

MARGARET CHAN

THE BAGPAGE IMRAN JALAL

The last time veteran thespian Margaret Chan stepped into a hair salon was about six years ago. "My hairstylist is amazing. But I just have no time to spend in the salon," she says of her decision to break up with her stylist of more than 30 years. "Hairstylists insist you walk out looking good since you've paid them a lot of money. But I go bananas at having to wait for things such as blow-drying my hair."

Since then, the 62-year-old, who played the titular role in Stella Kon's classic play *Emily Of Emerald Hill* in 1985, has been cutting her own hair.

The memorabilia and props that she and two other prominent theatre practitioners – actor-director Ivan Heng and Malaysian actress Pearly Chua – used for their performances as Emily are now part of an ongoing exhibition at the Peranakan Museum.

Called *Emily Of Emerald Hill: Singaporean Identity On Stage*, it runs till February next year.

But back to her annual DIY hair grooming.

"I just grab any pair of stationery scissors from the cupboard and 'chiang' here and 'cheng' there," the grandmother of two says animatedly, making scissor blades with her fingers in the air.

She also touches up her greying roots every 10 days using Bigen, her favourite hair colour brand.

"It's senaaaaang," Ms Chan, who is dressed in a black dress from budget chain This Fashion, says in Malay to describe how easy it is to get her shock of jet black hair.

That voice echoes the famous (or is it infamous) "I'll crrrush you like a cockroach" line she screeched as a Peranakan matriarch in *Masters Of The Sea*, Singapore's first English TV soap opera, which aired in 1994.

When it comes to her job as an actress, however, she does not cut any corners. To build up the stamina needed to be on stage for 90 minutes during the 2010 restaging of *Emily Of Emerald Hill*, she ran at least 13km around her estate every other day.

She runs shorter distances now. "My daughter nagged me because she said the heart can get scarred from running too frequently," she explains. Her daughter Cara, 35, is a partner at law firm Allen & Gledhill.

Ms Chan and her husband, who owns a consultancy firm, also have a 27-year-old son, who is studying law at the Singapore Management University (SMU).

These days, Ms Chan, a former food critic with *The Straits Times*, is better known as "Prof" among her students.

She has a doctorate in theatre and performance studies from Royal Holloway, University of London, and joined SMU in 2003.

She was hired as a senior manager, but has since worked her way up to Associate Professor of Theatre Performance Studies (Practice).

On her decision to get a stable job, Ms Chan says: "I told myself that I must earn enough to pay my maid. One year, I earned all of \$140 a month."

The third of four siblings, Ms Chan, whose mother was a teacher and father was a civil servant, has always been the brainy one.

She reveals that she was once crowned beauty queen at a pageant in the 1970s because she trumped the other contestants in the IQ challenge.

She entered the competition because she wanted to win the first prize of a pair of return tickets to London as it was her dream to travel.

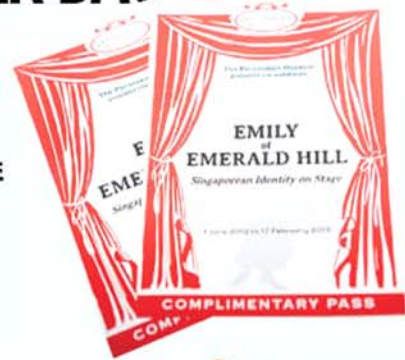
"I figured I was okay-looking. But when it comes to brains, I can put anyone in the pocket because I can talk," she says.



HER BAG
 My husband bought me this satchel with no brand after he saw the old one I had was breaking apart. I'm such an organised person that I bought chains to secure the pouches inside the bag so that I can reach them easily.

7 THINGS IN HER BAG

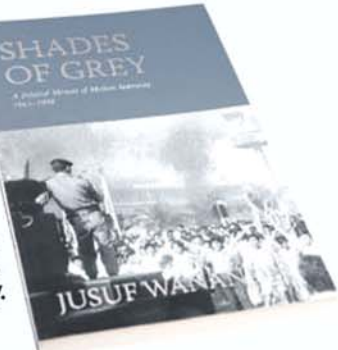
1 FREE PASSES TO THE EMILY OF EMERALD HILL: SINGAPOREAN IDENTITY ON STAGE
 I have two tickets with me so that I can pass them to anyone who wants to catch the exhibition.



2 TICKET STUBS
 I went to watch *Lao Jiu: The Musical* with a friend last month as I heard it was good – and it was. I also wanted to expose myself to Chinese culture as much as I can and brush up on my Mandarin.



3 SHADES OF GREY BY JUSUF WANANDI
 This political memoir by the scholar and former Indonesian parliamentarian was launched in SMU last month. I'm interested in Indonesia because it is a cultural treasure box. If you are an anthropologist like me, you'd go mad for the country.



4 NOTEBOOK
 This notebook contains everything I need, from stage notes to my grocery list and telephone numbers. I chose this over fancy notebooks because it is light. Even my ballpoint pen has to be light. Don't bother giving me an expensive pen that is heavy.

5 SILKYGIRL LIPSTICK
 Lipstick and sunblock are the only two cosmetic items I need because I can't be bothered with preening myself too much. I just grabbed this from Watsons, which has an outlet in the basement of SMU.



6 SMU STAFF PASS
 The university is built like Fort Knox as outsiders are barred from many access points. Without this pass, it is impossible for me to get around.



7 PICTURES
 I keep photos of my family in this old plastic casing of my bank passbook. I rarely take them out, though, because I also have pictures of my old pet dogs Onky and Sugar here. I get very emotional when I see their pictures. Onky died before I went to Britain to study in 1996. Sugar died last year. I took a leave of absence for six months to look after her when she was diagnosed with cancer.



ST PHOTOS: PANDORA WONG

STOCKISTS Antepima, 01-18 Paragon; Coach, 02-19 Wisma Atria; Coast London, 03-13 Paragon; Diane von Furstenberg, 01-08A Ion Orchard; Dior, 01-22 Ion Orchard; Dorothy Perkins, 01-27 Wisma Atria; Envie de Pois, 03-07 Ion Orchard; Etro, 01-30 Paragon; H&M, 01-01 Orchard Building; Jil Sander, 02-22 Hilton Hotel; Kate Spade, 03-27 Ion Orchard; Lanvin, 01-19 Hilton Hotel; Marni, 02-28 Hilton Hotel; Michael Kors, 01-16 Scotts Square; Miu Miu, B1-31 The Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands; Pedder Red, 03-04 Takashimaya Shopping Centre; Prada, 01-45 Paragon; Quintessential, 02-01 Pacific Plaza; River Island, 01-41 VivoCity; Salvatore Ferragamo, 01-40 Paragon; Steve Madden, B2-108A The Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands; Stuart Weitzman, 02-12E Takashimaya Shopping Centre; Topshop, 01-01 Knightsbridge; Tory Burch, 02-38 Wisma Atria; Warehouse, B1-28 Ion Orchard; Zara, 01-01 Liat Towers