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**Inside the Brand**

**Self-Portrait**

**The Designer who Turned Selfies into Fashion**

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# Inside the Brand: Self-Portrait

The Designer who Turned Selfies into Fashion



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The *Inside the Brand* series includes books on these luxury fashion brands:

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Coach	Louis Vuitton
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Dolce & Gabbana	Prada
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Ermenegildo Zegna	Tom Ford
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# Inside the Brand: Self-Portrait

The Designer who Turned Selfies into Fashion

**FASHION**  
&  
**DESIGN CLUB**

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## A Message from the Fashion and Design Club

The *Inside the Brand* series was commissioned by The Fashion and Design Club for the benefit and education of fashion and design students. The books assume that the reader has a basic understanding of the designs offered by a brand. They focus on the origin of a brand, how it has evolved, and its business operations.

All *Inside the Brand* books have been written from an independent perspective. Many of the books in this series contain information obtained by interviewing key people from the brands. These include individuals working in production, development, pattern cutting, sales, and marketing, as well as interns. Creative directors, brand founders, CEOs, CFOs, investors and Chairpersons have also been interviewed. The views expressed are those of the authors and the editor and do not represent any member of the Fashion and Design Club.

'Fair use' for purposes such as criticism, commenting, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research, applies to the content in this publication. Fair use is permitted by copyright law as the content does not have a negative impact on the original form, it is intended for teaching purposes, and it is not transformative in nature.

The Club would like to thank the generosity of the sponsors who had made these publications possible. The books are independently funded to ensure impartiality and no brand has commissioned, authorised or financially supported these books in any way.

Self-Portrait received a draft of this book in prior to publication to ascertain whether the brand wished to discuss any issues with the editor. This was done to minimise any possible errors or misunderstandings in the manuscript. The brand declined to comment.

More information about the Club and its activities can be found on the [Fashion and Design Club website](#) including a list of published and pending publications.

Iayn G Clark  
Secretary of The Fashion and Design Club





## Foreword

How has Self-Portrait, a brand created by a relatively unknown designer, not from a wealthy family, and with no access to millions from an investor, or large cash awards from the likes of the British Fashion Council, managed to beat many accomplished designers like:

- Jonathan W Anderson
- Maria Katrantzou
- Christopher Kane
- Roksanda Ilincic
- Alice Temperley
- Erdem Moralioglu
- Roland Mouret
- Victoria Beckham

Since its founding, why has Self-Portrait gained such an enormous celebrity following? Self-Portrait's founder Han Chong has already left a distinctive and successful mark on the world of fashion and it appears that his 'selfie' brand will prevail well into the future.

## Find Out More

- Why Self-Portrait has seen remarkable success in a short space of time.
- An account of the money and finances of the brand.
- The team and their salaries.
- The future of Self-Portrait in the next decade.
- The potential threat posed by Self-Portrait to high-end luxury brands.

## Further Reading

- Inside the Brand: Balmain
- Inside the Brand: JW Anderson
- Inside the Brand: Shanghai Tang
- Inside the Brand: Temperley London
- Inside the Brand: Victoria Beckham

## Self-Portrait: Key Facts at a Glance

Brand Founded 2013	Website <a href="http://www.self-portrait-studio.com">www.self-portrait-studio.com</a>
Founded by Han Chong	Manufacturing Hong Kong and Italy
Origin United Kingdom	Own stores and concessions 3, 3
Ownership Han Chong 8% Manager Asia Ltd 92%	Creative Director Han Chong
Head Office London	Chief Executive Han Chong
Products Women's ready-to-wear and accessories	

### Accounts for the year ended 30 September 2019 \*

Staff numbers 2019 (2018) 43 (38)	Operating Profit 2019 (2018) £3,488,000 (£4,702,000)
Turnover 2019 (2018) £30,359,000 (£33,584,000)	

\* Figures are taken from the accounts that Self Portrait Limited filed with Companies House for company number 08537264. Figures in the above table are for 12 months to 30 September 2019. The 2018 published figures are from 1 June 2017 to 30 September 2018, 16 months so have been prorated to 12 months to allow a reasonable comparison between 2018 and 2019. The brand used to file accounts for the years ending 31 May but changed its year in 2018 to 30 September. Accounts for the year ending 30 September 2020 are expected to be published in March 2021.

\*\* 2018 figures for a 16-month accounting period

## Self-Portrait Timeline

1979	Han Chong is born
2011	Three Floor is founded with Yvonne Hoang
2013	Self-Portrait is founded with Tin Lau
2014	Selfridges stocks Self-Portrait
2015	First NYFW presentation
2016	Self-Portrait collaborates with Le Specs
2016	Duchess of Cambridge wears a Self-Portrait dress
2018	Opens its first store in Mayfair, London
2018	Chong launches a 5-year scholarship funding Central Saint Martins MA fashion students
2018	Brand becomes a key billing on the NYFW runway schedule
2018	Duchess of Sussex wears Self-Portrait
2019	Opens its second store in Soho, New York, USA
2019	Opens its third store in Bangkok, Thailand
2019	Agrees to a joint venture for China expansion

## Would you like to be in this book?

Do you own any products made by the brand featured in this book?

Would you like to be seen in a book about fashion?

Now is your chance!

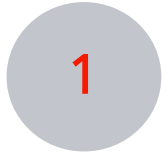
A loyal and returning clientele is vital to the success of any luxury fashion brand. As such, The Fashion and Design Club will feature pictures of customers using products of this brand as a new Chapter 1 in the subsequent editions of this *Inside the Brand* book.

Does this opportunity sound interesting?

Email your images to [photos@thefashionanddesignclub.com](mailto:photos@thefashionanddesignclub.com) and include your name, the name of the brand and product you are wearing and how much it cost. As you will be showcasing the brand, please tell us what motivated you to buy its product. What do you like about it? What don't you like about it? The more information you give us, the more we can say about you!

By sending us your photographs, you are providing consent for them to be included in the next edition of this *Inside the Brand* book, to be uploaded to The Fashion and Design Club website and for their distribution on the Club's social media platforms.





## Worn By

### Wooing Celebs by the Dozen

For a young brand, Self-Portrait deserves more than praise for the appeal it has drawn from top celebrities and influencers. The brand's accessible price points and trendy designs make Self-Portrait a fashion staple of these celebrities and many more:

- Kate Middleton
- Meghan Markle
- Michelle Obama
- Jennifer Lopez
- Beyonce
- Reese Witherspoon
- Priyanka Chopra

You will find out more about Self-Portrait's impact on celebrities in Chapter 3: Self-Portrait Celebrities and Chapter 9: Today and the Future.

#### Be Part of Inside the Brand: Self-Portrait

In the next edition of this book, The Fashion and Design Club will endeavour to include photos of people who own the brand's products in the Worn By chapter.

Do you own any Self-Portrait products?

Email your photos to [photos@thefashionanddesignclub.com](mailto:photos@thefashionanddesignclub.com) and include your name, the name of the product you are wearing.

By sending us your photographs, you are providing consent for them to be included in the next edition of this *Inside the Brand* book, to be uploaded to The Fashion and Design Club website and for their distribution on the Club's social media platforms.



## 2

## The Beginning

Han Chong was born in January 1979 and raised in Penang, Malaysia where he studied Art. His aunt was a local artist in Penang and taught him to open his eyes to the world around him.<sup>1</sup> Here you can see an artist's impression of Chong.



### Central Saint Martins

At the age of 18, Chong was studying under a Central Saint Martin's graduate. At 22, he emigrated to London to study womenswear design at Central Saint Martins College, part of UAL (University of the Arts, London).<sup>2</sup> **He spent his 20s and early 30s working in design teams and with a few brands in the UK, including Topshop.** Through this, he was able to gain knowledge and experience of the industry.<sup>3</sup>

### Three Floor

In 2011, Yvonne Hoang and Chong founded Three Floor at the age of 32. Three Floor pride themselves in redefining your wardrobe with feminine, graceful, and expressive clothing.<sup>4</sup>

Chong left Three Floor because he felt his vision and ideas were getting diluted due to the number of partners that were at the brand.<sup>5</sup> Chong considers himself a control

freak, which he sometimes jokes about. Chong's desire to be in control of his vision and ideas led him to create Self-Portrait in October 2013 at the age of 34.<sup>6</sup>

Three Floor lives on with a new creative director, Ivan Lan, who studied a BA in Design and Technology for the Fashion Industry and a MA in Fashion Design and Enterprise. He has been the Creative Director of the brand for 2 years.<sup>7</sup> Three Floor's price point is similar to that of Self-Portrait. Their clothes are usually in the range of £160 to £350.

