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## Me and My Money: Gems are just part of her sparkling portfolio



Ms Amanda Koo is the founder of jewellery business eClarity, which provides professional consultations and offers pieces. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR



**Sue-Ann Tan**  
Business Correspondent

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SINGAPORE - As the hit song goes, diamonds are a girl's best friend, but they can also be valuable items for investors looking to grow their wealth, says entrepreneur Amanda Koo.

Ms Koo certainly knows an investment gem when she sees one: Her interest - passion might be a more accurate term - lies in jewellery which in turn has a big influence on where she puts her money.

She has a personal jewellery collection that sits alongside her own gems business, a sign of her belief that there is an intangible personal and sentimental value in collecting objects like diamonds, rather than just accumulating cold hard cash.

Her passions extend to other areas as well, funding start-ups she believes in, such as those in music, dance and art.

Ms Koo, 44 and a certified counsellor herself, has an interest in mental health start-ups as well.

She is the founder of jewellery business eClarity, which provides professional consultations and offers pieces, including lab-grown diamonds, under a sub-brand.

The business also allows customers to rent a piece of jewellery on a monthly or yearly basis from a selection of more than thousands of items.

eClarity was founded in 2005 with a start-up capital of about \$80,000 that Ms Koo had saved from her early years of doing small business ventures and working in the corporate sector.

Before founding her own business, she worked at a telco as a project manager in the product development and information system team, working with ringtone downloads and SMS chat functions.

"When we first started out, there weren't many players in the industry specialising in the customisation and online sale of diamonds," she says.

That meant she could stay ahead of the curve by exploring the customisation process for engagement and wedding bands, as well as maintaining a real-time database of diamond availability.

People also invest in jewellery because of the personal connection. Ms Koo says she had a customer who brought in an heirloom from her grandmother - a two-carat diamond valued at \$9,000 around six decades ago. A similar piece now would cost \$70,000.

"Beyond the tangible return of the diamond, what is precious is also the intangible value, including the beauty and sophistication that her grandmother brought with her with the jewellery she wore in her lifetime, which was later passed on to her daughter, and then to her granddaughter," Ms Koo notes.



Ms Amanda Koo has her own gems business, as well as a personal jewellery collection. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

Tangible assets like diamonds also make good investments over a long period, similar to other alternative investible products like whiskey and wine.

But people wanting shorter-term gains can focus on rare gems or those that are in trend, says Ms Koo, who was born in Malaysia, where her father is chairman of chain jeweller Wah Chan.

She came to Singapore as a teenager and later graduated with a degree in computer science from the National University of Singapore.

Ms Koo also has a master's in counselling from Monash University in Australia and is a graduate gemologist and accredited jewellery professional with qualifications from New York.

The single mother has three sons aged 12, 15 and 17.

**Q: What's in your portfolio?**

**A:** My main investments include rare jewellery pieces for my business, property, managed portfolios, exchange-traded funds (ETFs) and stocks and start-ups. I also have investments in cryptocurrency and insurance. About 20 per cent of my investment goes to managed portfolios, another 20 per cent to the ETFs and stocks and 20 per cent to start-ups. I also do day trading, which I allocate another 20 per cent to. About 10 per cent of my portfolio is in cryptocurrency, insurance and others, while the last 10 per cent is left available for me to decide what to invest in. I also have my own diamond collection that is separate from the business. One of my top five favourites in my personal collection is a diamond necklace with a central one-carat heart-shaped diamond, 22 princess-cut diamonds, 22 baguette diamonds and 112 round brilliant diamonds in 18K gold, white, with a total worth of \$200,000. I also have a collection of Akoya pearl necklaces, Akoya pearl earrings, as well as a full set of blue sapphire jewellery and a diamond eternity bangle.

**Q: How did you get interested in investing?**

**A:** Even after I was 10 years into the business, I was never big on investments. My business funds were put into basic corporate accounts that yielded negligible interest rates. But this disposition I had towards investments changed after two separate encounters with my friends five years ago. I had a friend who owns a big regional conglomerate. He said his business was actually making a loss from the second generation onwards, and it was actually the earnings from his side investments that helped cushion the dip in revenue for his business, and now the business is well in its fourth generation. This inspired me to start planning ahead for my business and invest for rainy days. Another one of my friends, who is a business owner of my age and also came from a humble background, bought a bungalow worth \$9.8 million. We chatted about his investments and he said he has always been an active investor and sees a monthly investment return of \$30,000 from his range of investments. Witnessing the importance of investments, I spent two years reading more than 50 books, meeting up with bankers from different banks and joining an exclusive investment forum. With this exposure, I have now built a rather diversified portfolio that generates healthy dividends.

**Q: Describe your investing strategy.**

A: My strategy is simple: Buy in big names or US indexes during market crashes. I am dividend-focused and am well diversified in my portfolio, investing my funds into different countries and market segments. Keep some extra cash for fun trading and have an exit strategy as well as some extra cash for when the price drops further. I trade and invest with a computer scientist mindset, which puts emotions aside, and with minimal fundamental assessments of individual stocks.

**Q: What else is in your financial plan?**

A: I bought education insurance for my three sons, who have token sums for their respective education funds at the age of 18.

**Q: How are you planning for retirement?**

A: I love living a simple life. With a resort home in Malaysia, I could probably step into my first phase of active retirement now, if it weren't for the fact that I still love making a difference in and through my businesses. Currently I have close to \$1 million invested, with about 8 per cent returns. It is a humble start. I will continue to figure out my business and life direction as I mature past 45 years old.

**Q: What does money mean to you?**

A: I see money as a means to bring happiness. A means to have what you want, to do what you like, for as long as you prefer. But it's important to keep our wants as simple as possible.

**Q: Home is now...**

A: A 1,850 sq ft freehold condominium with four bedrooms in Novena.

**Q: I drive...**

A: A white Mini Cooper.

**Best and worst bets****Q: What has been your biggest investing mistake?**

A: I once entrusted someone with \$100,000 to trade on my behalf using investment algorithms and that fell through. I also invested \$100,000 into a start-up, believing in the team's potential and business model, but the business did not take off due to a lack of adaptability and willingness to tweak the business model when needed. These experiences taught me to be fully responsible and informed in my investments. Investing is about skills and knowledge, it is not a gamble, and it doesn't have a quick fix. So it is best that one does not go into investments unless they are fully aware of their actions, risks and plans.

**Q: And your best investment?**

A: eClarity was an investment in and of itself due to the higher capital amount required. Within that, my lab-grown business, BA.SG, has seen 500 per cent year-on-year growth since its start in 2019. A resort home that I bought in Malaysia 15 years ago was also one of my greatest investments in terms of its intangible returns, as it provided an avenue for family bonding, and a quick getaway to nature, with activities like horseback riding and a fruit farm.



Sunday, August 21, 2022

Me&amp;MyMoney

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**Entrepreneur's diversified assets include ETFs, stocks, property and crypto, bringing in 8% returns**



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Worst and best bets

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**Sue-Ann Tan**

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Ms Amanda Koo, founder of jewellery business eClarity, at her store in Ngee Ann City. The 44-year-old funds start-ups she believes in, such as those in music, dance, art and mental health.

ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR