

Survival of the fit

The son of former Chief Justice Wee Chong Jin has built a mini yoga empire



▶ Wong Kim Hoh

man with a penchant for fast cars.
Mr Wee, who says he has been dating a Korean model for the last 2½ years, says his tastes in cars are a lot more sedate.
"I drive a Lexus SUV now."
However, he sheepishly confesses that he has just picked up the keys to a Maserati Quattroporte.
His free time, he says, is spent with his 87-year-old father whom he calls — eyes tearing suddenly — the "most compassionate man I've ever known."
"I look at him now, surrounded by four loving kids. It's something you cannot buy. And I certainly don't want to grow old without children."

TRIED AND TRUE: Patrick Wee begins each day with seven sets of sun salutations.



PHOTO: CAE

A LOCAL society magazine recently listed Patrick Wee as one of Singapore's most eligible bachelors.
He is not happy.

"I was the oldest one on the list. It's sad. I'm 40 and not married," the boyish-looking bachelor wails and sighs with mock melodrama.

The man behind True Yoga, Singapore's largest yoga centre, sums up his state of singlehood in one word: Work.

"I work 14- or 15-hour days, seven days a week. I used to go shooting with a .45 automatic at the National Shooting Centre and power-gliding in Johor Baru.

"Now, I don't even get to play golf. I guess one has to make sacrifices in this life and this is the time to do it."

Mr Wee, the youngest of former Chief Justice Wee Chong Jin's four children with his wife Cecilia, is not sure whether the sacrifices have been worth it.

"God only knows," says the law-trained entrepreneur.

But there is no hiding the pride in his voice when he talks about the little empire he has built ever since he left the law profession and entered the fitness business about seven years ago.

"I have fitness centres and yoga studios in Korea, Thailand, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia," says Mr Wee, who was the local partner for California Fitness when it opened here in the late 1990s.

His ventures are not small affairs. He has four California Workout Worlds in Thailand, all of them over 50,000 sq ft — including one that is under construction.

This month, he launched True Fitness, a 40,000 sq ft facility in Kuala Lumpur.

In Singapore, he raised many eyebrows when he pumped in "north of a million dollars" to open True Yoga in November.

Located in Pacific Plaza in Scotts Road, the 12,000 sq ft centre is the biggest here. It boasts

two studios — one of which can accommodate 90 people — and offers 20 yoga classes, from Hatha to fusion yoga, daily.

"I have eight full-time yoga instructors from India, three part-timers from Singapore and we occasionally bring in masters to teach specific courses."

Detractors wonder whether it is a huge gamble. After all, yoga — unlike general fitness — may not be everyone's cup of tea. Mr Wee thinks otherwise.

"Yoga conditions not just the mind but the body too," says the lanky man, who begins each day with seven sets of sun salutations.

"We have all the facilities and, more importantly, we offer flexibility. We have 20 classes for people to choose from each day. A person can come here, do a class, shower and head back to work without wasting a large part of the day."

He continues enthusiastically: "Also, it's very affordable. We are half the price of our competitors."

He then quotes American tycoon Donald Trump: "If you build the best, they will come."

His confidence is boosted by his success in Hong Kong. He opened a Planet Yoga there in February 2003, when Sars was rearing its ugly head.

"I thought we'd go bankrupt in six months. But by June that year, we had signed up 3,000 members. Right now, more than 30,000 people a month go through our doors in Hong Kong. Singapore shouldn't be any different."

He started working life as a lawyer after graduating from the National University of Singapore in the late 1980s.

He was handling the legal work for the setting up of California Fitness here in 1996 when he got roped in as its local partner.

"Being a lawyer was great training for the mind, but it was not something I wanted to do for the rest of my life. Most of the time, it's a contest of wills — between you and a client or you and another lawyer, and I found it very negative."

He claims to be a lot happier now, even though his workload is punishing.

He also claims he no longer has the time to live up to his reputation as a ladies'

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