

Text/  
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Robert Wun



After a decade of avant-garde designs rooted in emotive stories and strong female figures, acclaimed Hong Kong couturier Robert Wun reminds us that home is where the heart is.

You’ve probably seen Robert Wun’s otherworldly couture creations on the likes of Beyoncé, Adele, Lady Gaga, and Lisa. Marked by precision cut sunray pleats, ruffles, and fluid drapes that juxtapose sensual harnesses and corsets, the former ready-to-wear designer-turned-couturier is known to leave his audience gasping in awe at his statuesque gowns and tailoring. Take Wun’s poetic *Bleeding Love* design that took over 1,000 hours to create. This surreal version of a classic wedding gown and veil was *stained* with over 150,000 hand-embroidered blood red sequins, glass beads, and Swarovski crystals. Flame for the London-based Hong Kong creative was similarly kindled with *The Scorched Bride* that blends prints, dyes, crystal embroidery, and burnt edges on a satin gown. Dashes of red wine, glass shards, and coque feathers additionally illustrate the hyper-experimental nature of the creative. However, it isn’t just Wun’s avant-garde design language and onus on craftsmanship that led him to make history as the first Hong Kong designer to earn a spot at Haute Couture Week in Paris. The designer’s appreciation for in-depth storytelling, embracing themes such as feminism, power, memories, and emotions, elevate his creations from mere theatrical garments to sartorial points of connection. Cinema is one way Wun introduces recognisable yet heavy-hitting narratives into his work. For example, the use of 1,200 glass shards on *The Trinity* coat reimagines the epic window shattering scene from the opening sequence of *The Matrix Reloaded*. On the other hand, a sculpted A-line coat styled with a silk tulle skirt – all in bright canary yellow – is titled *The Georgie*; a homage to the cult classic horror film *It*. Wun is also not afraid to get vulnerable, often spotlighting his admiration for the strong and powerful women in his life. We recall *Armour*, his fall-winter 2021 collection, a poetic tribute to his late grandmother who deeply informed his notion of feminism. Silhouettes marked by dramatic flared pleats emulated the swallow tail – her favourite bird from her village in Hainan. The label’s spring-summer 2024 couture collection also caused teary eyes at the sight of *The Love Letter*. Channelling feelings of grief, Wun presented a layered tulle gown with over 750 words of reflection

embroidered with more than 450,000 beads. Recently, the celebrated couturier revisited memories of his grandmother closer to home. Celebrating 10 years of his eponymous label, Wun held his headlining *Homecoming* show at Hong Kong’s Palace Museum. Presented during Centrestage, an annual fashion design showcase by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC), the collection featured 12 never-before-seen couture designs among hits from past seasons. Staged with a backdrop of incense and a red runway, some looks recall photos of his beloved grandmother. *Grandma’s Embrace*, for example, is a deep purple gown with a 3D-printed arm holding a baby, while *Groceries* reimagines an image of a family member during a routine outing. Wun then spotlighted other female figures dear to him during his childhood spent in the city. *Anita Black* references late Cantopop icon Anita Mui’s penchant for black-and-white polka dot prints, whereas the neon yellow *Guan Yin* is a nod to the Chinese Goddess of Mercy. The show’s collaborators, from Eric Lui, who produced and directed the show’s original soundtrack, to the invites that pulled on the expertise of graphic designer Katol and art printer Jimmy Wonderland, were also part of the Made in Hong Kong imprint. “They are as important as the collection because they are the ones who inspired it, executed it, and made it happen.”



ROBERT WUN



**MANIFESTO: How are you feeling now that *Homecoming* show is over?**

ROBERT WUN: What surprised me was how different it felt from the other shows we've done at Couture Week in Paris. This one felt calmer. I didn't feel that emotional leap until I got to see my friends, families, and all my collaborators.

**M Why choose Hong Kong to mark the 10th year of your label?**

RW I think it's about timing. We started talks with HKTDC a year ago. We figured that since it is our 10-year anniversary, we wanted to do two couture shows in Paris anyway, so why not do this one too.

**M How has your upbringing in Hong Kong continued to influence you creatively?**

RW There are cities that are known for creative industries that are blooming with gigantic businesses. But I realised that true creativity doesn't come from how much support the government provides or how well they are doing. Instead, it's in the everyday things. For me, inspiration comes in this format. In Hong Kong, it is how we work and the contradicting but very distinct mixed culture. If you see things, grew up with it, and especially if you leave the city, you look back and realise how much of that upbringing anchors you.

