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PAGE: 1

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TWO years ago, coffee lover Jessica Tan realised that Singaporeans were becoming more informed about the aromatic beverage.

Tan — who was no stranger to the café culture in Hong Kong, Taipei and London — also noticed a stronger presence of indie coffee chains here.

At around the same time, she was contemplating setting up a business in Singapore after deciding to quit her business development job in China to join her husband back home.

Inspired by the lifestyle trends that she had spotted, Tan and former hotel pastry chef Alfred Chan decided to set up a café that offers coffee as well as pastries and cakes to complement the beverages.

Thus, both Tan and Chan started the Drips Bakery Café in Tiong Bahru.

Tan, 35, is the café director and oversees mainly the coffee section, marketing, public relations and events, while her partner and pastry director makes most of the sweet and savoury bites and oversees their quality.

The café has a retro and cosy living room decked out in bright and bold-coloured furnishings, a concept inspired by the owners' visits to London.

Its in-house specialties are the baked tarts and among the staples are the macadamia nut tart, cherry brandy tart and cinnamon egg tart.

The fruit tarts, made with the freshest seasonal fruits, are usually snapped up within two hours after they are rolled out from the kitchen, says Tan.

New things to learn

Besides her love of coffee, Tan's people-oriented nature has helped her to assimilate into the new working environment.

She says: "As I'm a very people person, I would say I'm really suited for this job."

"Many of my friends commented that I'm overqualified to be just running a café, but I do not feel that anyone is overqualified for a job as

Coffee with sweet delights

Inspired by the modern café culture, Jessica Tan gives up her high-paying corporate job to start a bakery café



In the food and beverage line, you have to be as hands-on as possible, right down to cleaning the tables and serving the customers. — AFPpic

there will always be new things to learn every day."

But she concedes that people management is the most difficult part of being in the food and beverage (F&B) industry.

She says: "Managing the staff, especially the younger ones, is indeed a daily challenge. Having to think from their point of view and convincing them to see things from your perspective is really daunting."

Must be hands-on

Since trading her corporate

job for entrepreneurship, she has had to adjust to living on a more modest salary — her annual income has plummeted from six figures to four figures.

But she does not regret setting up the café, thanks, in part, to her husband's moral and financial support.

However, she admits that the venture, with the long hours and a different set of challenges, demands a lot more hard work than she had imagined.

She says: "In the F&B line, you've to try to be as hands-on as

possible, right down to cleaning the tables and serving the customers."

"I realised that it is not possible to just pump in the funds, create an ideology and expect everything to fall into place."

"Also, we must be very focused on the quality of the food rather than on profit margins. This is something really hard to adhere to because there are a lot of overheads to cover."

"However, if a café becomes fixated with cost control, the quality of the ingredients might sometimes

be compromised, and quality is what we stand for when Drips was set up."

But she is determined to make the business a success.

She says: "I guess what keeps me going is that I treat Drips as a baby and I am seeing this baby grow up."

"It is really like a child to me and I do not have the option to give up from the very day I decided to have it. I'm not only answerable to myself but also to my partner." — Singapore Straits Times / Asia News Network