

THE PARTY ISSUE

# Town & Country

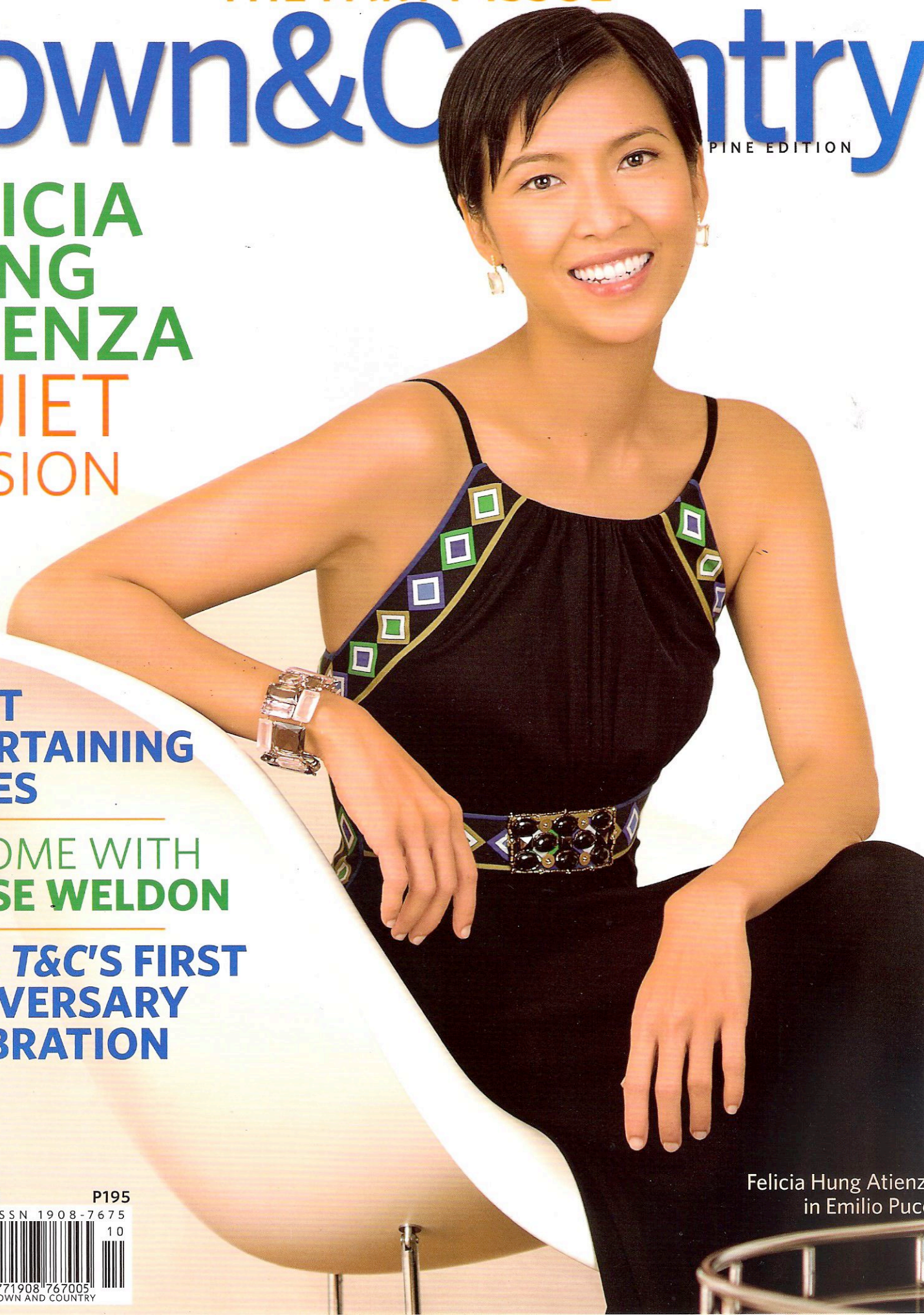
PINE EDITION

FELICIA  
HUNG  
ATIENZA  
QUIET  
PASSION

GREAT  
ENTERTAINING  
STYLES

AT HOME WITH  
DENISE WELDON

PLUS: T&C'S FIRST  
ANNIVERSARY  
CELEBRATION



Felicia Hung Atienza  
in Emilio Pucci

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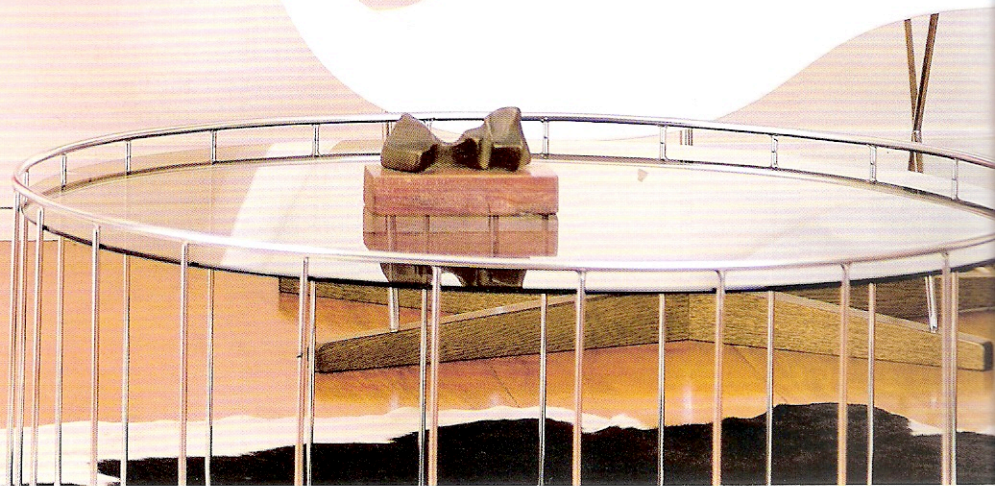
TOWN AND COUNTRY







Alfredo Esquillo Jr.'s *Ma Mckinley* which was loaned to the Whitney Museum in 2003 for the exhibition, "The American Effect: Global Perspectives on the United States 1990-2003," is easily the main conversation piece in Felicia and Kim Atienza's collection of art, mid-century design classics such as La Chaise by Charles and Ray Eames and their countless pets, exotic and otherwise. Escada dress and satin shoes. H. Stern DVF Love Knot yellow-gold earrings and Golden Stones textured yellow-gold ring.





# A QUIET PASSION

FELICIA HUNG ATIENZA APPROACHES LIFE  
WITH CURIOSITY AND VERVE THAT BRINGS  
HER FLUIDLY FROM ONE STAGE OF LIFE  
TO THE NEXT. *By Sunshine Lichauco de Leon*

How often do you encounter a woman who has had a successful career in finance, married her perfect partner, given birth to three children, actively campaigned for her husband's run for political office *and* built a school—all before the age of forty? Elegant, sophisticated yet wonderfully unassuming Felicia Hung Atienza has accomplished all this, and the story of how life has led her almost seamlessly from one distinct phase to the next is both fascinating and inspiring. Each chapter of her life has required her to play vastly different roles, yet it is the quiet passion with which she has dedicated herself to fulfilling each one that is the common thread that ties all the pieces together into one seamless whole.

*Photographs by Toto Labrador*  
*Styled by Rorie O. Carlos*





Sharing a light moment  
with husband Kim.  
Balenciaga knit sweater.

The signs that Felicia would not lead an ordinary life seemed to be there from the beginning. Taiwanese by blood, she was born and raised in Manila with a “typical” Chinese upbringing, one that strongly emphasized education and discipline. Showing an early gift for numbers, she brought this talent to fruition by accomplishing a double major in multinational management and finance at Wharton, America’s top undergraduate business school. In 1992, the year of her graduation, the U.S. economy was in a recession, making good jobs scarce, so Felicia returned to Manila to contemplate her next move. Following a friend’s suggestion that she apply with some brokerages, she began what would become a flourishing relationship with Jardine Fleming Exchange Capital Securities. After a year as a research analyst, Felicia continued on to spend the next five working in institutional sales, eventually rising as one of the group’s top salespeople.

