



Mr Gerald Tan, 37, with his wife Bernice Ong, 36, son Gabriel, eight, and daughter Elizabeth, six, in their home, a three-bedroom apartment which was bought in 2009 for \$1.65 million. Mr Tan chose this apartment, comfortably sized at 1,614 sq ft, because it is conveniently located within the central business district and has easy access to three MRT stations. ST PHOTOS: NG SOR LUAN

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# Home's a sweet spot in the right location

Gerald Tan's house-hunting efforts include use of Google Maps, night strolls to check out sites



Lorna Tan  
Invest Editor

Entrepreneur Gerald Tan's interest in real estate was ignited in childhood when he would accompany his mum and dad to view potential investment properties.

"My parents have always been interested in property," he recalls.

"Since I was a young child, they would take me along to view properties with them, teaching me how to assess a property, looking at its layout, facing, location and so on, in order to determine whether it would be a good investment."

The investments proved crucial to his family when they hit hard times.

Mr Tan's paternal grandfather had a successful rubber processing and trading business but it ran into difficulties.

When his father took over the firm, he had to start from scratch with his wife helping him to get the operation back on its feet.

Despite owning several residential properties, his parents decided to lease the homes to get rental income, and raised their family in Mr Tan's maternal grandparents' three-room Housing Board flat instead.

So Mr Tan, 37, spent most of his childhood living with his maternal grandparents and sharing a bedroom with his parents and sister.

Through his parents' hard work, wise financial decisions and property investments, his family's lifestyle improved greatly. Both his parents retired last year.

Mr Tan was involved in his family's rubber business in the company Pulau Bintan Djaya until it was sold to Singapore-listed Halcyon Agri last year.

As part of the sale, he joined Halcyon in its strategic development team. Late last year, he spearheaded a new joint venture, HeveaConnect, to develop an online platform to digitalise rubber trading and became its chief executive.

When it comes to property invest-

ing, Mr Tan believes in taking his time and conducting proper due diligence instead of rushing in. This includes checking online property listings, researching and visiting the locations.

Mr Tan graduated magna cum laude from Singapore Management University in 2008 with a bachelor's degree in business administration majoring in finance and marketing.

He is married to lawyer-turned-housewife Bernice Ong, 36, and they have a son Gabriel, eight, and a daughter Elizabeth, six.

**Q Please describe your home.**  
**A** It is a three-bedroom apartment which was bought in 2009 for \$1.65 million. This was intended to be my matrimonial home. I chose this condominium (Riverwalk Apartments) because it is conveniently located in the central business district, within walking distance of my workplace and my wife's (when she was a lawyer), and has easy access to three MRT stations.

The apartment is also attractive to us as it is a comfortable size at 1,614 sq ft and can accommodate our plans to start a family.

I am familiar with this condominium as my family owned several units here. My grandmother, in fact, still lives in another unit here. So, when this apartment came on the market, I did not hesitate to buy it.

**Q What's your favourite part of this home?**  
**A** My favourite part of this home is definitely its location. It is conveniently located with many offices, shops, museums, restaurants, cafes and bars at our doorstep.

Following in my parents' footsteps, I decided to rent out the unit for rental income and lived with my parents from 2011 to last year.

The rental yield of the property is also good and we received more than 3 per cent yield during this period. We moved back into the property this year.

**Q What's in your property portfolio?**  
**A** I own another 818 sq ft, one-bedroom apartment in the same development. I bought this unit last year at \$1.26 million as an investment and it generates an annual rental income of about \$38,400.

In the past, my wife and I owned two other properties. One was a 926 sq ft, two-bedroom apartment



Riverwalk Apartments, overlooking the Singapore River. Mr Tan's family members owned some units there and his grandmother lives in one of them.



Mr Tan relaxing in his 1,614 sq ft condo unit. He bought the apartment in 2009 but rented it out from 2011 until he moved back this year.

located in the west which we bought in 2012 for \$875,000 and sold last year for \$950,000.

The other property was a 431 sq ft, one-bedroom apartment in the east which we bought in 2012 for \$635,000 and sold last year for \$600,000.

Both properties were bought for investment. We decided to sell them after the Additional Buyer's Stamp Duty (ABSD) cooling measure was introduced so we could reduce the number of residential properties under our names and continue to invest in other properties.

Even though one of the properties was sold at an apparent loss, our net position was actually still positive due to the rental proceeds we received from it. The potential savings on the ABSD justified our call to liquidate the smaller properties in our property portfolio.

ferent times of the day.

**Q Describe your property investing strategy.**  
**A** I do a lot of research into the property market before deciding to invest. My wife and I frequently view property listings online, researching their locations, sizes, rental yields, frequency of transactions, number of units in the development, the number of other competing units in the area, and so on.

We also frequently view properties so as to familiarise ourselves with different developments, and we often take night strolls in the areas which we like so we can identify the properties we prefer.

We also embrace technology and use Google Maps to check out the driving times from the target property to various locations during dif-

We are cognisant of the fact that most property viewings take place during off-peak hours but the traffic conditions can be very different and thus we use Google Maps to help us check out the driving times during peak periods. This is especially applicable to the properties in the school zones.

**Q What's your view of the property market?**

**A** The local property market outlook is uncertain as I feel we are in very volatile times. While it is important to own your home in Singapore, I am not overly bullish in buying more properties for investment purposes at present, as I do not foresee a huge rise in the property market due to the current cooling measures and uncertain global economy.

That said, I also do not think there will be a crash in the Singapore property market as the Government can manage the real estate market by lifting the cooling measures.

**Q What's your financing strategy?**

**A** I tend to prefer floating rates. I believe that we will remain in a low-rate environment as central banks around the world will want to keep the economy going. I have just refinanced my portfolio and will always look at finding the best leverage for my investments.

I have two home loans with a similar interest rate of one-month SIBOR (Singapore Interbank offered rate) plus 0.5 per cent. One is for a loan amount of about \$1.3 million with a 26-year tenure, while the other is for an amount of about \$1 million with a 30-year tenure.

Another consideration is the lock-in period. I chose a no-lock-in period due to the ongoing collective sale negotiations.

**Q Do you have insurance cover for property and contents?**

**A** We have fire insurance for our properties.

**Q What's your overall investing strategy?**

**A** My portfolio is very property-heavy and I have a few private equity investments, mostly in real estate investments, mezzanine or project financing, and the rest is in cash.

My job in HeveaConnect, a new start-up, is taking up most of my time. HeveaConnect is a corporate start-up with listed companies as the shareholders. It owns a digital platform that drives industrial standards, and leverages partnerships and technology to improve the transparency and sustainability of the natural rubber industry.

**Q My dream home is...**

**A** My dream home is a landed property in the Bishopsgate area. I've always loved the traditional colonial-style black-and-white houses and it's my dream to eventually own and/or stay in one.

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