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Leisure LAND

The Island

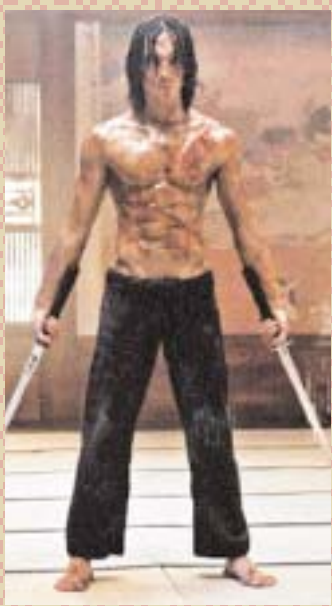
Inside Guzzling food makes you fat

Eating quickly makes you put on weight because your stomach does not have time to tell your brain it is full, scientists find.



'Ninja Assassin' misses the target

Humourless, preposterous, and soaked in blood, Ninja Assassin turns out to be thinly-plotted schlock from a team of pedigree filmmakers who should have known better.



Hand Candy

Talented artisans in Malaysia take gold, brass and silver and turn them into blinding bling

by Rose Yasmin Karim in Kota Baru

The Star/ ANN

Admittedly, you may not hanker for everything your mother has. Her tendency to nag? Thanks, but no thanks. Mom jeans? Urgh. The fixation on Tom

Jones? Pray it isn't hereditary. But her cocktail ring with diamonds and rubies? Now, that would add some serious frost to your hand. Alas, it's not quite yours... yet. So try this: borrow it and take it to Bangunan Parking in Kota Baru, Kelantan, Malaysia and custom make your own. The shabby building, which sits right opposite Grand Riverview Hotel, is hardly a top-of-mind destination for jewellery—until you scratch the surface.

For a fraction of the cost of mom's bauble, Hashim Mustafa, 39, and his crew, Yussof Musa, 33, and Khairul Anuar Yussof, 36 will reconstruct its likeness in any metal (sterling silver, brass, yellow gold, white gold or platinum) of your choice, or in semi-precious rocks (amethyst, turquoise or opal) in place of costly gems.

And there you have it, your very own sparkler - without the wait or the expense.

"You might love the design of a platinum wedding ring with emerald, but you can choose to have the same ring made in sterling silver and have the precious stone replaced with modestly priced topaz or rose quartz," proposes Hashim, his hands speckled with silver shavings.

Pick a polished and sleek look that will elicit oohs and aahs or turn the conversation towards yourself with intricate hand-carved words and symbols, assuming you don't mind attracting a little attention. In the mood to charm? Distract with something big, bold and chunky.

"Bring a few pictures for reference or just drop by and discuss the style you're going for with us," offers the self-taught artist who has been operating the signless studio located on the ground floor of the building since 1993.

Hashim's work space is not the only one-of-a-kind in the modest building. There are at least 20 others, including a shop that has been converted into a classroom that teaches jewellery making.

"Even many of the locals aren't aware that Bangunan Parking is the place to go if you're seeking traditional metal-smiths," he points out.

The art of metalworking is so much a part of Hashim's life that much of the



Silver pellets being melted down.



Tools of the trade.



Once the cast is removed, what's left is the ring and sprue.

work that he does has become automatic.

"After so many years, my hands just work by themselves without thinking," he shrugs.

But despite his claim that he doesn't even think about it, the work that he produces is doubtlessly artful.

"If you're not satisfied with the outcome, we will gladly tweak it till you are," says Hashim as he uses a torch to liquefy silver pellets.

To demonstrate his art, Hashim carefully pours molten silver through a funnel into a cast made out of squid bone, before dipping it in a pot of water to set it. Once the cast is removed, what's left behind is a rough ring with a sprue (the pipeline that lets the molten silver flow into the body of the cast) attached. The sprue is chopped off and the ring is filed and polished to remove bubbles and fire scales.

After many rounds of cleaning and polishing, the ring is smooth and gleaming. Only then is it ready for gem-setting. A final polish, and off to the showcase or onto a lucky person's finger.



Artisans: Hashim Mustafa (left) and Khairul Anuar Yussof.

"What's special about this technique of jewellery making is the use of squid bone as a mould. We use squid bone because it does not char when molten is poured into it. Another thing that sets us apart from big name jewellers is we do not rely on machinery."

While some people fancy their rings plain, Yussof points out that etching can also be done to add character to their rings.

"The etching could be inside or outside the band and include names, words, initials or even certain symbols," says Yussof, as he etches the word "LOVE" onto a silver bracelet for a customer who likes to wear his heart on his wrist. A reserved man, Yussof sports a wedding ring tricked out in sapphire.

"I made it myself so I can include my personal preference."

The market may be flooded with cheap costume jewellery but people like Wan Abd Rahim Wan Ibrahim, 47, will pay top dollar for a more unusual piece.

"A good design means more than just a pretty appearance. The design must be durable," the chatty Wan opines, as he shows off the multiple rings on his fingers.

"The gemstone mounting is especially important. Most people think that a craftsman just makes a ring beautiful. This is not true. A bad craftsman can do a shabby gemstone mounting and compromise durability even if the ring has a great design and a good metal weight."

Metal weight is important to give strength to the ring.

"A ring with a wide band and low silver weight can bend and go out of shape easily," says Wan. "Most people wear their rings often, so the design and mounting must provide good support to the gemstone, otherwise the prongs will open up and the gemstones will come loose."

There are many methods of making a setting and choosing the type, says Khairul.

"If a stone has an unusual cut, then the setting will have to be individually designed to accommodate the shape of that stone," he adds, as he meticulously engraves filigree (lace like detail) on a ring shank, his detailed workmanship reflecting the refined taste of the discriminating jewellery buyer.

Of the three, Khairul is the engraving expert, the person who gives life to a ring. Tacked to the wall in front of him are sketches of flowers and leaves with different names. Using a small hammer and a nail, he deftly taps a design.

The traditional designs are far from old. While Hashim and his friends fashion rings for women, their customers are mostly men.

"Perhaps because it's mostly men down here in this dusty workshop. That could be the reason why women are shy to swing by. They'd much rather go to proper shops," says Hashim.

A jeweller's jeweller, he often has stores around Kota Baru send him work they can't handle themselves.

It comes to no surprise at all that as soon as the shop opens in the morning the three men are up to their sleeves in orders, given that the pricing is remarkably wallet-friendly.

"Customers can bring their own stones for us to set or they can commission us to source the stones for them. If customers bring their own stones, our prices range from 20 ringgit to 800 ringgit (US\$5.80 to \$234) for the workmanship depending on the complexity of the design," says Hashim.