It was during these years spent marketing Filipino equities to institutional investors such as Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan that Felicia’s other talents started to emerge. “Sometimes you find out your expertise along the way,” she recalls. “I am not a

very bubbly person so I never imagined I would be in marketing, but I loved my job. I realized I could ‘turn it on’ when I had to.” The combination of her pride in making money for the firm and the gratitude that she received from clients who made money based on her calculated recommendations inspired her to work hard. She reminisces about these fast-paced years with philosophical amusement. “You have to be passionate about what you do and this in turn will drive you to excellence,” she says. “I was in the office at 7 a.m. every morning. I mean, who goes to work in Manila that early? The markets don’t even open until 9:30 a.m.”

Working in a predominantly male industry had its inherent challenges, yet Felicia handled it all with a distinctly feminine strength. “The key to being successful in a man’s world is to make them *feel* like they are in control,” she says. “Play damsel in distress when you are actually in the driver’s seat!”

The year 1997 brought the first major change to her life as Felicia and a group of eight co-workers were recruited to set up the offices of Merrill Lynch Philippines. She embraced her position as a member of the board and as Director of Institutional Sales until a dream opportunity arrived in 2000—the chance to work for Merrill Lynch London. Looking back on the year she spent in England, Felicia says excitedly, emphasizing each syllable, “Oh, that was fan-tas-tic!” A surprisingly loud laugh escapes her as she continues, “I loved London—I made great friends and the dining scene is amazing. And it’s a stone’s throw from my favorite city—Paris!”

Even the best laid plans can be full of twists, however. Two days before Felicia moved to London, a friend opened a door that would lead her to discover the great love of her life—Kim Atienza. It would also change the course she had expected her life to take. Looking amused, she recalls: “I was set up on a ‘real’ blind date, as I did not even know I was being set up! I was invited to dinner with Anna Periquet, and was told only towards the end of dinner that a friend of hers was going to ‘drop by.’”

Within minutes, Felicia knew she had met someone worth exploring in more depth. “I found him quite attractive,” she says. “Well-dressed, personable, easy going, light and with a great sense of humor. It was clear we had the physical, mental and emotional attraction.” They spent much of the next forty-eight hours together, followed by a visit Kim made to London two weeks later. When love was at their door, it seemed nothing would stop them, as Felicia visited Kim almost monthly over the next year.

By the end of her stint in London, Felicia’s career ambitions had been leading her towards a move to Merrill’s New York office when another twist of fate intervened, and changed the direction of her inner momentum. In the first deal of its kind, Merrill Lynch Philippines was offering a management buyout to four of



"I feel that marriage is often just timing. You might have met your soul mate in your twenties but you were just not ready to settle down. When I met Kim, it was like a confluence— I was ready to be a wife and a mother."

Pucci halter dress. H. Stern  
Spring tourmaline and polished  
gold earrings.







The dining room is a gallery of Kim's collection of designer chairs.

its employees in the region, one of whom was Felicia. The opportunity to run her own office came at the perfect time for both her career and her personal life, as the thought of continuing a long-distance relationship from New York had started to feel too daunting. As it turned out, her return to Manila found the stock markets very quiet but her relationship in full bloom—she married Kim within six months and left work at Philippine Equity Partners a week before the birth of her first child. Explaining why she never returned to the industry afterward Felicia says, her gentle voice full of conviction, “There is a time for everything and broking is behind me. I am happy I was there when the local stock market was at its peak, but it’s not where my passion is anymore.”

