

PEOPLE

Trading in *law* for *gems*

Former DPP leaves industry after 16 years to follow his passion for gems

REPORT: BENSON ANG
bang@sph.com.sg

Once, he helped put the bad guys behind bars.

These days, one-time deputy public prosecutor Kelvin Tan is dealing in gems instead.

The 42-year-old founded Genesis-Global Gems and Jewellery last September, after 16 years in public and private practice.

He has been a deputy public prosecutor, magistrate and coroner, and once served as a deputy registrar of the Subordinate Courts and a referee of the Small Claims Tribunals.

In private practice, he worked in major law firms like Drew & Napier, and was an in-house legal chief for multinational companies like Prudential Assurance and Aviva.

But to follow his passion, he took a 90 per cent pay cut and invested a six-figure sum in the business.

He says: "I only have one life. I want to do something I love – dealing with gemstones. They are luminous and radiant – Mother Nature's most beautiful creations.

"Whenever I was tired or stressed, I'd look at my gemstones and feel relaxed. They were like 'vitamins for the soul'."

Today, his customers are the crème de la crème of society, including businessmen, managers and socialites.

"Many people waste money by buying branded bags, shoes and watches.



"Why not save some money, and get a stone that you can keep for yourself or give to your loved ones?"

The bachelor's interest in jewellery started at age 13, when he saw his mother wearing some before going out.

He says: "She wore a simple design, but the stones sparkled. I'll never forget them."

When he entered the workforce, he began collecting rubies, coloured diamonds and jadeite.

"Every time I got a bonus, I'd buy rings or brooches to make myself happy."

But these days, he helps customers select gemstones and designs.

He says: "The law paid me well. But life is not just about money."

"As a lawyer, I often worked with people in serious, stressful moments."

"But now, I celebrate their happy memories – engagements, weddings, anniversaries."

Success at work, he says, is also a jewellery-buying moment.

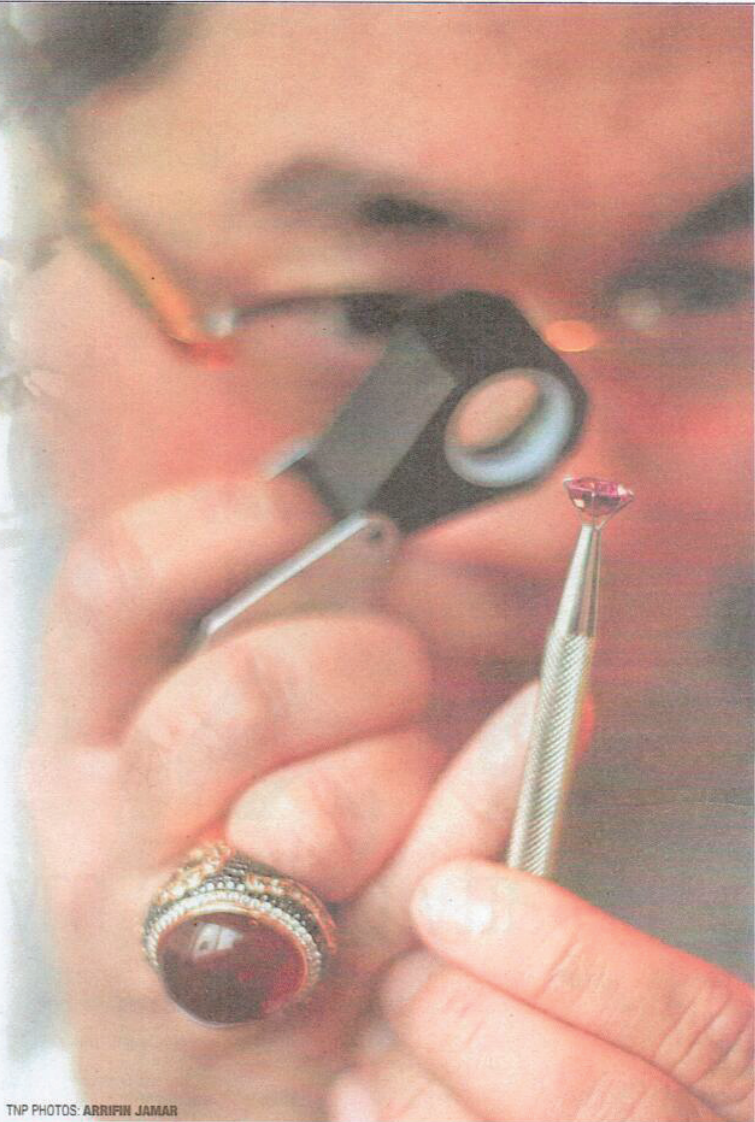
For example, a female lawyer bought a \$12,000 brooch from him last year, after she won a case in court.

"She worked very hard and wanted to reward herself."

Parents have also bought stones for their children's wedding presents, he says.

Three months ago, a couple bought a sapphire pendant and some diamonds for their son and future daughter-in-law.

"Their son was in a relationship, but was only 18.



TNP PHOTOS: ARRIFIN JAMAR

CELEBRATIONS: Mr Kelvin Tan says now he helps clients celebrate their happy memories.

"His parents feared the gems would become too expensive by the time their son reached marrying age," says Mr Tan.

"It was a strange request. But my job is to cater to my customers."

The cheapest item he has sold is a pair of tanzanite earrings that cost \$400. The most expensive item? A flawless diamond which costs more than \$300,000.

For security purposes, his office is installed with CCTVs, motion detectors and vibration sensors.

In his experience, about 80 per cent of customers buy gems to invest. They typically select a stone, and then fashion it into a piece of jewellery.

The rest want something pretty, like a cocktail ring or earrings to match an evening dress.

In his experience, designs of flowers and animals are particularly popular.

He says: "I've sold designs with birds, tigers and leopards. With the Year of the Horse coming, I already

The law paid me well. But life is not just about money.

– Mr Kelvin Tan

have orders for horse-head pendants." However strange the order, Mr Tan accommodates.

He says: "Beauty and worth are subjective. Even if I think something is hideous, as long as my customer wants it, I'll still get it."

His passion has paid off. In just over a year, he has also started a Hong Kong company to sell gems.

His companies have sold more than \$1.6 million worth of jewellery.

He says: "These days, it's not just women who wear jewellery. Men do too."

"Have you noticed that Thai army generals always have a big rock on their hands?"

"A diamond is a status symbol, indicating power."

"It can be a man's best friend."

WANT VIDEO?



1. Turn on 3G or WiFi.
2. Download QR code reader to smartphone
3. Scan QR code