

Town & Country

PHILIPPINE EDITION

**INA
CALALANG
AYALA
SAVORING
LIFE**

**WELLNESS
AT EVERY AGE**

**JESSIE
LICHAUCO'S
SAFE HAVEN**

**PLUS:
TOP 50 BEAUTY
BEST SELLERS**

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TOWN AND COUNTRY

Ina Calalang Ayala in Louis Vuitton

Ina Ayala has the ability to be both completely in the moment while being a step ahead. Louis Vuitton silk taffeta dress; earrings by Lucille for Jul B. Dizon. Makeup by Steven Doloso; hair by Glenn Roxas of Emphasis Salon. Shot on location at Chi, The Spa at Shangri-La, Edsa Shangri-La Manila.

time on your cell phone. Meditation requires inner peace and a lack of striving. Being and becoming are one. Get rid of your wristwatch and just look at the gift of life. It's fine to be greedy but more important is the acceptance of the animity and avoiding the stress of trying to become what you cannot be. You finally accept yourself. The ultimate test of wellness is enjoying the way you want to live it. You find you are too busy to be scheduled for your second course physical—has it been 10 years already? Except for minor headaches when you move your head too fast at the sight of a beach, you tell yourself you feel fine...for your age. If you have blood on your stool, maybe you should reconsider your schedule. You are no longer affected by what people say. Not even interested to find out what they think of you or even if they think of you. You certainly don't think of them. This independence from other people's opinions on your lifestyle, companions and favorite pastimes can be liberating.

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A Way of Life

For the free-spirited **INA CALALANG AYALA**,
curiosity need not kill the cat—
it could build a humorous and intelligent
sense of self. *By Sunshine Lichauco de Leon*

Photographs by Lilen Uy

Styled by Rorie O. Carlos

WE HAVE ALL known people who leave home to travel the world or live in different parts of it because they are in search of “something.” Often they are searching for a sense of home, love, success, fame, acceptance or simply a better sense of themselves and what they want from life. What is fascinating about Ina Calalang Ayala’s story is not that she left her very conservative upbringing in the Philippines to see what lay beyond the world of protection she had been so carefully nurtured in, but the spirit with which she explored and the life that this led to. When Ina left Manila at the age of 21, she already knew exactly who she was and what she wanted from life. Armed with this special blend of self-assuredness and innate curiosity, she would go on to create building blocks of her life in Italy, Hong Kong, California and New York. It has been 21 years since, and life has brought her full circle as she has returned to Manila with her husband, Freddy

Ayala, and two children, aged 11 and seven. Her life may seem a regular circle from the outside, but five minutes of conversation with this beautifully humble and unassuming lady will lead you into corners of simple wisdom that somehow stay with you long after you have left her side.

Whether because or in spite of her parents’ strict rules (she says she had a curfew until age 21 and was often accompanied by a chaperon), Ina showed signs of taking ownership of her life’s path as a young adult. “I somehow knew when I finished college that I did not want to just get married and stay in the Philippines. I wanted to go away and experience new things and thankfully, my parents gave their blessing.”

A creative soul, this young adventurer chose Milan as her first stop on her journey toward a worldwide education. With the goal of learning to design shoes and accessories, Ina took a course

and worked as an apprentice making shoes in a factory, a time she recalls as “unglamorous yet essential.” Sensing that there was still more in the world for her to experience, she followed the suggestion of a friend in New York City and chose Manhattan as the setting in which the next chapter of her life would unfold.

Although she came to the big city to further her career ambitions, it was in fact love that the constant energy of Manhattan brought to her life. Love surfaced in the form of Freddy Ayala, whom she had met on a blind date a few months before leaving Manila and who happened to be working as an investment banker in New York City when she moved there. In retrospect, she had been immediately impressed by his “honest and genuinely nice-guy manner,” but when they first met she had not been in a “relationship” state of mind. Things were different this time, however, and after ten months a marriage proposal was knocking at her door.

Ina’s uncanny ability to understand herself and her needs again stepped in to add a slight twist to the roadmap her life seemed to be creating. When Freddy proposed she did something unthinkable to some, yet doing otherwise would have been unimaginable to her own sense of self. Her expressive eyes grow more animated as she explains, “I grabbed Freddy by the collar and I said I wanted to get married, but at twenty-three, I did not think I was quite ready to do so. I knew he was the one for me but I also knew I had not yet had my fill of being able to walk outside and enjoy the endless fun things that the city offered.”

