

Asian bagus

Wherever he may roam, fashion designer Goh Lai Chan prefers street food to fancy fine dining

Eunice Quek

Fashion designer Goh Lai Chan may dress high society women in bespoke gowns and cheongsam, but he says candidly that his "glamorous image is bulls***".

The 49-year-old bachelor says: "I don't really fancy fine dining and enjoy squatting at a roadside stall eating noodles in Laos."

"Also on a hiking trip in Nepal, we reached a stop at night and the instant noodles we ate never tasted so good."

Goh, who runs his boutique Laichan at the Raffles Hotel Arcade, is fiercely loyal to his Asian roots. He cannot go without Chinese food when he is overseas.

Waving his hands frantically, he says in mock horror: "When I was in Paris, I remember having a croissant for breakfast on the first morning. It was so lovely. On the second morning, I looked at the croissant and thought, oh croissant again. The third day, I saw a croissant again and I could not take it. I need Chinese food."

"The best meal I had after the croissant was a lovely bowl of hot and sour soup."

For convenience, he sometimes plans his meals around fast food. That, however, backfired at a KFC outlet in Guangzhou, China.

He says: "I pointed to the wrong meal and ended up with a litre of Pepsi, a huge bucket of chicken, corn and drumlets. I was very embarrassed but ate slowly and played it cool even though everyone was looking at me. So the lesson is, ask before you point."

What are your childhood memories of food?

My late mother cooked dinner at 5pm. It would be ready by 6pm and everything was cleared at 7pm. If you were late or slow, you did not get to eat.

My dad would eat slowly, while my 14 siblings and I would try to eat fast so that we could leave the table quickly to play.

If we held our chopsticks the wrong way, we would get scolded. Also, we had to put down our chopsticks before we spoke.

For a nice snack, I miss having Khong Guan biscuits with butter and sugar.

What do you want to eat when you come back from your travels?

I go straight to the East Coast Lagoon Food Village for hawker food. It does not really matter what we have but I always order too much food.



What are your favourite hawker foods?

I crave chwee kueh and mee siam. I like vinegar, so I love a good lor mee. I go to Ampang Niang Tou Fu at 225 East Coast Road as well.

Where are your favourite food haunts?

Shunjuu Izakaya at 30 Robertson Quay for good Japanese food. I always order the monkfish liver with vinegar and fermented soy beans with squid.

For Sichuan cuisine, I dine at Xing Hua at 29/31 Tyrwhitt Road, off Jalan Besar. I like that it is offbeat and the outlet has a nice Hong Kong style to it, like it is out of a Wong Kar Wai film. I order the Sichuan-style spicy sliced beef, shredded potato with vinegar and dried chilli, and Sichuan cold spice chicken.

I love chicken rice, so I go to Kampong Chicken Eating House at 247 Outram Road for the tender chicken.

I chanced upon Pies & Coffee at Rochester Mall and enjoy its wagyu beef cheek pie which is moist and has a lovely crust. I also like its sticky date pudding with caramel.

For breakfast or meetings, I go to Ah Teng's Bakery and Empire Cafe at Raffles Hotel.

Tell us about your foodie groups.

For many years, three friends and I gathered at Liang Court's McDonald's to eat fries and drink iced lemon tea every week, either on Friday or Saturday nights. We have cut down on this though.

Sometimes I travel with different groups and this September we are planning a road trip to Kuala Lumpur to eat. Once, we went to Phuket for an eating trip. I ran 8km every day for two weeks before the trip so that I could eat like crazy.

Do you cook?

I cannot cook and do not cook but I throw a great party. I've hosted Italian and Russian themed dinners before. For the Italian one, I bought canned soup from Marks & Spencer, got everyone out of the kitchen, heated it up and served the soup in beautiful seashells.

Once, my group in church had to prepare breakfast for about 200 people with \$200. Instead of doing the usual kueh or sandwiches, we served barbecued meat on skewers on my dismantled Ikea shelf. Yes, I may not have the skills but I have the gadgets.

Do you have any food quirks?

I stopped eating pork when I was about 17 years old. Somehow I did not like the idea of eating a lazy and fat animal that rolls around in mud all day. The only pork I'd eat was bak kwa every Chinese New Year. But slowly I stopped eating that too. When my sister makes dumplings for the annual Dragon Boat Festival, she will specially make Nonya ones with vegetables for me.

Are you an adventurous foodie?

Not really, but I do not mind trying. In Datong, in the Shanxi province of China, my friend and I tried rabbit's head, which is a delicacy there. The meat was very tender and it was scraped off the skull. It was my first and last time.

What's comfort food for you?

Rice, as it is the simplest form of food that everyone can afford and enjoy.

If you could invite someone (dead or alive) for a meal, who would you pick?

My late parents, and I would ask my mother to cook. I miss her porridge and chicken rice. It would be quite funny to have my dad eating slowly with all of us again.

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WHAT WOULD YOUR LAST MEAL BE?

Chwee kueh, char kway teow and roti prata with curry.



To "prepare" for an eating trip to Phuket, designer Goh Lai Chan ran 8km every day for two weeks.

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