

Turn your loved ones' ashes into diamonds

Service comes at a price; gems have no commercial value



By ANG YIYING

IN ABOUT six months, Madam Chin Siat Ngo, 83, will receive a special gift in memory of her late younger sister Chin Mee Ngo (left): a 0.4-carat diamond made in a Swiss lab from her ashes.

The gift from her son and daughter-in-law comes courtesy of technology that can “grow” the ashes into a sparkler – the high temperatures in the lab in Switzerland extract carbon from ashes.

The final product sparkles like a natural diamond, but has no commercial value. It is more a keepsake of love.

To create such a rock, 500g of ashes are needed; depending on the requested size of the gem, it can take up to 52 weeks to make.

The 0.4-carat stone requested by the Chins, the first Singaporean customers of Algordanza International, will be 26 weeks or so in the making. The family sent the ashes to Switzerland last month.

Such a keepsake is not cheap. In fact, it costs quite a bit more than a

diamond of equivalent carat weight.

For customers here, Algordanza's prices start at \$6,399 for a 0.25-carat stone and go up to \$9,399 for a 0.4-carat one and \$33,999 for a one-carat gem.

A one-carat natural diamond can cost between \$2,000 and \$30,000, depending on its cut, colour and clarity or number of inner flaws, said Mr Ho Nai Chuen, the president of the Singapore Jewellers Association.

But Algordanza said its diamonds cannot be compared to natural diamonds because they are for “memorial value”.

The technology has been available from the company since 2004, and Algordanza has since pulled in 3,000 global customers, serving them through its offices in 23 countries, the latest of which is here.

Madam Chin Siat Ngo declined to be interviewed, but her daughter-in-law Penny Chin, a 59-year-old retiree, told The Straits Times that the family decided to get a lab-created diamond as a keepsake.

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Sparkling way to remember the dead



A 0.85-carat radiant cut diamond containing the ashes of a German woman. Algordanza Singapore now offers a service that would convert part of a loved one's ashes into a precious keepsake. The company said it has already received more than 30 enquiries. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

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The Chin sisters had been close and lived together, the younger sister a constant companion and chauffeur to the elder, said Mrs Chin.

“I thought that to do a diamond and put it on a cross for her to wear – I think it speaks for itself.”

She said her mother-in-law had signalled her approval with the response: “If it can be done, then good.”

Mrs Chin said she remembers her late aunt-in-law as quiet and reserved, and fond of her two pet dogs. She was not particularly fond of jewellery.

Asked if she would consider making these stones out of the ashes of her other loved ones, Mrs Chin said: “I will wait for the cost to go down first.”

When asked if he thought the technology would dampen the demand for crematorium niches here, Algordanza

Singapore's chief executive Ang Ziqian, 29, said he did not think so, as the amount of ashes needed is only a portion of a person's ashes, and that families may still want to keep the remaining ashes for traditional rites.

Mr Ang, who is also a director of four funeral service firms, said he wanted to give Singaporeans “a new and beautiful way” to remember their loved ones.

A diamond – portable and with no customs restrictions hanging over it – is also good for the mobile Singaporean who is posted overseas and unable to perform traditional remembrance rites, he added.

Algordanza Singapore has already received more than 30 enquiries, he said.

He concedes that not everyone may be receptive to making jewellery out of the ashes of a loved one.

Still, it does give the phrase “a gem of a person” a new spin.

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Additional reporting by Mou Zongxiao

SPECIAL KEEPSAKE

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Mrs Chin, whose aunt-in-law's ashes were made into a diamond