

---

*“I got involved with **HELPING KIDS** through the **CHARITY WORK** of my godmother Sally Leung, and her younger sister Eleanor Wong.”*

---

**J**ANE CHAO-LEE HAS AN IPHONE AND IT'S chirping. Not that she's taking any notice. "When I'm with you, I'm with you," she says. "Face to face time is precious. I like to listen, I don't have to be always talking or the centre of attention." The 34-year-old twin sister of Joan and daughter of Wah Kwong shipping tycoon George Chao and his wife Lily is not given to loud exclamations, but she is vocal about mobile phones and her transformation of a bijoux space on a Wan Chai street into an elegant art gallery. "I want it to be inviting, welcoming, I want people to feel comfortable, to gravitate here," she says, her eyes glowing with enthusiasm. "This will be much more than a gallery, we'll have art classes, wine tastings, book readings - a real cultural centre."

Her enthusiasm is infectious especially as she's done a remarkable job with her new venture, Galerie Huit, using sliding wall panels to double the hanging space and drawing the eye inwards with a classy faux fireplace.

She could have left it all to the designer, but being Jane, she's in the St Francis Street space every day, hunting online for the perfect door handle and supervising the hanging of paintings.

The grand opening party for the gallery will take place at the end of this month, but Jane has already finessed details such as a second venue nearby for the hundreds of her society friends and art world guests who can't all squeeze into Galerie Huit at the same time and a roster of eight exciting international artists whose work will provide the space with its inaugural exhibition..

Jane developed her organisational skills after being thrown in the deep end at locations across the globe. First it was boarding school in rural England, then architecture and art foundation colleges in California and London, followed by a stint with her flamboyant mother, renowned former actress Lily, running the restaurants Club Shanghai and Soahc in Shanghai.

"Soahc is Chao(s) backwards, because we're so chaotic" she giggles. Jane's grandfather T Y Chao

escaped from Shanghai and the Cultural Revolution in 1948 but today her family's connections to the city are as strong as ever. Twin sister Joan, married to Frenchman Frederic Nugeron, 35, who runs a Shanghai trading company, now helps Lily with the restaurants, which are landmark destinations at the Shanghai Concert Hall and Xin Tian Di.

**U**NTIL RECENTLY, JANE WORKED on Wah Kwong's property investments, while her strikingly attractive elder sister and leading socialite Sabrina, 36, has been engaged on the financial side. Brother Hing, 32, married to Vicentia, 38, recently joined Wah Kwong, so Jane's flight from the family coop to her new perch at Galerie Huit is a big step.

"The time is right," she says. "After eight years in Shanghai, I'm settled back in Hong Kong. Everyone is encouraging me, especially my husband."

Jane married Dominique Lee, 43, co-chairman of apparel manufacturer M Magtague, in one of the society weddings of 2009, with a spectacular reception at the Intercontinental hotel. "We had 800 guests and even overflowed their huge ballroom," she laughs. She credits her fairy-tale romance with Dominique, whose luxury Magaschoni cashmere brand is sold globally, to a little light match-making by her wily godmother, Sally Leung.

The couple met at the Fook Lam Moon restaurant, and while their families were long term friends, their social circles had never overlapped, Jane being nine years younger than Dominique. The couple were stunned to discover that despite having different names, genders and birth years the last four digits of their HKID numbers were the same: "What are the chances of that?" says Jane, who thought fate might be taking a hand. "Maybe God gives you a sign."

The stability and happy marriage that followed led Jane to count her blessings and her thoughts turned to those less fortunate, especially underprivileged children.

#### WHITE SPACE

Van Cleef & Arpels Perlée earrings in white gold; Vintage Alhambra pendant; chain necklace in white gold with diamonds; right hand, Perlée bracelet in pink gold with pearls; Perlée bracelet in white gold with diamond motifs; Perlée bracelet in pink gold with diamonds; left hand, Perlée ring in pink gold; Strapless dress by Valentino

