

BOAT

International

**HIGH
TIME**

**THIS YEAR'S
MOST EXQUISITE
TIMEPIECES**



**EXCLUSIVE:
DHOWS AT DUSK**
OMAN PHOTOGRAPHED BY
SIR DON McCULLIN

STARFIRE

A PAINSTAKING REFIT AND A DAZZLING 73-METRE REBORN



THE LATEST AND GREATEST IN PRIVATE AVIATION

OWNERS' CLUB

LIVING THE DREAM ON THE WORLD'S BEST BOATS



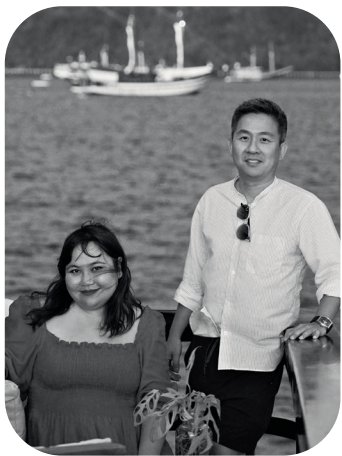
“HEY, I HAVE A CRAZY IDEA...”

How an Indonesian phinisi was conceived during a global lockdown

Celestia, the 45m charter yacht built for Jasmine Chong and Jason Tabalujan

THIS MONTH: *the Owners' Club convenes in Bermuda / notes from Norway / camaraderie at the Cyclades Cup*

EDITED BY CAROLINE WHITE



ON BOARD WITH

JASMINE CHONG AND JASON TABALUJAN

The divergent life paths of these siblings converged in the ultimate pandemic project, 45-metre phinisi *Celestia*. They talk boundless oceans and starry skies with *Terry Ward*

JASMINE CHONG

PLACE OF BIRTH: KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

ALMA MATER: SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

AND PARSONS SCHOOL OF DESIGN

OCCUPATION: FASHION DESIGNER

FAVOURITE RECENT PURCHASE: CARRARA MARBLE DINING TABLE

HAPPY PLACE ON LAND: NEW YORK'S 79TH STREET

GREENMARKET ON A SUNDAY

JASON TABALUJAN

PLACE OF BIRTH: SINGAPORE

ALMA MATER: UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA & THE WHARTON

SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

OCCUPATION: PRIVATE EQUITY FUND MANAGER

FAVOURITE RECENT PURCHASE: ON CLOUDMONSTER 2 SHOES

HAPPY PLACE ON LAND: OMBÉ KOFIE MENTENG,

HIS NEIGHBOURHOOD COFFEE SPOT IN JAKARTA

Jasmine Chong is a long way away from her daily life, under a Milky Way-streaked sky and at anchor in a glassy harbour off the northern coast of Sumbawa island in Indonesia. We are on board *Celestia*, the 45-metre phinisi that Chong owns with her older brother, Jason Tabalujan.

Bioluminescence glitters in the water to port, where we're riveted to a show just below the surface. A squid followed by a cloud of nervous minnows and then an undulating banded sea snake thread their ways through the sparkles. There are stars in the sky and stars in the water. We haven't even started sailing here in Indonesia's Coral Triangle, but magic is already all around.

Chong was born to an Indonesian mother and Malaysian father and grew up with Tabalujan and their middle sister between Malaysia, Indonesia

and Australia. She's a successful fashion designer who lives in New York City, where she runs her own luxury, ready-to-wear-label of women's clothing and accessories.

But during the long, lonely days of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021, far from her parents in Malaysia and Tabalujan – a private equity fund manager who lives in Jakarta – she got a call from her brother that spawned a collaboration she never saw coming.

"I said, 'Hey, I have a crazy idea, do you want to hear about my crazy idea?'" Tabalujan recalls saying to his sister.

Lighter on work than usual during the lockdown and with itchy feet from staying at home, he'd been looking for places to travel within Indonesia. So Tabalujan had hopped a few flights from his home on Java to the island of Sulawesi. He had carried on south from

WATCHING BULUKUMBA'S BOAT- BUILDERS, TABALUJAN GOT A WILD IDEA ABOUT HOW TO SPEND SOME OF HIS HARD- EARNED MONEY



PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF OWNERS



A luxurious example of a traditional Indonesian sailing vessel, 45m *Celestia* was delivered in 2023 to sister and brother owners Jasmine Chong (below left) and Jason Tabalujan (bottom)



into nonstop Zoom meetings, imagining the linens, textiles and other details that would eventually outfit the boat that they would later christen *Celestia*.

