



IN THIS SERIES OF LIGHT-HEARTED INTERVIEWS, BITES CELEBRATES HOMEGROWN FOOD COMPANIES HEADED BY THEIR NEXT GENERATION OF FAMILY MEMBERS. WE GET A GLIMPSE OF THE STORIES BEHIND THE BRANDS AND THE PERSONALITIES IN THE BOSS' SEAT.

By Katie Boon, Photography by Mary Abcede

What spurred your dad to start Hai Sia?

Dad (pictured, above right image) was the eldest in the family, and he worked with my grandfather selling fish at the wet market from a very young age. He is an opportunist and saw the value in becoming a wholesaler and supplying to restaurants, rather than just being a fishmonger. He felt it was a good way to make a living.

What were your fondest memories?

I started helping out when I was 14 years old. I had to scale fishes for many years before I was finally allowed to filet a fish, and eventually, walk with my dad around the fish market. My brother and I used to call this our "Hai Sia Scholarship". My fondest memory was catching a nap by the seaside on a wooden bench out back. It's still there today.

Out of your siblings, why did you take over Hai Sia?

My father is a very open-minded Teochew towkay. He never pushed us to take over his business. As the youngest son (with both my siblings having their own career paths), I realised that if I didn't continue the business, no one else would. Both my siblings are management consultants, and they support by giving third-party, objective advice.

How different are you from other seafood players?

We are very intimate with our produce. We take pride in filleting the fish and grading it ourselves. We also portion cut fish fillets for restaurants to help with the labour crunch they are facing.

You're also quite a foodie yourself.

Having gotten experience as an assistant to chef Emmanuel Stroobant and a commis at two-Michelin starred Restaurant Christopher Coutanceau, I feel I have a better understanding of my clients' concerns including how they do costing for a dish. This allows me to better recommend a catch to them.

What initiatives have you taken to modernise?

Modernise is too strong a word. I simply bring a certain

level of energy to the business. We often become very myopic and stop looking at the bigger picture when we've been in an industry for too long. For someone who is not as familiar in the trade, I inject a new perspective that brings about innovative ideas, and act as an agent of change for better habits and practices.

What are your goals in the next five years?

To keep our core values surrounding people and food. I have many staff who has worked with us for over 25 years. As we improve and change, I would like them to come on-board too. Food-wise, I hope we remain as fishmongers and not become a company that sees the product as just a physical object. It is important to always be interested, from seafood's origins to its taste.

What do you do during your free time?

I usually dine out at either our customers' restaurant or places where I hope there's potential for collaboration. Part work, part leisure.

What did you grow up eating?

At home, we ate plenty of fish—as you can imagine. Dad would come home smelling of fish and carrying them for my mom to prepare.

What do you do during your travels?

I always make it a point to visit fish markets as well as the local markets. It's very interesting when you look at how people from other parts of the world do things and why they do it differently. It started when I was in primary school. My family went to Hong Kong for a holiday, and my dad and I woke up at 2am to visit a fish market. It has become a habit ever since.

BRIEF TIMELINE OF HAI SIA

1950s-1960s

Ang Jwee Heng, and his brothers helped out their father at his stall selling fish and seafood along Mohammed Sultan Road. Jwee Heng started running his own stall at Mei Ling Street. He would often hitch a ride to Jurong Fishery Port, paying the truck owner a small fee.

1970

Jwee Heng expanded the

business from a hawker stall at Mei Ling Street to become wholesaler. In 1977, he incorporated the business, which was then known as Hai Sia Seafood Supplies.

1988

Moved to current location at Jurong Fishery Port in 1988, and opened a processing facility with -18 degrees Celsius warehousing facilities.

1990s-2000s

Expanded their service to serve a wide range, from airline caterers, hotels, hospitals to

Teochew restaurants, food services including western establishments as well as hawkers and private chefs.

2015-2016

Youngest son Ang Junting joined the company in March 2015. He introduced Hai Sia Seafood to e-commerce grocers like RedMart, as well as started digital marketing. Hai Sia Seafood was invited as a

panellist speaker on Google Go Global Program in 2016. Junting also kickstarted the initiative to organise free walking tour of Jurong Fishery Port (see p. 7).

2017

Hai Sia Seafood's newly minted processing plant went live. The new plant is fitted with several state-of-the-art capabilities including close to 100% stainless steel interior and an environmentally friendly heat recovery system.