With an ability to be both completely in the moment yet also a step ahead, this grounded young woman knew that marrying Freddy would require moving to Hong Kong for his work. Besides needing the freedom of exploring the nightlife and traveling with friends, she wanted time to gain more work experience in her job assisting a shoe designer. Reflecting her practical nature, she explains, “Whether you are traditional or not, I think that once you marry, you solidify your role as the center of the home and I feel it is something you should do with pleasure. It’s hard to do this if you still have dreams and ‘what ifs’ in your mind.”

A year later, Ina and Freddy began life as a newlywed expatriate couple in Hong Kong, with Ina working as a footwear designer and both of them enjoying the endless social and travel opportunities such a cosmopolitan city offered. Ina recalls the moment she really fell in love with being able to create something. “I was so excited when I saw someone walking on the street actually wearing what I designed!” She also quickly learned how to fend for herself: “I knew nobody when I first arrived so I had to make a real effort to make friends and be independent socially since my husband worked a lot.”

Having grown up in Manila, she admits she had been used to being surrounded by a constant circle of family and friends

but soon found how open people could be if you were just open to them. The eight years of marriage without children were invaluable, as she believes it allowed them to really know each other, and it also taught them “the importance of knowing how to fight.”

Fifteen years and two children later, the Ayala family moved to Atherton, California, a sleepy suburb where life was as opposite to Hong Kong as this effervescent personality could imagine. Always one to embrace change wholeheartedly, Ina treasures the lessons she learned from those differences. She recalls with a sly smile, “I always thought I was addicted to the buzz of the city, but I learned that I could live the quiet life. I became a 24/7 hands on mom, driving my children everywhere. I had no idea that I had it in me or that I would love being a soccer mom.”

Whereas Ina’s definition of “fun” had previously included a city, heels and a dress, this stage of her life found her as happy watching movies and attending barbeques with other couples and their children.

As if to illustrate the difference between adapting to a situation and changing one’s nature completely, she giggles as she recalls a moment where her imaginative spirit came shining through. She awoke one day and asked herself what she could do that would be completely uncharacteristic of their neighborhood—“to shake things up a little.” A few days later, she joined her son’s latest passion and started learning to play the drums.

This was no surprise to her very supportive husband, who thinks his wife is a “challenge junkie”; Freddy’s face every so often wears an amused expression of “oh no, here she goes again.” Ina keeps a list of things that she has always been interested in doing and simply can’t envision a life in which she is not actively trying them out. Whether indulging her artistic streak with painting, photography or starting a new business, she feels that certain ideas are meant to be acted upon at specific times of her life, and when the time seems right, she has no hesitation putting her ideas to action. Clearly headstrong, she admits, “I know what I am capable and not capable of doing, and when I set my mind to something, I really do it.”

Ina leads an incredibly active life, yet the manner in which she juggles the competing parts with such natural ease and quiet grace is intriguing. She believes it is essential to lead a life in which she feels balanced physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually, and she speaks of her philosophy on how she maintains this sense of equilibrium. She pauses a moment and then looks at me directly in the eye as her words flow quietly but with certainty. “Don’t plan too much or micro-manage everything. I feel that having a super-ideal scenario all the time can lead to more disappointments. Just do the best you can and enjoy the process of getting there.”

Another key to maintaining a sense of balance in her life involves being very careful with commitments she makes. She says that keeping focused on her priorities as they relate to herself, her husband, her work, hobbies and children is essential, and that she tries to avoid the nagging feeling of starting something and not doing it well. This woman knows from experience how many distractions can get in the way and says, "I am a very committed person and even though I might want to do it, I try not to over commit because if I say yes to something, I will do it all the way. I don't like to be spread out too thinly."