Felicia apparently approached the goal of creating a family with the same determination as her business deals: within five years she had given birth to Jose III (six), Eliana (four) and Emmanuelle (two). She admits matter-of-factly, “I just wanted to have them all and close shop!” Felicia speaks of her own transition from driven businesswoman to motherhood with a sense of awe. “I never *dreamed* that I would be the mother of three. I discovered however that at a certain age the maternal instinct kicks in.” “Feli,” as her closest friends sometimes call her, continues, “I also feel that marriage is often just timing. You might have met your soul mate in your twenties but you were just not ready to settle down. When I met Kim, it was like a confluence—I was ready to be a wife and a mother.”

Learning to fulfill a nurturing role to a growing family was one thing, but taking on the responsibilities of a politician’s wife was a completely different challenge. Despite her strong

financial background, she admits she was a complete novice when it came to politics. She reveals with a smile, “I met Kim when he was a councilor—I admitted I did not even know what a councilor was!”

At the early stages of her marriage, Felicia says she identified as being more Taiwanese, and her exposure to Philippine politics was both a huge change and eye-opener. Being faced with the stark incongruence of Philippine society on a daily basis made her a more compassionate person, and these experiences led her to formulate her own strong beliefs on the way to improve the lives of Filipinos. “For meaningful reform I think we need to collectively work towards bridging the huge disparity and polarization between the social classes and improve educational attainment,” she says.

Kim was a Councilor for the 5th district in Manila (Malate, San Andres, Bukid, Intramuros) and as his new wife soon discovered, his job was “very much of the people.” She explains, “Our doors were always open and people would freely stop by anytime, even at 2 a.m. I learned that our pantry always had to be stocked because at any point twenty people could arrive and you would have to entertain them.” Felicia perfectly played the supporting role, making sure that all guests felt at home, and learning the ropes by simply watching and listening. She also helped with grassroots efforts by liaising with the female coalition and participating with livelihood projects.

With a demonstrated ability to fill any required role, Felicia says she has, in many ways, enjoyed overcoming the challenges each unexpected situation has brought her. She reminisces about a time when she was six months pregnant and dancing the “ocho-



ocho" for the campaign. "I learned that people can discover hidden talents when the need arises," she reflects. "I don't like speaking, much less dancing, in public, but you realize that for love and for duty you can actually overcome these mental hurdles."

When asked the secret to juggling such different responsibilities, the answer comes without hesitation. In her usual articulate manner, she says, "The key first and foremost is making myself happy! I always set aside 'me' time every day—whether it's exercising or pampering myself. A happy Felicia in turn propels me to give it my best in all other roles."

Although having children has brought out a previously unexplored nurturing and caring side, Felicia is quite strict as a mother. She believes there are no shortcuts in life and wants to instill in her children values of hard work and honesty. "I have learned that it's vital to lead by example," she says. "If you are lying around in bed all day watching TV, yelling at the house help and insulting your spouse, you can be pretty sure your child will grow up to be a lazy, irresponsible and disrespectful individual."

The Atienza home used to be the residence and atelier of the late Joe Salazar. They have retained much of the details which Salazar, an architect by training, designed himself such as the narra tree trunk accents that soften corners and the gleaming floor of various hard woods. Above right: Fely enjoys a sip from her wine collection. Balenciaga scuba jacket. H. Stern DVF Power Ring in rock crystal and 18k yellow-gold.

