



# From Creativity to Commerce

by [Editorial Team](#) | [December 26, 2013](#) | [No Comments](#) | [Culture](#)

One of the stories we're quite excited about on the TV Series Asia Rising is a look at luxury brands and how Asian economies have helped to create a renaissance for many iconic international companies. From high fashion to cars, Asian consumers are changing whole industries and the effects are profound. In this case, it has lead a well known photographer to give up his camera to launch a fund that invests in investment-grade watches, proving that capital and entrepreneurs follow opportunity.

## Celebrity Photographer Dominic Khoo Retires from Art to Go into Finance

Nominated against his idol Annie Leibovitz — famed for her pregnant photograph of Demi Moore — for Asia Pacific Photographer of the Year, Dominic Khoo ended his career as a celebrity photographer in 2012. After he became Singapore's most expensive living artist, he decided to concentrate fully on his other profession: investment-grade watches.

Khoo and his friends had made money from a decade of collecting and studying watches before deciding that "It's About Time" to start The Watch Fund. It is a world first investment-structure that allows investors to actually wear top-level watches and sell them later for a profit.

At USD\$16,000,000 assets under management in six months, The Watch Fund has garnered many supporters. "It can only exist now with this concept, connections, database and execution." says Khoo. The idea of a watch fund is not original — a watch fund was started in Luxembourg a few years ago but in that system investors only held onto a statement of investment and were not allowed to wear the watches. "We need to have a 'fun' fund," says Khoo. "Money making is not enough, fun must co-exist. If I can't wear what I spent money on, then what's the point? We wanted to create a whole new different kind of investment system."

So how does The Watch Fund work? The concept can be described with the scenario of a car fund. Let's say that you want to drive and own a super car. You invest USD\$250,000 in the car fund and they only take a 5% fee, giving you immediately a car to the lines of a Ferrari or a Bentley. You speed the car away. You attend the great events. You put the top down and let the wind through your hair. The person next to you kisses you on the lips. However, one day in the future you get sick of the car. The car fund would buy it back for more than USD\$275,000. You can choose to take the cash profit or reinvest it to get an even more exclusive car. Of course, such a car fund does not exist.

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Since its foundation in February 2013, The Watch Fund has become a serious player in the international investment scene. The hook is simple: Typical millionaires would end up buying 15-20 watches in their lifetime whether it is for themselves as individuals, for business associates or for loved ones. Considering that 99.9% of watches bought at retail prices would end up losing the buyer money — why not make a portion of this investment-grade? Particular watches have an annual increment of up to 15%. Khoo and his partners are connected to the highest levels of the industry and use their unparalleled network to gain access to these pieces that sometimes even money cannot buy.

During his 14-year experience of watch collecting, Khoo spoke on watches for several companies like The Hour Glass, UBS and Hermes. He was also given a royal warrant for watch-related and photography services by HRH Prince Hakeem Jefri Bolkiah of Brunei Darussalam. "One truth I know to exist: Guys have nothing else wearable to buy except for watches. If you know you're going to spend the money sooner or later — you better do it early," Khoo says referring to Warren Buffett's regret that at eleven years old — he had started investing too late. "With the price of skilled labour only going to go up in the watch industry — top-level watches will always rarer and more expensive", he continues.

Contrary to public belief, Dominic Khoo was the only South-East Asian watch expert even before he started photography. The passionate watch collector was given a camera on his 28th birthday to take pictures of watches. He continued to take shots of celebrities wearing watches and eventually became a famous celebrity photographer. During his seven years of photography, he has photographed more than 150 international celebrities including actors like Nicolas Cage and Tony Leung, soccer star Zinedine Zidane and the Dalai Lama. Khoo built up his career as a certified watch expert at the same time, but it was more a silent passion contrary to the big spotlights and the red carpets. "I think it's much easier to believe a 28-year-old is a famous photographer than a trained watch expert," he admits laughing.

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