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Special Issue on “Study in the UK”

## Vibrant London Makes Learning Fun

Arts enthusiast Eugene Ng and extreme mountaineer Robert Goh tell why the swinging city is a great centre for further studies.

By Joanne Kotzeva

For Eugene Ng and Mr Robert Goh, London was the place to acquire knowledge.

After eight years of training and working as a designer, Mr Ng, 27, was awarded the DesignSingapore scholarship. He chose to pursue a Master of Arts in cultural and creative industries at King’s College, University of London. He graduated with distinction last year.

Prior to his studies at King’s College, he had won several design awards and was featured extensively in design publications during his undergraduate studies here. But he felt he wanted to stretch his potential and see the bigger picture in which the arts reside.

“I am passionate about design and the arts, and I want to contribute to the development of the creative industries in Singapore. I felt that the master’s in cultural and creative industries programme would allow me to understand and investigate the social, economical and political issues of design in the wider context of the creative industry,” he says.

He now works as management executive (design culture) at the DesignSingapore Council. Mr Ng feels that although the cultural and creative industries shape our world view, there are few tertiary-level programmes that provide the knowledge that facilitate careers and research into this area.

“The postgraduate degree course which I enrolled in is probably the only one of its kind in the world that analyses this rather new and exciting industry from an inter-disciplinary academic perspective,” he says.

### **Back to Basics**

Another person who challenges himself to think differently is Mr Robert Goh, who has scaled the treacherous slopes of Mount Everest as well as Tibet’s Cho Oyu and Xixabangma without supplementary oxygen.

“I choose to climb without oxygen because I know I can do it with oxygen. The reason is that if you know you can do it, why do it at all? But if you know you may not be able to do it, there lies the challenge,” says the 41-year-old.

Now a motivational speaker and founder of his company, 29000ft, he topped his class during his undergraduate studies in aeronautical engineering at Imperial College London, which earned him the Governor's Prize in 1990.

He then pursued a PhD in aerodynamics at the same university, and graduated in 1994.

Although he is fond of the risky hobby of extreme mountain climbing, he chose to study in London because of its emphasis on the basics.

He explains: "I believe that in engineering, the fundamentals are extremely important. If your foundation is solid, you will go a long way. If your foundation is like sand, you will never be able to build a strong house on it."

"To me, the UK is special because it has that special touch and emphasis on the foundation."

London's rich heritage was also a plus point for Mr Ng, who says that unlike other arts centres such as New York, London is less business-centric, and its long history in the arts and design contributes to a great appreciation for art among the general population.

### **All Spiced Up**

Both Mr Ng and Mr Goh agree that living in one of the world's most vibrant cities is an eye-opening experience.

Diversity characterizes the city. London brings together more than 50 ethnic communities and also has an astonishing range of cultural resources and influential cultural institutions such as the Tate Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Royal Opera House.

"The juxtaposition of old and new, the traditional and the modern, marks out its unique identity and gives character to the city," says Mr Ng.

At King's College, he felt a special bond with his classmates and lecturers, who were like "an international family". Together, they attended workshops and classes in the West end, the epicenter of London's thriving arts scene.

Mr Goh also remembers relishing the eclectic atmosphere of this unique city. He recalls: "One day, I was having dinner in the relatively poor East End of London with a group of British friends. At the table, there were: a guy on the dole, a hermaphrodite, a gay neurosurgeon, a vegetarian couple who were doctors, a lesbian, a lawyer, a road sweeper, four cats, a dog – and me, from Bukit Batok!"

“At that time, the spice of life was so rich – the conversation was very sincere and uncensored. It was rather overwhelming, and I was sure then that London was a very special place.”

“And it still is.”