Hand built from ironwood and teak, *Celestia* is a classic, two-masted phinisi with seven cabins that include twin identical owners' cabins designed for Chong and Tabalujan. On the main deck, a cabin the siblings dreamed up with their parents in mind has an expansive, cushioned seating area to stern where the family gravitates to hang out during annual trips together in the archipelago. The yacht's interiors are understated and elegant, with hand-woven rattan panelling from Java, hand-glazed Balinese tiles and tropical toile jacquard textiles designed by Chong. The crew of 17 hails from all across Indonesia and the greater Bahasa belt.

Chong and Tabalujan grew up enjoying tropical island holidays with their family to places such as Bunaken Island off North Sulawesi, Guam and Malaysia's Langkawi island. And Chong says the two always shared a childlike awe when it came to wildlife, especially marine animals.

"I remember playing in tidal pools together and discovering a horseshoe crab, and feeling just this sense of wonder," she says.

The siblings went to Australia during their teen years for boarding school and both later attended the University of Virginia in the US, but their careers and lifestyles followed

Makassar along palm-lined roads crowded with motorbikes to Bulukumba, the region famous for its hand-built phinisis – this artful boatbuilding has won it a place on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list.

It was there, watching Bulukumba's legendary boatbuilders shimmy up near-vertical boat hulls and wield impossibly heavy iron hammers to do their work, that Tabalujan got a wild idea about how to spend some of his hard-earned money.

"I knew I wanted to do something involving hospitality, design and F&B, and that it would be a very boring boat if I did it on my own," Tabalujan says. (Chong got the creative gene, he quips, while he's colour blind and "better on an Excel spreadsheet".)

When he called his sister to see what she thought about building their own charter phinisi together, Chong recalls feeling surprised.

"I was like, 'I'm a fashion designer.' It felt crazy," she says. "But it was the pandemic and there were travel bans. And there was something very nice about dreaming of this project."

Before she knew it, she was down the rabbit hole: researching boat designs from afar, dialling



The siblings conceived the main-deck master cabin for their parents, while they have twin owners' cabins on the upper deck. Left: Jasmine Chong

diverging trajectories after that, until *Celestia* entered the equation.

Tabalujan credits his early years in Australia with teaching him to live independently in a new cultural environment where he also first learned about camping, sailing and truly enjoying the great outdoors.

"Being sent to Australia was a sink-or-swim moment," he says, and one during which he learned to persevere. He also became interested in endurance sports such as cross-country running (he recently committed to running the New York City marathon in early November).

Tabalujan graduated from the University of Virginia with a degree in economics and finance; it was shortly after 9/11 and the dot-com crash, but he eventually found a job in investment banking in New York City, where he worked for five years. Sixteen-hour days working on Wall Street were the norm, he says.



He recalls long hours of meetings in the Credit Suisse First Boston boardroom in Manhattan, which he remembers as "filled with paintings of sailing ships".

"That might have had a subliminal effect on my fascination with boats," he says.

After an MBA he returned to Indonesia to live after 23 years away. He makes his base in Jakarta now, running his own business managing third-

party capital, when he's not involved with the doings of *Celestia* (he recently hosted Indonesia's minister of tourism and the presidential security detail on board). And while he ponders the potential of a land-based hospitality project in the future, for now, he says, he's squarely focused on *Celestia*.

Chong, by contrast, graduated from an all-girls boarding school in Australia that she says she chose because of its beautiful historic buildings and location by the sea, then followed in Tabalujan and her older sister's footsteps to the University of Virginia.

After a year of co-ed life, however, she decided the path towards an economics major just wasn't for her. Fascinated with fashion from a young age (she recalls trips with her mother, also a fashion designer, to garment centres in Kuala Lumpur), Chong always kept notebooks filled with her own "collections" as a kid. Her mother and sister asked her why she had never considered fashion school.

After a break back home in Malaysia, she gained a fashion degree in Chicago, moved to New York City and worked in the design rooms of designers such as Marchesa, Tory Burch, Anna Sui and Thakoon. A fashion marketing degree followed and Chong devoted her talents to launching her eponymous ready-to-wear label, Jasmine Chong, which she designs in her atelier in New York's Garment District.

The soft-drama silhouettes of her feminine and romantic designs incorporate rich textiles such as jacquards, silk, wool and even tapestries. And when it came to outfitting *Celestia*, Chong says she was excited to see what parallels could exist between building a designed experience on the yacht and providing a luxury experience through her label.

