

# Roads

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## LOOKING SHARP: VOGUE LAUNDRY IN HONG KONG

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# Looking sharp in Hong Kong: Vogue Laundry

Roads checks in with Vogue Laundry to hear how they keep Hong Kong looking good on a commercial scale.

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**T**ouching down into the heart of Hong Kong's exuberant bustle, energy is everywhere. The pulse of commerce can be felt on the street and in the city's restaurants and shops.

Sixteen years after its return to China, however, Hong Kong is still getting used to the influx of new people, policy and business from the mainland. The city is perennially busy, and evidence of its constant growth and change is everywhere. As the famous skyline recedes in the mirror on the way to Tuen Mun in the New Territories, many of the trucks on the road are showing their age.

Earlier this year, the government announced HK\$10 billion (about \$1.3 billion) in subsidies to encourage owners of some 80,000 outdated commercial vehicles to update to more fuel-efficient and low-emission models. Despite air quality and other challenges that come with growth, there is a palpable optimism, an upbeat feeling that it will all come out in the wash.

### Enter Vogue

Located in Tuen Mun, Vogue began as a small retail shop doing laundry and dry cleaning. Next year, it will celebrate its 50th anniversary. From humble beginnings, Vogue has grown into one of the largest commercial laundry companies in Hong Kong, and counts major hotels, clubs and airlines, including parent company Cathay Pacific, among its customers.

As with any large city, laundry is big



business. "Some old-style hotels still maintain in-house laundry facilities," says Manager Marketing & Sales Emily Kam. "But as space is at a premium in Hong Kong, most of them outsource their laundry services."

To keep customers happy, Vogue concentrates on the quality of its cleaning services and the efficiency of its network of pickup and delivery teams. Keeping the hotels, restaurants and airlines of Hong Kong looking good is an important job that keeps everyone on their toes.

### Challenges

"Manpower is very expensive here," says Logistics Manager Alan Yiu. A statutory minimum wage of HK\$30 (about \$3.80) has been in place since May 2013, intensifying already fierce competition for skilled, licensed drivers. In classic Hong Kong style, workers often "shop around" for the best employment conditions, and turnover is high.

Vogue's fleet is comprised primarily of UD trucks. "I enjoy driving them," says Chak Hung, a 10-year veteran Vogue driver whose routes change from day to day according to customers' needs. "The trucks are very stable, regardless of whether they're empty or full, and the cab is quiet and comfortable." Vogue observes a strict environmental policy; it was among the first companies in Hong Kong to have a 10-ton Euro 5 emission standard-compliant truck, and drivers like Chak Hung are careful never to let the engine idle.

Another challenge comes in the form of route planning. "Each customer has their own unique scheduling needs that we need to meet for collection and delivery, and this means very careful planning to make sure we're running efficiently," says

Yiu. "Sometimes those details change, and when they do, everything needs to be juggled and reorganized. Our organization never stops. It runs 24 hours." Each truck's daily route takes it over about 200 kilometers of Hong Kong's roads. Add to this other variables such as traffic jams and typhoons, and the magnitude of Yiu's task starts to become clear.

### Not uniforms, "Collections"

The Chinese government's recent relaxation of visa regulations for people from the mainland has led to a sharp increase in hotel occupancy. "There used to be a 'summer peak' when the numbers of tourists were



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### Vogue Laundry Service Limited

**Total employees:** About 600

**Pickup & Delivery Staff:** 57 drivers, 100 delivery staff

**Number of trucks:** 27

**Relationship with UD:** Vogue Laundry has used UD trucks for 20 years. Currently, 80% of its fleet is UD, primarily the GVW 10.4-ton MKB.

**Volume:** About 75 tons, or 270,000 individual items, each day

**Retail shops:** 9 on Hong Kong Island, one each in Kowloon and the New Territories



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highest," says Kam. "After that, we had two months to rest a bit before gearing up for Chinese New Years. Now, there's no time to rest. Our customers' hotels are constantly full and we work around the clock."

This spike in tourism has meant more money for the major hotels, many of which have since undergone renovation and other overhauls, including uniforms. Kam explains: "In some cases, it's not even called a uniform. Real designers are hired for the staff's clothing. Rather than a uniform, they refer to it as a 'collection.'"

Such 'collections' are often made from unique fabrics and have special cleaning

requirements, especially for kitchen staff, whose uniforms are white and thus most vulnerable to the kind of staining that can only happen during food preparation. Specialization at such delicate cleaning is one of the reasons Vogue has been able to thrive.

### On the up and up

With plans to move to a new facility in 2016, including investments in new cleaning technology and the capacity to process a larger volume on a daily basis, everyone at Vogue is excited about the future. "Hong Kong is growing, and we aim to grow along with it," says Yiu. ■

**01.** Veteran Vogue Laundry Driver Chak Hung on his daily rounds.

**02.** Left: Emily Kam, Manager, Marketing & Sales; Right: Logistics Manager Alan Yiu.

**03.** A Vogue Laundry vehicle makes its rounds.

*"Each customer has their own unique scheduling needs that we need to meet for collection and delivery."*

*Alan Yiu, Logistics Manager*

