

Mum's cooking in a snap

The one person whom photographer Dominic Khoo wants to cook for him is his late mother

Rebecca Lynne Tan

Photographer Dominic Khoo confesses to having a weakness for greasy cubes of pork lard.

"That has got to be the basis why Chinese food tastes so good all the time," says the 31-year-old, who usually asks hawkers for extra servings of the crunchy and flavourful cubes.

The warm, well-spoken foodie, who lives in a condominium off River Valley Road, loves hawker fare and travels all over the island to get his fix – from Bedok Interchange for dessert at Hollywood Ice Kachang, Owen Road for kaya toast and back to Zion Road Riverside Food Centre for char kway teow.

He says: "I am very specific in my tastes. If I feel like having char kway teow, there is only one place I will go for that and anything else would be a compromise."

He began dabbling in photography in April 2005 but decided to take it more seriously the following year.

Last year, the sales and marketing graduate from Perth's Curtin University launched Pure, a coffee-table book featuring Asian celebrities and socialites laughing and crying in the nude.

It raised \$350,000 for charities including the Singapore After-Care Association, the key agency which provides welfare and rehabilitation services for discharged offenders and their families.

The book was in honour of his mother, who died in an accident in 2005.

In fact, much of his love for food and his sensitive palate can be attributed to his mother's tasty home cooking.

He says: "Her cheesecake is still the best I have ever had."

Do you take many pictures of food?

During my first few years of photography, I would shoot everything I ate, so much so that some restaurant patrons would get very irritated with me. But I wouldn't spend too much time shooting because my food would get cold.

What are some of your childhood food memories?

A lot of spicy food, hawker fare and home-cooked goodness. I had a good variety.

When I was growing up, my grandfa-

WHAT WOULD YOUR LAST MEAL BE?

Pork lard will definitely be involved, and so will chilli padi. My last meal would have to be Singaporean – chicken rice, char kway teow, prawn noodles or bak kut teh from my favourite eateries.



Khoo says his mother's prawn noodles and cheesecake are unbeatable.

ST PHOTO: SHAHRIYA YAHAYA

ther would always insist on a Sunday curry lunch. We would usually go to Samy's Curry in Dempsey Road.

What is your biggest food indulgence?

Pork lard. I always get extra pork lard when I eat char kway teow and bak chor mee (minced pork noodles). The zhi char eatery Sin Hoi Sai in Tiong Bahru always gives me an extra plate of pork lard when I order the fried fish fillet bee hoon soup.

Where are your favourite local haunts?

I am a big fan of the Zion Road Riverside Food Centre – it has really good char kway teow. It also has a great prawn noodle and chye tow kway (radish cake) stall. I like Founder Bak Kut Teh in Balestier

Road and eat there up to three times a week.

I also like the nasi padang eatery Rumah Makan Minang in Kandahar Street and the cuttlefish kangkong in Bedok Corner Food Centre.

Which restaurants do you find yourself heading back to?

Of late, I have been going to Braise in Sentosa. It does a very good job and every time I go there, I have a happy meal. There is a slipper lobster angel hair pasta with spicy fish roe which is very good.

The olive bread that is served at Garibaldi in Purvis Street is fantastic as well – it is the only thing I like as much as kaya toast.

Recently, I have been going to Su Korean in the basement of Far East Plaza for its marinated short ribs.



I am also a big fan of Crystal Jade Palace in Ngee Ann City. Every now and then, I will have to order the fried rice with salted fish and chicken cubes. I don't normally like fried rice but Crystal Jade's is an exception.

For fantastic yakitori, I go to Kazu Sumiyaki Restaurant in Cuppage Plaza. I also like the Cantonese restaurant Hua Ting in Orchard Hotel – I always have a good, hearty meal there.

What do you cook at home?

Does sukiyaki count? It's very simple – all you need to do is buy good beef.

I just get good Japanese or American beef – Rockdale is a good value-for-money alternative to wagyu cuts. And I buy the stock, so I guess it really does not count as cooking.

What is always in your fridge?

