

Seeking Truth

When lawyer turned fitness entrepreneur Patrick Wee decided to strike out on his own, he chose to name his fitness business True, reports **Low Yit Leng**

LAST YEAR THE YOUNGEST SON of former Chief Justice, Patrick Wee, launched True Yoga, Singapore's largest yoga centre at Pacific Plaza. Recently he made news again when he opened his second location in the heart of Raffles Place at Ocean Towers, another 16,000 square feet site.

"I have always believed in the power of developing a brand that is able to go beyond just one business," says Patrick who has since opened a True Fitness centre in Malaysia, and has also started selling specially designed sports apparel. Why did he choose the name True? "A lot has to do with our background," says Patrick whose father, Wee Chong Jin, was Chief Justice of Singapore for 27 years. "My father was a lawyer and someone associated with the truth. One thing that stuck with me was what my father had always told his children — you always have to be true to yourself and always pursue the truth," explains Patrick who practised law for a decade before venturing into the fitness business.

Since 1997, the chief executive of True Yoga has been closely associated

with California Fitness Centre with interests in fitness clubs in Thailand and South Korea. Patrick was a partner in Ray Wilson California Fitness and he also set up two Singapore centres. In 1999, he sold his interests in the Singapore company and moved to Hong Kong to oversee the expansion plans of California Fitness in Taiwan, Korea and Thailand. "I thought it was a fantastic opportunity to bring the concept out of Singapore and to benefit people. It is a business that brings the best of people and you do make a good return," says Patrick who enjoyed his stint overseas.

"I landed in Taiwan in 1999. I had to find a location, get a lease signed, hire and recruit people and design the club. This was also done in Korea and Thailand. I learned so much from the experiences — starting something from zero to the end product. Everyone has a different way of doing business in a foreign land. Going overseas and establishing myself there was one of the most challenging things that I had done. I found that Singaporeans are well regarded because we can get the job done. It is the same when I build this brand — True is a Singapore brand that

"MY PARENTS HAVE ALWAYS SAID YOU CAN EITHER BE A SHEEP OR A SHEPHERD. IF YOU WANT TO MAKE ANYTHING OUT OF LIFE, YOU HAVE TO BE OUT IN FRONT TO LEAD AND THAT REQUIRES PASSION AND INTEGRITY"

I am taking overseas. We have a fitness business in Malaysia and we hope to establish in other countries in the region next year."

Patrick had his first taste of yoga back in 2001. "It was in India in the garden of the New Delhi Hyatt. I was practising by the pool on the grass. There was no mat and the instructor was stepping on my back. When I told the instructor that ants were biting me, he said, 'maintain your posture' and would not let me get up. Yoga helps you to concentrate and focus. It takes away all the noise and distraction and during that one hour, you are just thinking how much longer can you hold a posture," he says.

An alumnus of the National University of Singapore where he studied law, Patrick was a keen sportsman in school where he played tennis and rugby. "I was very playful in school and used to think that my siblings enjoyed a wonderful life because they were sent abroad for their further education," recalls Patrick. "But I am thankful to my parents because I met my lifelong friends at the university and have a lot of fond memories of my childhood in Singapore."

He recalls when he first told his father about his plans to open yoga centre, "My father said: 'You already have the fitness centres; what are you doing with yoga?' My response was: 'Yoga is the future — it is back.' Even though yoga has been around for a long time, it has been practised only by a small group of people," he points out.

Today, there is a lot of family influence in the way he conducts his life. "My parents taught me an important trait," he says. "They have always said you can either be a sheep or a shepherd. If you want to make anything out of life, you have to be out in front to lead and that requires passion and integrity. They also reminded me that people must believe in you so your reputation is important," shares Patrick who is still single, but is often seen with a beautiful companion.

Described as someone who does not hesitate in being hands on in running a business, Patrick attributes this trait to his mother. "Both my parents are from Penang, Malaysia. I have a sister who still

lives in Australia. My mother was so bored in Singapore after my father retired that she went to Australia where she bought a hotel and today she has four hotels to run. Even though she is 74 years old, she still flies in and out of Singapore and works 12 hours a day. This is probably why I am so driven because I am very much like my mother. She was the disciplinarian in the family. She would say: 'If you see someone sweeping the floor, find out how he does

it and if you can sweep as well as he, then you will have learned something'," smiles Patrick.

A great source of pleasure for Patrick is not only designing the club, but also looking into the various details including the furnishings. "There is a sense of pride when you walk into a place that you have built and when people are wowed by what they see — it is one of the most satisfying things for me," he smiles. 📍

