When I told my grandmother I wanted to stop studying medicine because I could make just as much money in banking, she was angry. For her, it was never about money. She would put you on a pedestal if you were hard working with a good work ethic but not if you were simply rich and beautiful, because those are things on the outside."

The decision behind her switch from a career in science, which ultimately led her into headhunting, was taken in the 1980s. Of this, she says, "When I first came out of school, biotechnology was way ahead of its time. The only career I could have chosen was research and looking at microscopes all day drove me crazy." She decided there and then that she wanted to go into a commercial line. "I did very well, was headhunted by a headhunting firm and then became a headhunter myself."

With three "mini-me" daughters all aged under 16, Yap's favourite poem is by the American poet and dramatist, Edna St Vincent Millay who wrote, "Safe upon the solid rock the ugly houses stand: Come and see my shining palace built upon the sand!" Yap takes this as her motto: "I would rather live in a palace built on sand and enjoy the moment. I interpret the poem as meaning 'living life to the fullest.'" ■

### AT A GLANCE

**STATUS** Married

**ACHIEVEMENT** Jack of all trades

but master of none

**CHILDHOOD**

**AMBITION**

To study medicine and marry a man who could support me financially, so I could be a homemaker

**TREASURED**

**POSSESSION**

My three daughters, Isabelle, Niki and Beatrice

**NEXT AMBITION**

I am happy with what I have achieved but I look forward to stretching myself in other areas of my life

**FAVOURITE**

**BOOK**

*An Intimate History of Humanity* by Theodore Zeldin

**EARLY MENTOR**

My grandparents