Ritter Sport Hazelnut Chocolate. I cannot understand why it is so good but I think it must be the blend – the makers really have it down pat. I stock up every time I stop by the petrol station. I buy about eight to 10 blocks at a go.

What dish of your mother's do you miss the most?

Her prawn noodles was really unbeatable. She also cooked a really good chicken curry that had a thick masala-like gravy.

Another one of her dishes was *gai zao*, a clear soup of chicken in an XO stock with black fungus.

Who makes a better cook, a man or a woman?

Statistically, all my favourite foods have been cooked, both in restaurants and hawker centres, by men. But then again, if there is one person whom I would want to cook for me again, it would still be my mother.

Ingredients can be standardised but how is it that your mother's cooking is always the best? Can you ever be objective about your mother's cooking? It's a tough question but I'm happy to be biased.

If you had the opportunity to dine with anyone in the world, who would it be?

Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew. I would love to hear stories about the food he likes and find out what his tastes are. I think it would be very interesting to see whether his food tastes have changed over the years.

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Wine Club/Jenny Tan

Domaine Schlumberger les Princes Abbes Riesling 2005, \$46

Busting French stereotypes

My trip to Alsace many years ago left me with a deep impression of the French wine region.

It broke the classic stereotype that, very generally speaking, the French enjoy life a little more than work, what with their long summer holidays.

Indeed, Alsacians are a hardworking lot, so much so that it prompted one of my travelling companions to exclaim: "They seem more... German than French."

It is not a comment that is entirely wrong (and to those who may take offence at these blanket statements, apologies in advance), for Alsace and Germany have long had a connection – France and Germany fought many battles over Alsace and Lorraine in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Another point of departure: Alsace will also change your impression that French wines are more about reds than whites.

While Alsace has produced some nice Pinot Noirs over the last few years, most of what it puts out in the market are its gorgeous whites.

Its main white grape varieties are Pinot

Blanc, Riesling and Pinot Gris, followed by Sylvaner and Gewurtztraminer.

I love building up my list of favourite producers from Alsace – Domaine Weinbach for its quiet elegance and power, Marc Kreydenweiss for its purity, Hugel for its accessibility and history, Marcel Deiss for its renegade philosophy – especially since the selection in Singapore is not the widest.

So here is my latest discovery: Domaine Schlumberger, a family-owned winery with two generations of producers – sixth-generation Alain Beydon-Schlumberger and seventh-generation Séverine Schlumberger – working side by side.

Alsace wine-growers (those who make their wines from grapes grown on their own property) make up only 22 per cent of the wine region's production, and Domaine Schlumberger belongs to this category.

Among the 140ha of vineyards it owns, about 70ha are classified as Grands Crus – Kitterlé, Kessler, Saering, Spiegel.

Another interesting fact: While it has be-

come quite fashionable for wineries to return to the traditional way of ploughing the soil with carts attached to horses, Domaine Schlumberger has been using this technique since Day One.

Taste test

Les Princes Abbes may be the most basic range from the winery but it offers good value. Lovely nose of ripe citrus fruits followed through by flavours of ripened citrus fruits, layers of minerality, a slight savoury note and fresh acidity. Lovely finish.

Pair with

Lobster or stir-fried seafood dishes.

Available at

Le Rouge (tel: 6532-7992)
Wine Plus (tel: 6253-9151)
Oaks Cellar at Great World (tel: 6835-3511)
Grand Vin (tel: 6465-3081)



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TOP TIPPLE

LEARN TO MAKE El Diablo

Ingredients
30ml Don Julio Reposado tequila
15ml Creme De Cassis
15ml lime juice
25ml ginger beer

Garnish
1 raspberry

Method

1. Pour all the ingredients except ginger beer into a glass.
2. Add ice to the brim and top up with fresh ginger beer.
3. Garnish with a fresh raspberry.

Taste

Sweet and refreshing.

Price

\$16 at Bedrock Bar & Grill, 96 Somerset Road, 01-05 Pan Pacific Serviced Suites, tel: 6238-0054