"I knew there would be a lot of tangible touch points on *Celestia* I'd enjoy, like fabrics and bed linens. But I was also excited to work on things

JASMINE TIMELINE

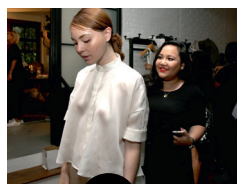
2012

Graduates from School of the Art Institute of Chicago with a degree in fashion design and moves to New York City



2015

Gains a degree in fashion marketing from Parsons School of Design



2016

Launches her label at New York Fashion Week

Features in the US reality TV show *Making the Cut*



2020



Dresses Kristen Stewart for the Los Angeles Times' Oscar Roundtables

2021

Attends *Celestia*'s launch ceremony in Indonesia

2022



like the menu," she says (*Celestia's* food and beverage programme is helmed by celebrated Balinese chef, Wayan Kresna Yasa).

The fact that she and Tabalujan were diving into such a project while their family was forcibly separated during the pandemic made it feel like an even bigger and more motivating dream, Chong says.

"Being in that bubble of wishfully thinking of a time where your family can come together and go on this fantastic trip was a great driver," she says.

When Chong finally got to visit *Celestia* in 2022, while the yacht was still in the shipyard, the experience was very emotional, she says.

"I started to see her fleshing out, like a person. It was a lot like making a dress, where you think about the fabric, what kind of material to use, how it's going to move," Chong says. "These are all things I thought about when designing the boat."

The siblings also thought about how their family – their parents, sister and her husband and their kids – would experience *Celestia*, and how they would get to experience it with their own friend groups, too.

"I was imagining my family in the spaces like the saloon, thinking about being in the indoor dining table or the lounge at the front of the boat with the dining tables outside. I was just imagining that togetherness," Chong says.

Tabalujan recalls the first time he showed his parents *Celestia* while she was still under construction and covered with scaffolding. "I waited until I sunk half my money into it, at a point where it couldn't be stopped," he laughs. They climbed onto the roof and there was a beautiful sunset. "I told them, 'You have to visualise how it will be at sea,'" he says.

Another memorable family moment for both Chong and Tabalujan came during *Celestia's* peluncuran ceremony – the yacht's official water launch from South Sulawesi in 2022, when nearly the entire village and all of the boat's builders and their families came



Above: Tabalujan at the 2024 Golden Globes; a five-day charter aboard *Celestia* was included in the celebrity gift bags

**"WISHFULLY
THINKING OF A TIME
WHEN YOUR FAMILY
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FANTASTIC TRIP WAS
A GREAT DRIVER"**



out to bless *Celestia* before sending her to sea.

A goat was sacrificed (its trotters were placed on the bow and stern to represent bringing the boat to life) and a gold ring was embedded in the keel to represent the yacht's navel before everyone sat down on the ground for a meal of delicacies wrapped in banana leaves that they ate with their hands.

Ten men pulled the yacht from the beach using chain blocks, little by little, into the water, a process that took many days and involved copious palm wine consumption, Tabalujan says.

"There were little kids running around this during the water launch ceremony, just playing and enjoying the boat. I think it really gave me a glimpse into the future of memories and family," says Chong. "I thought to myself, 'This is the first of many happy moments on the boat.'"

As for how the siblings use their yacht now that she's properly afloat (and when she's not booked for charters around the Coral Triangle), Tabalujan has enjoyed getting to scuba dive at

some of Indonesia's most legendary dive sites including the famous drift dive Shotgun in Komodo and a site called Jackpot in the Banda Sea that's loaded with hammerhead sharks. He's also fascinated by the history of the Spice Islands and remote outposts such as Run Island in the Maluku Islands, where *Celestia* sails on custom itineraries.

For Chong, who doesn't dive, quiet moments spent on board stargazing from the top deck during an impromptu al fresco sleepover with her international group of friends and waking up to the sunrise, are memories she still calls upon when she's back home in the concrete jungle of Manhattan.

After all, *Celestia* was named for the stars. "So often when you think about boats you think about what's below the surface of the ocean. But how often, in our day-to-day lives, when you're pounding concrete, how often do you really look up," Chong says. "In the city, you can't take in the stars." ■

JASON TIMELINE



*Dreams up Celestia
after seeing the
Bulukumba boat-
builders*



*Celestia's maiden
voyage to Labuan
Bajo from Bali*



*Attends Golden
Globes after a
Celestia charter
is selected for the
ceremony gift bag*

2003

*Gets his undergraduate degree from
the University of Virginia*



2010

*Wins his MBA from The
Wharton School of the
University of Pennsylvania ...
Moves back to Indonesia
after 23 years away*

2021



2023

2024