**M Were there particular Hong Kong films that inspired the 12 new designs?**

RW Wong Kar-wai films always inspire me like, *In the Mood for Love*, *2046*, and *The Grandmaster*. He helped define that golden era of local cinema in the late 1980s and early 1990s that was not only celebrated regionally but also globally. Sometimes, I look back to try to understand the difference between the movies today versus back then. I think it's capturing something sophisticated and elegant without being so in-your-face and the beauty of a distinctive culture that isn't for the Western gaze.

Sometimes, I feel that people from places not linked to Western cultures

think that the only way to stand out is to capture our world in a way that the West can understand. Oh, let's send a dragon down the runway so people get that it's an Asian reference. However, the true depth of our culture and history is a philosophy in itself. For me, to be able to encapsulate that would be the only justifiable way to talk about our culture and history. All Wong Kar-wai movies are able to establish that for me.

**M Did your prior experience working with Wong Kar-wai also impacted this new collection?**

RW Yes, his open-minded energy, decisiveness, and his power to command. There was a moment while we were shooting. He asked me to sit in his director's chair and share my thoughts. Anyone who has worked with him knows he helps young people a lot. He is never selfish about his experiences. There is no better testimony of a true

genius and good person that deserves to be where he is at. He is that great because he is a good human being. He can actually see people as people and it shows in his work.

**M The collection also pays homage to your grandmother. How did your memories of her influence your design process?**

RW That's the funny thing about memories. It gives you that feeling of reminiscing, especially when you are going through tough moments. When you are doing a collection or a show, you are always stressed. You start to question the purpose of life and why you continue to do this when you are stressed all the time. You realise that it's these memories that anchor you.

For me, designing is therapy that can help process what I will never be able to answer myself: the feelings I have



for [my grandmother], that I still miss her, and the regrets that I didn't get to say bye because I left Hong Kong to pursue my dream in London. For me, there's also nothing more beautiful than knowing that this can also connect with others who share the same feelings about losing their grandparents.

**M Why juxtapose pieces from past collection with your latest designs?**

RW That was a tough one. I am used to having a brand new collection, so mixing old and new was hard to swallow at first. Like, how do I make it make sense? It took me longer because I was trying to articulate the story. I also struggled with Eric Lui who writes all my show music. We came to a conclusion: Hong Kong is part of the world and the world is a part of Hong Kong. The more we try to separate both, it becomes a problem. What is beautiful here is also what is beautiful in the world. Then, it all came together.

**M Talk us through the model casting. We saw iconic Hong Kong model Qiqi Lam, actress Kara Wai, and singer Mika among others...**

RW [Qiqi and Kara] are people I grew up looking up to on the TV screen or newspaper. In my eyes, my love and respect for Qiqi, Mika, and Kara is because they are determined, straightforward, professional, masters in their craft, but most importantly, they are very kind people.

**M The cycle of life and death stand out as another theme in your work. Tell us more about this.**

RW I never see death as taboo. How do you understand the meaning of life if you don't understand the meaning of death? I've learnt a lot from the loss of my loved ones. From that, you only start to appreciate life, the people who you still have around you, and the importance of what it means to live. If everything is so beautiful there is no point fighting for anything. When things are tough, it's these memories, pain, and grief that reconnect you and give you the purpose to keep going. That's why there was a baby and a funeral element with the white lilies. For me, I see it as one. The joy of a new birth is as important as the loss of a loved one. But it's a full circle. It means you're alive.

**M Your label's experienced a meteoric rise in the last two years, especially since your couture debut. Did this surge in popularity come with unexpected challenges?**

RW There are challenges, but there are challenges everywhere. If it's easy it's not worth it. To be able to say that I can make a living out of what I am truly passionate about: that's the luckiest thing in the world. I just want to do my best and make sure I don't fail or disappoint all the people who have had my back even before I gained this little success that I have now.

**M Imagine the next 10 years. What is your vision for the brand?**

RW Hopefully, we have more expenditure to have more categories. Not necessarily just ready-to-wear, but beyond fashion. I can't say more for now, but we have some exciting projects lined up for 2026. I want to expand the language and universe [of the brand] and keep the passion alive not just for myself but also the people that I work with. I don't want 10 flagships stores. To keep doing better... that's it. [www.robertwun.com](http://www.robertwun.com)