

# A novel approach

In search of a more personal writing style, author Yang-May Ooi turns to blogs—and discovers what makes them so compelling to write and to read

by **Silvia Cambié**

**H**ow do you escape the solitary world of book writing, with endless days spent in your pajamas typing along at a project that takes months before it—and maybe you—sees the light of day? Yang-May Ooi, the author of two novels, *The Flame Tree* and *Mindgame*, both published by Hodder & Stoughton in the U.K., has the answer: blogging.

Ooi, who has been profiled in an English literature textbook alongside the likes of Kazuo Ishiguro and Salman Rushdie, came across blogs from all over the world while surfing the Net (instead of writing!), and became fascinated by the personal voices of many strangers. Drawing on her own experience—she was born in Malaysia and educated in the U.K.—Ooi has launched the innovative, magazine-style East-West blog Fusion View ([www.fusionview.co.uk](http://www.fusionview.co.uk)). Frequent *CW* contributor Silvia Cambié talked to Ooi to find out how she has used her multimedia site to create a growing cross-cultural community of writers, filmmakers and readers.

**Silvia Cambié:** How easy was it for you to make the transition from writing books to blogging?

**Yang-May Ooi:** After two legal thrillers, I wanted to develop a more personal, informal

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—Yang-May Ooi



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style for my third novel. I started a blog and found myself writing daily with enthusiasm—such a contrast from the struggle to work on my next novel! The more I wrote, the more visitors came to my site. E-mails and comments from readers encouraged me to write more. And as I wrote online, I rediscovered my own personal voice.

**SC: How do you create a community around a blog?**

**Y-MO:** A social network online is just like one in the real world, only you make connections through written text instead of speaking to someone personally. You visit other blogs, and you can join in the conversation by leaving a comment or e-mailing the blogger. The blog owner is likely to take a look at your blog in response, and other visitors might also come along via the conversation you just joined. They might then add their thoughts to your conversation.

A lot of advice out there about blogging says that links are the currency to make your blog top the search engines. That may be true, but it’s a sterile way of looking at what blogging is about. For me, the key is to engage in a real way with other bloggers. Take the story of the translator Nicky Harman, who e-mailed me to ask if I knew any literary agents for her translation of a Chinese novel into English. I did not, but I was intrigued and invited her to write a first-person piece about the process of translation. As a result, she was approached by a publisher in China and is also talking to a U.K. literary agent, both of whom found her on Fusion View.

**SC: How can blogs be used to promote the profile of writers and communicators?**

**Y-MO:** First off, a blog isn’t necessarily a replacement for traditional forms of PR, such as press releases or networking, but used in conjunction with them, blogging can increase your profile in a powerful way. The more regularly you write on your blog, the more Google and other search engines will love your site. At a deeper level, by building a quality community around the themes of your blog, you are likely to have more targeted traffic from visitors who are interested in what you are writing.

Having a well-designed site that projects your personal brand and delights the eye also helps. I started my blog in April [2006], using the free platform Blogger. When I realized that I was devel-

oping an online brand for my writing, I switched to a paid-for hosted site and commissioned Web designers to create a site that reflected that image. Just because there are free tools for blogging doesn’t mean you should use them for your business. That’s like using free clip art as your logo.

**SC: You are collaborating on a script for a TV drama with U.K. best-selling author Caro Fraser. What is the difference between communicating through books, online and TV?**

**Y-MO:** Screen drama is entirely visual. It’s been interesting developing the story through the eye of a lens and thinking in terms of frames. The text between the dialogue is all about how a viewer would, well, view the scene—literally. You are communicating your ideas through images, drama and dialogue. The first rule of great drama is “show, not tell.”

Writing a fiction book can be a long, isolating experience. And then once you finish the book, the publishing process can take another 18 months, so you are not really communicating with your audience until possibly two or three years after you started the project.

Writing online is much more fluid, immediate and fun. I love the direct communication with my readers through e-mails and comments, as well as the network I am involved in through engaging in others’ blogs. Online communication has also led to real-world connections: I speak at book events in Malaysia. I’ve been commissioned to write articles for the U.K. writers’ journal *Mslexia* and contribute to a book of essays in Malaysia. I’m also in discussion with an editor about a book project based on the series on my blog called “Getting Published.” All this has come directly from having a blog.

**SC: Fusion View is about bridging cultures through writing, art and other means of communication. What is the most important factor to keep in mind when communicating across cultures?**

**Y-MO:** That what you think you know about another culture you probably don’t know. It’s worth opening the discussion with curiosity and proceeding with respect. Inviting others who might have more depth of knowledge or who may disagree with your viewpoint to add to the dialogue can be a gracious way of encouraging quality feedback in the spirit of discovery.



# FusionView

An East/West view on writing, culture and the arts

## Phone Blogging from Malaysia



While I am in Malaysia in the next 10 days or so, I will be having a go at Phone Blogging. The player below will be updated with a new episode every time I report by phone on my Malaysian trip. This page will headline Fusion View until Monday 05 March 07.00 am GMT.

Why Phone Blogging? Because I will be staying with my parents and the most up to date technology they have is an electric typewriter... So, I will not be able to update this blog using text.

I won't be able to do any editing to the phone blog so it will essentially be like a live podcast from my phone

Also, I won't be able to add any written notes to my phone report so the player will show only Episode 4\*, Episode 5\* etc. You can listen to each episode by clicking on the relevant episode in the player below. I will aim to record a report every other day so check back from time to time to hear the latest episode.

I hope you enjoy this experiment!

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**Fusion View** is created by **Yang-May Ooi**, author of *The Flame Tree* and *Mindgame*, legal thrillers set in Malaysia and London, first published by Hodder & Stoughton.

“In today’s globalized world, the fascinating mix of cultures in many people’s lives will only increase.”

Online communication through her blog Fusion View has led Yang-May Ooi to real-world connections, including speaking engagements and writing assignments.

**SC: How important has it been to you to focus your blog on cross-cultural issues?**

**Y-MO:** One of my projects for a possible third novel was based around stories of my family. I have uncles and aunts who have migrated from Malaysia to the U.K., the U.S. and Australia. I have made London my home, while my parents still live in Malaysia. Looking further back down the generations, my ancestors arrived in Malaysia from China. It’s as if we’ve been migrants all through the generations. As I started to explore

that, it struck me that many of my close friends have come to the U.K. from all over the world. I realized that I had more in common with “fusion” people than specifically Chinese people or Malaysian people or English people. In today’s globalized world, the fascinating mix of cultures in many people’s lives will only increase. I feel very much that cross-cultural living is an important emerging trend. ●

**about the author**

Silvia Cambié is the director of Chanda Communications in London and chair of the IABC/ Europe and Middle East region.