The ultimate seafood guide

Surrounded by the ocean, Singaporeans just cannot resist all things seafood. Whether you're exploring our own "mini Tsukiji" or searching for the most succulent crab feasts, we have our go-to lists to swear by. By Olivia Ong

WHERE TO BUY SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF JURONG FISHERY PORT WHERE TO EAT HOW TO SELECT



Sea Farmers @ Ubin

www.seafarmers.sg. Tel: 9820 0906

This plucky farm has been in the business since 2012. Oysters are delivered on the same day you place orders, and arrive un-shucked to ensure the freshest quality possible. Oysters start from \$36/dozen, and green mussels at \$6/kg. For oyster shucking newbies, their website provides a comprehensive guide, while protective gloves and oyster knives are also available when you place your order.

Senoko Fishery Port

31 Attap Valley Road. Tel: 6257 6721

Singapore's second fishery port is a more modern version of Jurong Fishery Port. Expect similar stocks of regional catches of the day, as well as a food canteen to refuel at. Opens Tue-Sun, 2-6am.

The Seafood Market

Eight outlets including #B1-07 City Square Mall, 180 Kitchener Road. Tel: 6509 8853

Operated by Song Fish Dealer, this no-frills chain offers a wide range of frozen fish including barramundi, red grouper and pomfret at reasonable prices.



WHERE TO BUY
Get your freshest seafood at these local suppliers, with offerings ranging from locally farmed kelong fish and oysters, to fresh and frozen seafood.

Jurong Fishery Port

35 Fishery Port Road. Tel: 6265 0430

Started in 1969, Jurong Fishery Port is the oldest fishing port in Singapore, with regional fishing boats arriving every day in the wee hours. Get the freshest local catches such as prawns, Spanish mackerel, red snapper and stingrays here. Opens Tue-Sun, 11pm-5am.

Evergreen Seafood

94E Jalan Senang. Tel: 6582 0111

Evergreen Seafood specialises in the sourcing, packing, processing and supply of a variety of live, chilled, dry and frozen seafood. Pop by their Kembangan factory space and browse through tanks of live seafood offerings such as geoduck, Boston lobsters and marble gobies.

Hai Sia Seafood

35A Fishery Port Road. Tel: 6264 1356

Hai Sia has a modernised facility which can process fresh seafood to your specifications. They also supply exotic frozen seafood such as Australian scallops and Honduras prawns, even unagi and salmon. They also offer free, friendly walking tours of Jurong fishery port every Saturday from 1.30-3am—check out our tour on the next page!

Fassler Gourmet

46 Woodlands Terrace.

Tel: 6257 5257

Established in 1991, Fassler Gourmet offers more than 80 products, whether its fresh and frozen fish, or smoked and prepared food items such as their soups (from \$3.80) and laksa seafood shepherd's pie (\$13.90). Their party packs and hampers make hosting a cinch.

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF JURONG FISHERY PORT

Date: 28 February
Time: 2am

We reach the gates of Jurong Fishery Port and are immediately greeted with the briny smell of the sea. Exchanged our ICs for access passes through the metal gantry. Don't forget slip-proof shoes as the grounds of the market are slippery!

Hai Sia Seafood conducts free walking tours every last Saturday of the month, 1.30am. Contact them at enquiry@haisia.com.sg



Before entering the market, we caught a glimpse of the traditional ice makers, from whom the fish merchants buy their crushed ice from.



Our knowledgeable guide from Hai Sia Seafood, Melvin, explains how to identify a fresh fish and how these fishes are priced according to their size.



We see workers sorting through the daily regional catch, such as sting rays, pomfret, batang (Spanish mackerel) and baby sharks.

Customers including hawkers come as early as 11pm, though the market really comes to life around 1.30am and hits its peak at 3am.



Watch out for heavy traffic along the walkways! Workers are buzzing to and fro with large baskets of fish on their trolleys.



Stall owners at wooden high desks, manually recording their ledgers and having a bird's eye view of all that is going on. It's a challenge to attract the younger generation to take over in this laborious blue collar industry.



Baskets line the stalls with pre-orders from buyers. If the handles are tucked in, it means the basket has been sold. All transactions in the market are dealt with in cash, so leave your credit cards at home! Be prepared to buy in bulk at most stalls.



Weighing in the goods on old industrial scales.