### Han & Him

In 2009, Han Chong was invited to exhibit at the 'The Collectors' program of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Venice Biennale. Using the moniker Han & Him, Chong displayed two pieces of work:

- *Butterflies* - a display of discarded underwear
- *She Could Hear Every Breath In the House* - an installation of garments in the Danish Pavilion.

Chong reflected on this experience:

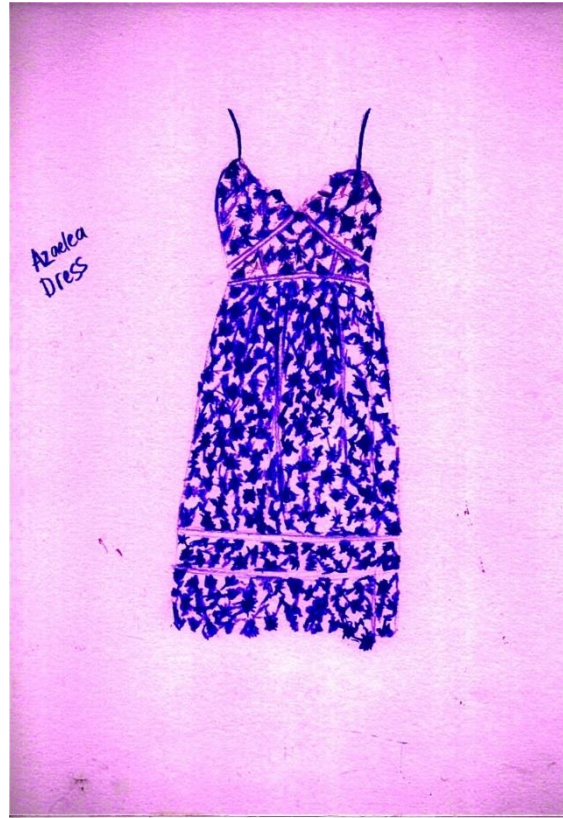
*“It was a bit overwhelming because, in the same show, there were people like Wolfgang Tillmans—whom I really admire—and all of these really big artists that my work was exhibited adjacent to.”<sup>8</sup>*

### The Self-Portrait Identity

Self-Portrait is a play on both the modern and the traditional. **Chong linked Self-Portrait to the selfie culture. His brand is a reinterpretation of personal expression.**<sup>9</sup> Self-Portrait started out with 17 dresses that offered its consumers a new, modern way to dress for special occasions. The brand's Spring 14 collection saw the birth of Self-Portrait's USP - lace. The collection re-contextualised lace and frills adding a sexy, flattering twist. The collection gained popularity and was highlighted on social media. The price point surprised people as the quality dresses had a mid-level price range of £150 to £250.<sup>10</sup> However, this was Chong's aim all along. Chong was not from a wealthy family.<sup>11</sup> He was a poor student and always wanted to create clothing for the 'normal-income' girl.<sup>12</sup> He noticed that there was the high street on one end and luxury on the other. He wanted to create something in the middle. Chong believes that women should be able to have beautiful clothes without breaking the bank.<sup>13</sup> The dresses are now a favourite amongst wedding guests, party guests and have been spotted being worn at graduations.<sup>14</sup>

## Azaelea Dress

Autumn 2014 saw the birth of Self-Portrait's renowned Azaelea dress. This dress was part of Chong's first collection and retails for £290. Here you can see an artist's impression of the Azaelea dress.



The Azaelea dress is Self-Portrait's most iconic dress for which the brand was recognised following its release. It's a luscious lace dress that has generated thousands of orders per season through wholesale alone. This dress has been recreated into different versions since its release.<sup>15</sup>

## Popular with Stockists

By 2014, within a year of the launch of Chong's brand, Self-Portrait was stocked by Selfridges, who became the first major stockist for the brand.<sup>16</sup> Thea Jones, Selfridges Contemporary womenswear buyer recalls that Self-Portrait 'provided something unique but at a fantastic price point'. Self-Portrait was supposed to have a party at Selfridges flagship London store, but there was nothing left. Everything from the collection had sold out before the party.<sup>17</sup> This emphasises how popular the brand was becoming. Selfridges were swiftly followed by Matchesfashion.com and Net-a-Porter the following year.<sup>18</sup>