

# SEALED WITH A KISS

Zena Khan takes an intimate look into the beautiful life of Adam and Dianthus Kiss.

Photography: AARON LEE Styling: WEECHEE Hair & Makeup: DEIRDRE CHING



*On Adam:  
Jacket and pants: Ami Paris available  
at Club 21 The Gardens Mall*

*On Dianthus:  
Dress: Issey Miyake*



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“**S**he grew up in beauty.” Adam Kiss’ evaluation of his wife Dianthus’ childhood emulates the opening of a stanza. This is to be expected. After all, he is married to a poet of the senses, whose world is cocooned in aesthetic lines of beauty and quality. Together, this couple marry their respective strengths—his penchant for logistics and rationality tinged by madcap adventures with her tactile and sensorial nature—to tailor a life reverberating with personality.

Dianthus and Adam’s marital home in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, that they moved into five months ago, reflects this notion of uniting the unexpected. The location they chose to live in immediately makes this palpable. Standing on their balcony I was treated to a panoramic view that sweeps across dense rainforest and the

old bungalows of Ampang, to the modern concrete skyscrapers delineating our contemporary downtown environment. Harmonious opposites abound inside too; they seep out from the wide-ranging subjects of the books that fill their library shelves or litany of objects dotted across their split level home. Most of all it lives in the personalities and interactions of Dianthus, Adam, and their Nebelung cat Miska (also known as Tubby, T, or Sir Tubbington).

Johor-born Dianthus has risen to prominence in the KL lifestyle scene through her bespoke floral business, Maison Dianthus, established two years ago with Adam post pandemic. Her immersion in the world of flowers is a birth right. As the daughter of Kim’s Florist in Johor Bahru, she grew up in the business. “Like most children from an Asian family, I entered the family business out

of a sense of filial piety.” Dianthus explains over a homemade pasta lunch. “The turning point for me to love the flower business and excel in it as I would want? Well, that came after 10 years of working.”

Dianthus’ decade of training in the family business was a foundation from which she grew her practice as a floral designer, explaining, “My medium is perishable, but I see what I do as art.” As a contemporary art curator myself, I immediately connected her journey with an artist’s. First came the training in her medium—flowers—similar to how a painter trains in fine art.

What are the histories and special meanings behind each flower? This is a parallel to the concepts embedded in visual iconography. Understanding the scale, proportions, colour palettes, and focal points in a bouquet? Well, these are clearly

Jacket: Gucci  
T-shirt: CK Calvin Klein



the formal aspects of art production, but translated to blooms.

This revelation of years in training as a florist, as well as time spent in the kitchens of her late father's restaurants, clarifies to me why I have found it tricky to describe Dianthus' work in a single line. Over the years, she has honed a craft that she infuses into the lives of her clients through Maison Dianthus. A storefront in Publika by the B.I.G. Supermarket and website to take bouquet orders are narrow portals into the world of Maison Dianthus. Beyond the shop are commissioned tablescape for events such as KL's first Soho House luncheon in partnership with S.E.A. Focus Art Fair, private tutorials, and a burgeoning supper club.

At Maison Dianthus, process is Queen. Dianthus begins each commissioned bouquet

not with a discussion on colours or favourite flowers, but by asking the sender to write the receiver a note she then inscribes onto embossed cream coloured cards in her flowing calligraphic hand. Reading between the lines, she extracts the emotions and desires within—I miss you. I love you. I am so proud of you. Stay strong—and finds a way to 'say it with flowers'. Adam proudly informs me that Dianthus chooses every single stem herself. This attention to detail has captivated Malaysians, and led her to work with luxury brands including Gucci, Valentino, and Patek Philippe. After all, each Maison Dianthus bouquet is different from the next, speaking to a truly luxurious sense of individualism, just as paintings do.

Every artist needs their muse. But after years of working alongside contemporary

artists, I am here to tell you that every artist needs their studio manager. Enter Hungarian-born Adam. His foray into working life started similarly to Dianthus, by watching his father's lorry business. From there, he gained a degree in logistics. This training, coupled with a mind that is equal parts rational and questioning, means Adam is the perfect complement for Dianthus. Interacting with the Kiss couple at home offers a glimpse into the seamless flow of their personal and professional lives. It is clear that a genuine care for their partner to shine is paramount. Was it always this easy, I wonder?