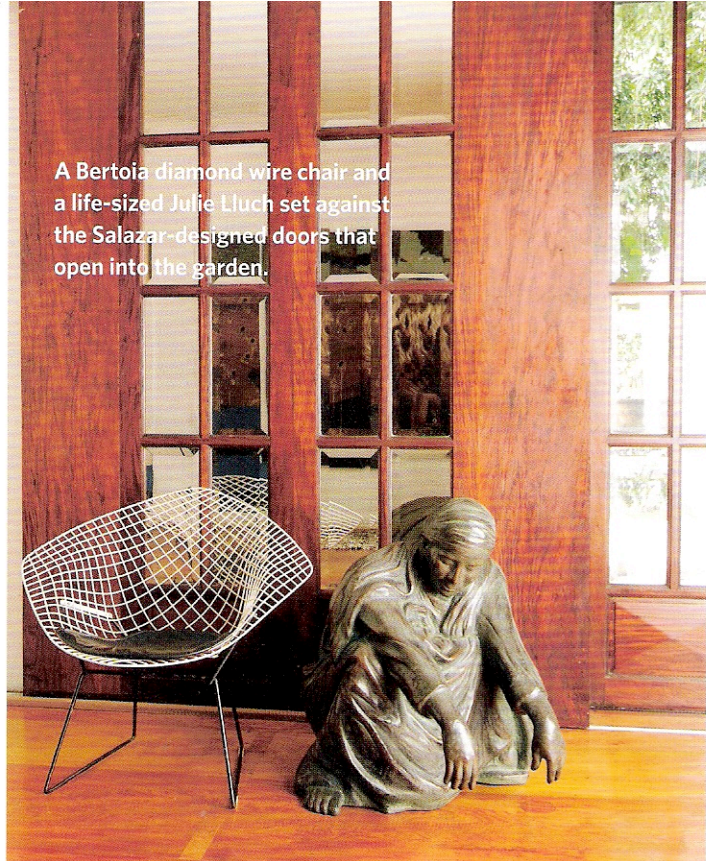


The next project to capture Felicia's attention arose from her belief that education is the most important gift a parent can give a child. Before Jose turned two, Felicia went on an intensive search for a school that combined an international curriculum and a Mandarin language immersion. When she was unable to find one, she did what came naturally to her—she decided to build one. Knowing nothing about education, Felicia conducted extensive research worldwide, meeting with educational professionals across the globe. She was convinced that if it were going to happen, things would just fall into place. "The idea snow-balled and before I knew it I had stumbled upon a great location in Fort Bonifacio and a fantastic partner—Lulu Sian, a Harvard-graduate and educator [who would become the school's headmaster]. Three years later, Chinese International School Manila opened its doors."

The response to the school has been a satisfying tribute to her vision. Feedback from parents has been very positive, teachers from the best international schools are continually applying to join the faculty and a significant percentage of her students are of foreign nationality. Inaugurated in August 2007, the school can accommodate up to 600 children from pre-Kindergarten to grade twelve and is expected to reach full capacity within six years. And whereas most international schools have four core modules (Math, Social Studies, English and Science), CISM is unique in its addition of a fifth:



A Bertoia diamond wire chair and a life-sized Julie Lluch set against the Salazar-designed doors that open into the garden.



Mandarin. Although the medium of instruction is English, Mandarin is mandatory and taught from day one.

Aside from sharing a passion for work (Kim is now a media personality with ABS-CBN), Felicia and Kim share a devotion to the hobby of wine tasting. Felicia was first introduced to the wine world at a dinner hosted by a Singaporean client in 1995. "He brought out all these fantastic wines and when he asked if we were familiar with wine, my co-worker and I had to admit we were completely unexposed," she says. A few choice bottles were enough to pique her interest, and Felicia embarked on a journey of "experiential learning" which has culminated in quite an extensive wine collection. "My collection is meant to be enjoyed," she says, "it's got quite a high turnover." The new aficionado would educate her own palate by simply trying a wide range of different wines and taking note of what she liked. "Wine is very personal, and after a while you discover what you like. The brand is not so important—it's what appeals to you that counts." On her definition of a good wine, Felicia says, "I like powerful wines—they have 'oomph' when you drink them."

