



BIG FISH
This giant grouper is the size of a 12-year-old child

what's the catch?

As the young boss of a seafood company, Ang Junting works antisocial hours in a demanding – and sometimes malodorous – role. But his rapport with his staff and professional passion make his job its own reward

As most of Singapore drifts into dreamland, the atmosphere at Jurong Fishery

Port is just starting to come alive. The place is abuzz with fishermen, wholesalers, hawkers, and suppliers, all eager to get their hands on the night's best and

freshest catch. It's midnight but everyone is walking with a sense of purpose, talking with urgency.

One of them is Ang Junting, son of Hai Sia Seafood's founder Ang Jwee Heng. Decked out in Hai Sia's signature yellow polo shirt, black pants and a pair of white Wellington boots, the 26-year-old strides confidently from stall to stall, inspecting the goods and making small talk with the stall owners. "My main job is really to talk to people," he tells me in an almost conspiratorial tone.

Even though it looks like no one has the time for idle chit-chat here at the central marketplace, upon Junting's approach at each stall, the owners will give

him a friendly wave and a warm smile. Many of them tease him good-naturedly when they learn he's being photographed for this story. "He's very handsome, right?" a stall owner asks me.

"It's all about building relationships," says Junting. "Half my time at this market is spent talking about what's up, who's

Among this sensory overload, of course, there is no ignoring the ever-present fishy odour

retiring, who's having problems with his children. Once you have that [rapport] with the stall owners, they are more likely to tell you about the best fish they have for that day, and keep the good stuff for you."

Just as he finishes his sentence, a huge crate is wheeled to the area and everyone is gesturing excitedly for Junting to look at it. "A giant fish is coming in," he says. Apparently, this stall owner has found out that Junting is being interviewed and has offered to reveal this jaw-dropping catch so we can get a good photo. It takes four men to tilt the crate, and out pours a giant grouper the size of a 12-year-old child. There's a round of appreciative whistles and nods as the crowd inspects the fish, but Junting has to move on.



WADING IN

It's all hands on deck when the haul comes in during the wee hours

On an average night his team of five, including himself, do anywhere between 10 and 20 rounds of the market to procure the seafood they need for their customers. "We don't buy all the fish and seafood in one go," he tells me. "If we know a certain fish is in high supply, we will not be in a hurry to buy. Rather, we might wait for a later picking, or when the market is closing, to buy it at a lower price."

As a supplier, Junting also has to use a fair amount of creativity when procuring fish. "We take a very active approach: if we see a certain seafood or fish, we think of how our customers can use it and recommend it to them. There are dynamics to manage between all the players here – our suppliers, ourselves, our customers – because we get our fish mainly from sea catches and the supply changes all the time."

There is so much to see at the market, the noise level could lift the roof, and you have to tread the wet



floor carefully lest you trample on someone's display of fish or step into a puddle. Among this sensory overload, of course, there is no ignoring the ever-present fishy odour. When you are more accustomed to a warm bed and quiet room at 2am, it feels overwhelming. "When do I sleep? That's a good question," Junting muses.

Has he always known he would take over such a demanding business? "I was studying in France to become a chef. One day, a chef asked me about my family business. After that, he made a comment saying how if I were to strike out on my own, I'd be building on a couple of years of experience, but if I were to return to help my father, I would be taking over a legacy. That woke me up," says Junting.

Besides working in the market, he also oversees the processing of the seafood and the day-to-



“When we test our products, everyone gets to sample the good seafood”

day running of the business. His day starts at midnight and ends at noon. The youngest of three children, it is evident he and his father are excellent partners in business. “My father may exude the air of a traditional businessman, but he is also remarkably open-minded and progressive. We do have our fair share of disagreements but in the end, we always come back to what is best for the business.”

While many younger bosses are eager to revamp the company, Junting is respectful of Hai Sia’s 30-plus years of history and the people who help run the business. He initiated a programme where the company pays for English lessons for its staff. “It’s quite difficult to be a foreign worker in Singapore,” he says, with empathy in his voice. “And given the kind of hours we keep, a lot of my foreign staff don’t get a chance to see the country. So, whenever their English teacher says they have improved, we take them on an outing.

“When we test our products,



FAST FILLETER

Left: Junting is prepared to be hands-on with the fish he buys; (below) walking through the market



everyone gets to sample the good stuff. I believe that when they go out and tell people they work for a seafood company, they should know what is good,” says Junting. “Empowering them with knowledge and experience will be key to growing Hai Sia into one of Singapore’s top seafood supplies companies.”

As the time approaches 4am, Junting starts another round of the market. “Sometimes, my finance person gets very frustrated with us,” he says cheekily. “When we see a really good fish, we will buy it even if we have no intention of selling it. We did not start a company and pick seafood to sell. Rather, my family’s passion is in seafood and we made a business out of it.”

Today, the 37-year-old business counts up-and-

coming online grocer RedMart and long-running Singaporean establishments like Muthu’s Curry, the highly regarded Indian restaurant, among its customers. It’s hard work, but Junting rarely relaxes.

“We only rest on the first day of Chinese New Year. Otherwise, the business runs 20 hours a day, 364 days a year. Let’s go!” 🇸🇬