"We all have a role. There's a mixing, but the roles are all in service to the relationship," Adam explains. "Lines can be blurred, but our roles are not." Ever the artist, Dianthus concurs by telling me, "The way we

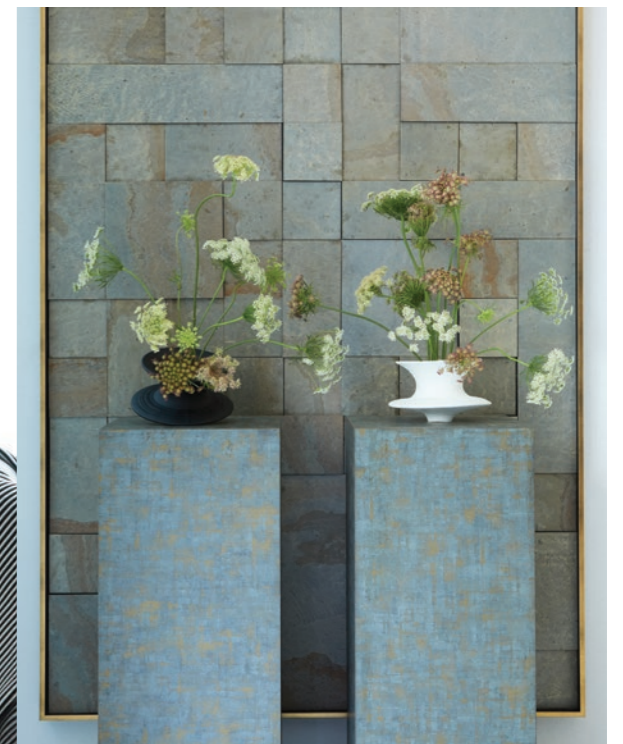
Hoodie & pants: Ami Paris available at Club 21 The Gardens Mall  
T-shirt: CK Calvin Klein  
Shoes: Bottega Veneta



Sir Tubbington living his best life Mementos serve as eclectic decor

On Adam:  
Pullover: Boss  
Pants: Ami Paris available at Club 21 The Gardens Mall

On Dianthus:  
Dress: Issey Miyake



No two Maison Dianthus bouquets are the same

Dress: Issey Miyake



It's all about the details

Hints of the Kiss' newly-trialled supper club

live our life is synonymous to how I approach flowers. I love and respect flowers. Flowers use their energy to bloom beautifully, to change the ambience of their atmosphere. And our home reflects all that love I feel for 'alive things'. In our home setting, everything is curated with care."

My interaction with the carefully-curated belongings in the Kiss household articulates Adam and Dianthus' personal identities, ties to kin, and expressions of their experiences as individuals and as a couple. The most significant for me? A ceramic sculpture of a pomegranate that Adam was carefully painting with beetroot juice when I first entered their home. He describes it as a 'living sculpture' gifted by his best friend Grego Ammer to mark the Kiss' marriage. Adam notes that the act of recolouring it

every six months is a metaphor for the care a marriage requires, "You have to tend your garden for it to bloom."

Exclaiming over the litany of objects in the Kiss household, from tiny golden tailor scissors to pointy flower frogs (kenzans), I realise each is the introductory paragraph of a different life story. Through a model of a Mazda RX7, Adam recounts the first car he refurbished in Ireland after a dangerous bout of H1N1 in 2009, which would lead to his move to Malaysia and meeting Dianthus in a jazz club. An original plastic-wrapped record of the 'Good Morning Vietnam' soundtrack instigates a conversation into Adam's study of the English language and how humour communicates intellect and compassion.

If Dianthus' floral arrangements evoke sculpture, then her love for cooking mirrors

performance art. Her Instagram Stories on cooking, peppered with witty insights into domestic life, incited a flurry of self-invites from close friends that has since evolved into a newly-trialled supper club. Late September saw the first of these intimate dinners in collaboration with Danielle Peita Graham. Topical conversations on art, technology, society flow here, reminiscent of the European salons of yore with a contemporary Malaysian twist. Asian ingredients fused with Western ones can be read as a commentary on globalism and cross-continental information flows, or more simply, speak to the diverse palates of today's well-travelled Malaysians, among them Dianthus and Adam. As I see that there is no function without form for the Kiss couple, one thing is made clear: this is art come alive. 