



This page: The Liok ladies set up their garden tea party  
Main photo: Serene Liok, Evan and Vanessa The

# Time for Tea

*Inveterate party-goer and renowned soireé hostess, Serene Liok invites Alexander Kohut-Cole to her mansion for high tea and a grand tour*

If anyone knows how to host a girl's tea party in the garden, it's Serene Liok, the passionate gardener professing a love of trees and plants: "I am very green. I recycle everything," she says. Owner of fashion boutique, Avana, Liok is married to Tony and has four children; Vanessa, Natasha, Amanda and Justin. She named her store after her three daughters, two of whom, Vanessa and Natasha, now run the business. "I love fashion and dressing up," she says. "My mum used to dress me up and instilled in me from a very young age a love of fashion."

Located in District 9, the Liok home looks

out over a spacious terrace to a scenic garden surrounded by mature trees. "I love to see the green of the garden," says Liok. "When I'm tired or stressed I go outside and look at the plants and flowers and they revive me."

The plant in the centre of Liok's garden started life as a bush then grew into a tree, displaying white flowers every day. At its base Liok placed a stone sculpture by Michael White. She endeavours not to introduce too many colours to the garden, preferring the simple, natural feel of mainly greens with white plus pink, orange and white Bougainvillea.







This photo: Serene Liok  
Right: Cup cakes and  
mini sandwiches  
Below: Stone sculpture  
by Michael White



Bougainvillea  
by the pool



Architect Charles Ho worked closely with Liok’s father-in-law who commissioned the house for her marriage to her husband. “My father-in-law is 93 this year,” she says. “A great age and a great man.” He chose the bricks that were used to ensure the home is low maintenance. Says Liok: “When I visited Amoy [in southern China, near Hong Kong, where her father-in-law is from], I noticed an area which produces a certain type of granite, so I deduced that that’s where the idea for the bricks came from.”

Outside the front door at the top of the steps sits her ceramic Dalmatian. “We used to sell them but this one arrived with a cracked foot so he guards the house,” explains Liok

“When I’m tired or stressed I go outside and look at the plants and flowers and they revive me”

of its sentinel presence. “People think it’s real and they dare not come up!”

The family dining table is an André-Charles Boulle 18th century replica inlaid with tortoiseshell with two matching sideboards. The Anglo-Chinese inspired dinner service in blue and white was painstakingly collected



This photo: 18th century dining table  
inlaid with tortoiseshell, a replica of  
an André-Charles Boulle, with the  
original chandelier from 1975  
Below: Anglo-Chinese dinner service  
from Hong Kong

by Liok over many years. “My father-in-law’s sister took me to all the old streets and shops in Hong Kong and we found this one shop which sold this design. I collected the whole set over five or six trips. These perfectly match the collection of blue and white ceramic pots which were a wedding present from the famous businessman, Tong Djoe.”

Above the dining table hangs an impressive, majestic chandelier. Says Liok: “It’s from the 1970s when the Renaissance Baroque style was fashionable. It’s very European and opulent. Big chandeliers are coming back now.”

Creativity clearly runs in the Liok family. “All the girls play the piano,” says Liok, “but Tony and Natasha are the talented ones.”







This photo: The Bösendorfer piano in front of the Chinese screen inlaid with mother-of-pearl  
Right: Beside the front door entrance



Liok's father-in-law was keen for the girls to become pianists. They thus travelled to Austria to choose a suitable piano. They ended up with a Bösendorfer as, narrates Liok: "They were so polite. They took care of us. So we had this one shipped over." The sheer beauty of its smooth, shiny state renders one speechless.

Above the piano hangs a Chinese, carved, mother-of-pearl screen; the four fairies are playing musical instruments for the emperor in the foreground of the pagoda, typical of palace gardens. Liok toyed with the idea of placing a pagoda at the end of her garden where the two points meet but, while this would have been a scenic aspect from which

**Liok studied for her A levels in Britain, following which she attended St Godric's secretarial college in Hampstead "where they turn out impeccable ladies, rather like a finishing school"**

to sit, look at the view and drink tea, it would have partially blocked the view.

Being Peranakan, Liok appreciates old Peranakan style which she describes as vibrant. "Everything matched, from the pins in their hair to the purse, the gilded belt and beaded sandals. Everything was hand-worked." But this is not where her love of fashion stemmed from. It came from years of study in London in the 1960s during the fashion explosion. "My inspirations for fashion were: Mary Quant, Ossie Clarke, Biba, Carnaby Street,



**Below:** A brass lamp  
**Right:** Chinese sideboard  
with calligraphy set



**“My mum used to dress me up and instilled in me, from a very young age, a love of fashion”**

Twiggy, the singers Connie Frances, Dusty Springfield and Mia Farrow.”

She studied for her A levels in Britain, following which she attended St Godric’s secretarial college in Hampstead “where they turn out impeccable ladies, rather like a finishing school. They taught us to be so fussy that we never made a mistake in our typing.” Now very particular, Liok says she is “critical of fine details, but in a positive way.”

Did Liok ever consider studying fashion? “I didn’t know what I wanted to do then,” she says. “The fashion was Pucci and art, fashion and music were at their peak. It was all about fun, freedom and wholesomeness.” She describes fashion now as avant-garde and fun with no strict trend, “So, you can be classic, modern, or retro. You can show yourself and your character, your taste and your style.” And she shows us hers – impeccable and unerring – as she leads her beautiful daughters and her grandson down the garden path for tea. □