ON THE COVER: VAN CLEEF & ARPELS VINTAGE ALHAMBRA NECKLACE; RIGHT HAND, FIVE RINGS FROM THE VAN CLEEF & ARPELS PERLÉE COLLECTION; PERLÉE BRACELET IN WHITE GOLD  
LEFT HAND, PERLÉE RING IN WHITE GOLD WITH DIAMOND MOTIFS; FOUR PERLÉE BRACELETS; SHIFT DRESS BY PRABAL GURUNG, AVAILABLE AT HARVEY NICHOLS



---

*“If only people would sit down and express their feelings in a **DRAWING**, there would be much **LESS VIOLENCE** in the world.”*

---

“I got involved with helping kids through the charity work of my godmother Sally Leung, and her younger sister Eleanor Wong.” In 2002 Wong was involved with founding a school in China for children with hearing and speaking problems. Mother-in-law, Magdalena Lee, whom Jane numbers as one of the most inspirational people in her life, donated the music room at the Changing Young Lives Foundation centre in Shek Kip Mei, last year.

“It’s fate, after I found out about the centre I learned there are so many underprivileged children in Hong Kong and China,” says Jane, who now wants to get directly involved. “Later on I will do volunteer work, maybe art programmes, using a creative approach. Not just painting, but drawing on my experience as an artist myself, using many media.”

**J**ANE IS A FAN OF ART AS THERAPY. “If only people would sit down and express their feelings in a drawing, there would be much less violence in the world. We live in the city and get so tied up with superficial stuff, it’s easy to get separated from your real self, your soul. Art has always helped me, I fall back on it when I feel stressed and it’s brought me a lot of joy. I would advise anyone going through a tough time to try it – it can really calm your nerves.”

A lifelong artist, art student and patron – she’s a keen collector – Jane likes to express herself through many media, from charcoal to oil and soft pastel, as well as collage. Jane’s talent is hardly surprising, given the Chao family creative streak. Cousins Anthony and Nicholas Chao are musicians, Anastasia Chao is a jewellery designer, her uncle Cecil Chao is an architect, as is his daughter Gigi, and her brother Hing is a keen photographer. Mother Lily demonstrated her talents first in fashion, then in interiors, designing every aspect of her restaurants.

Jane doesn’t see herself as a typical Hong Kong socialite. “I’d rather spend \$30,000 on a painting than a designer dress,” she laughs, pointing to her faded five-year old tee-shirt. Not that she’s a fashion

slouch, but she says she knows what suits her. She’s no bohemian hippy chick either, and loves nothing more than dressing up for a glamorous party. “We’re all so busy but parties are a great chance to catch up, especially now so many of us are back here after 10 years away in New York, London or China.”

**F**AMILY AND FRIENDS ARE VERY IMPORTANT to Jane and she spends as much time as possible with her father George, 70, chairman of Wah Kwong Shipping, the Company T Y Chao founded in 1952. She is very proud of his courage in recovering from a stroke in 2004. “He has faced his illness with tremendous bravery, which has so impressed me,” she says. “He aims to get better every day and is almost back to normal. He comes to the office six days a week, has physio and takes singing lessons to help him to speak more clearly.”

Being a twin, is she exceptionally close to her sister Joan? “Yes, we speak or text every day, but we are not identical, though my mother says we are. We don’t look alike and our personalities are quite different. Joan’s extrovert and trendy, I’m introvert and conservative.”

Nevertheless, they have twin-like tendencies, such as buying similar leather jackets on the same day – but one was in Boston and the other in London.

Now she’s focused on Galerie Huit, especially the choice of painting for the opening night’s silent auction, which will be the first of many fund-raisers for the Changing Young Lives Foundation. “I’m happiest when I’m doing things that make other people happy – for me that’s sharing art and philanthropy – helping people less fortunate than me,” she says. “To me money’s not important, it’s being a genuine, honest person that counts.”

She’s grateful that the ever-supportive Dominique gave her a timely nudge. “He advised me to use my commercial experience and do something I’m passionate about. My first love is not shipping, property or restaurants, but art. So here goes.” ■

**BRIGHT PALETTE OPPOSITE**

Van Cleef & Arpels Perlée earrings; right hand, Perlée bracelet in white gold; Perlée bracelet in white gold with diamond motifs; Perlée bracelet in white gold with pearls; left hand, Perlée rings in white and pink gold; Perlée signature ring in white gold; beaded dress by Giorgio Armani