Up until this point in our conversation, Ina's mind had been effortlessly racing from one subject to another yet her body had remained seated in the same position. I ask her to recall a time when she ever felt unbalanced, and her movements shift, as if her body is doing the thinking. Ayala recalls, "Nobody ever told me the reality of what would happen when my first baby was born—no sleep, no time to even brush my hair!" She continues, "You tend to forget what you like or don't like as everything becomes centered on every detail of your baby's life." Ina explains that it often takes your girlfriends to get you back to yourself. She says it was a difficult time but, "you eventually get your groove back and you feel even better afterward because you realize you have been out of sorts with yourself but finally gotten the rhythm of life back and now have a baby!"

Although the ripple effect of Ina's active lifestyle extends to her children, she stresses the importance of sometimes teaching them to stay home. She explains, "We teach them to sit quietly and to know what their likes and dislikes are. It is essential for them to find out what they will and will not allow themselves to do."

Ina credits any spiritual balance she may possess to having been raised an "Assumption girl." Besides being taught how to sit quietly, she recalls, "we were taught that there is always a time in prayer when you close your eyes and don't do anything. You just receive. Practicing this all of my life has ensured that there is a certain place I can go to when feeling confused."

When I ask her to explain how she keeps her emotional balance in times of trouble, the answer is clear. Ina explains, "I don't let things affect me so deeply. I am not comfortable feeling negative and I find I have some reserve inside that allows me to not panic emotionally, even if I may panic verbally. There is always an answer if you think really hard. Sometimes you just have to focus. I also believe in putting out fires as you go so you don't end up with the snowball effect."

Ina exudes an admirable confidence that perhaps springs from the fact that she is without question always guided by her instinct and intuition. She declares, "I am gut driven and a doer. I always say 'keep it real inside you'." And although her

open-mindedness leads her to take what others might consider "chances," she says she rarely just closes her eyes and jumps: "I know what I am capable of and I don't put myself in situations that I cannot handle. I just try to surround myself with people I like and things I enjoy. I believe life is too short to do otherwise."

When I ask Ina where this strong sense of self comes from, she explains what she has learned both from her own experience and from reading up on the birth order of her children. Although some complain about the middle-child syndrome, she feels that being the middle of three girls has had a positive impact on her life. "Each of my sisters was typecast according to her interests or because she was the elder or the younger. The middle was a happy place to be because I found I could fit in on either side. Not being stereotyped gave me the freedom to discover who I really was."

Ina's long-term passion for dressage is one that gives her both discipline and plays a main role in helping to keep her fit. Her love for horses bloomed during her Hong Kong days where she started the morning rhythm she still keeps today. "I wake early, go to the stables to practice dressage, and am ready to start the day by 9:30! I am on auto pilot and it's fun."

This equestrienne, who confesses to "loving the smell of horses," rides every day except Sunday and Wednesday since "one day is for family and the other is for the horses to rest!" Ina explains her love for the sport: "I love the challenge of trying to make the horse do certain movements but having it look like he is effortlessly dancing. The ultimate goal is to become one with the horse, sharing one movement."

It is not surprising that she is most happy when she accomplishes something she never thought she could do. "When I push myself to do something new and difficult and can eventually, do it well, I think to myself 'Wow, little me? How did I do that?' Even just a small achievement can give great pleasure."

Ina has a way about her that immediately makes you feel as if you are completely welcome in her world no matter who you are, and I realize that weeks after our first meeting, I still think of the many basic truths she spoke of. Perhaps this woman's own words describe her unique appeal best. She admits that if her husband came home tomorrow and suggested moving to the Congo, her response would be, "Well, it's an experience, so why not?"

As she walked me to the gate of her home, she paused for a minute, as if to reflect on our interview and then said simply, "I think I am blessed with curiosity. I am curious about a lot of things and I am not ashamed to try anything, no matter how badly I may end up doing it. If you can laugh at yourself and your failures then everything is just one big ride. Who cares? Just go."

✱



"If you can laugh at yourself and your failures then everything is just one big ride," says Ina. Here with camera-ready Otto Groot-Altena, her Belgian Warmblood. Jacket and sweater by Tod's.

The self-styled "gut-driven doer" always keeps it real inside her. Louis Vuitton shirt, pants and boots; her own watch and earrings.





Ina is a "challenge junkie": she keeps a list of to-dos and acts upon them at the right place and time. Louis Vuitton cashmere dress; Lucille for Jul B. Dizon earrings.

Ina is always up for an adventure,
and she is happiest trying out new
things.