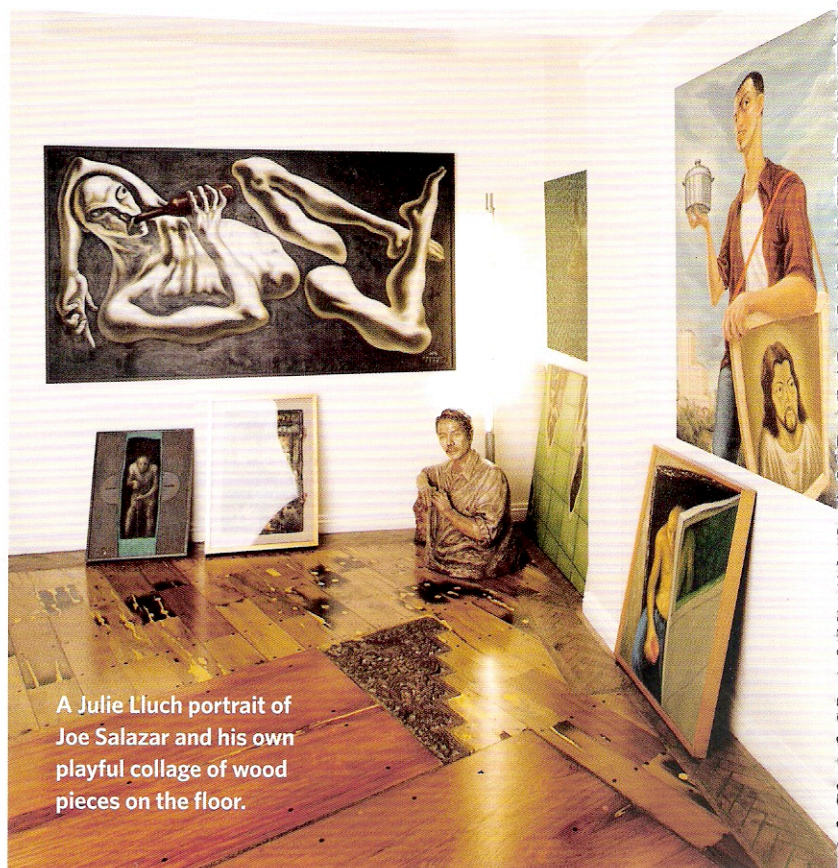
For his part, Kim appreciates the gourmet food and wine that make his wife so happy, yet his palate is more flexible. "He is as happy eating a can of sardines as he is indulging in *uni* and *toro* sashimi," Felicia says. When it comes to his passion for art however, Kim is "obsessive," according to Felicia. "I enjoy art but I'm not obsessive-compulsive like he is," she says with amusement. "It's easy to tell which pieces he chose—they are mostly macabre!"

Her husband also loves and collects pets, so much so that the couples' modern yet cozy home in Malate, which Felicia calls "an oasis in the middle of old Manila," could be considered an exotic

wild park. A visitor to the Atienza home gets the chance to see bearded dragons, reticulated pythons, free-roaming Rufus hornbills, twenty-three mini pinschers, geckos, Sulcata tortoises, radiatas, koi and a blue-tongued skink. Musing over the fact that taking care of a hedgehog was another thing she never imagined doing, Felicia highlights yet another role: "It's a full-time job making sure all the animals are well-fed and in tip-top health!"


Felicia believes that although she and Kim are opposites, their differences bring out the best in each other. She feels that her mathematical mind is perfectly balanced by her husband's creative nature, and while Kim is a "connector," she is a "very wary person" when it comes to making new friends. "He drew me out of my shell," she says. "Without him, I would still be hanging out only with my group of five friends." In contrast, Kim is at times too trusting and so Felicia, cautious by nature, often uses her strong intuition to act as a "watchdog."

Looking back at her life so far, Felicia says that each stage has been full of lessons, and she has tried to apply what she's learned from one role to the next. Her internal standards are high, as she believes "making a mistake once is valuable, but making the same mistake again is just foolish." A few years shy of crossing over into her fourth decade, she says, "I believe forty is the new thirty. I have never felt more empowered and self-confident than at any other point in my life, and each experience led me to this place." ❖



A Julie Lluch portrait of Joe Salazar and his own playful collage of wood pieces on the floor.





"I believe forty is the new thirty. I have never felt more empowered and self-confident than at any other point in my life, and each experience led me to this place."

Patrice Ramos-Diaz piña gown and amethyst cocktail ring. H. Stern Spring colored stone and polished gold earrings. Makeup and hair by Henri Calayag of Henri Calayag Salon. Nail grooming by Nail Spa, Shangri-La Plaza. For shopping details, see Fashion and Shopping Information.