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Bonnie Wong doesn't have a business card; she has a QR code on a mobile phone – and people can scan it to obtain her contact details. She is no doubt a product of the digital age, weaned in a culture of “instant” information, messaging and virtual shopping. Which also suggests she is quick to adopt new ideas in an era rich in innovation.

Wong is the perfect fit for the food and beverage (F&B) industry, which needs new ideas to refresh and survive. So, when she asked her father, Anthony, in 2013 if there was a vacancy in his F&B company, he did not bat an eyelid. Creative Eateries was the company he founded in 1992, and it is behind the Hot Stones Steak and Seafood Restaurant.

Today the company owns a range of Thai, Chinese, Japanese and Western restaurants in Singapore, Malaysia and Taiwan. Under its umbrella are popular brands such as Thai restaurant Bangkok Jam, hot pot eatery Suki-Ya, and Vineyard, a restaurant in Hort Park serving French and Italian food.



Despite operating in a competitive industry, Bonnie Wong has managed to scale up her family's F&B business in Singapore and abroad.

Wong grew up wanting to emulate her entrepreneur father and her grandfather, who founded Capitol Optical more than 50 years ago. Capitol currently has 18 stores. To pursue her ambition, she went on to obtain a double degree in accounting and business management from the Singapore Management University.

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Her work has impressed Wong senior and, now, as chief operations officer, she, along with older sister Bernadette, who is director of corporate affairs and human resources, effectively manage the company. But Wong, 30, had to first change how the company operated to move it forward.

Her previous stints with Pricewaterhousecoopers LLP, a business-consulting firm, and at a start-up gave her valuable insights into how businesses operated. This helped her create a more robust structure to develop employees. Weekly meetings of department heads were started and ideas generated were shared with all the company's F&B outlets. But she also had to balance her father's instincts for business opportunities, which grew the company to 34 restaurants in Singapore, with her sensibilities as an accountant.

"We used to open outlets based only on Dad's gut feelings," she says, laughing. "Now, we run the business based more on financial projections and KPIs. With a more measured approach that analyses cost margins and projects sales numbers, we have increased our hit-rate in setting up profitable outlets."

But it did not mean her father's gut instincts were abandoned; at times, that was all the company could count on. She pointed to an occasion in 2016 when they were pondering over establishing a central kitchen to prepare catered food. "At the time, there was no clear business case for it," she recalls. "But, thankfully, with my dad's understanding of macroeconomic trends, we were able to take a leap of faith with the plan. The catering licence is invaluable to our business today. Dad and I complement each other very well."

Under her watch, the company is expanding and has launched, among others, Fremantle Seafood Market, Tally Thai and Typhoon Cafe in Singapore and Bangkok Jam in Taipei. She is using the popular Suki-Ya hot-pot brand to open at least two outlets in Manila and penetrate the Vietnamese and Indonesian markets.

"Our growth lies overseas, especially in South-east Asia, through joint ventures and franchises," says Wong. "It's the right time and the right opportunities have emerged. Among these are lower operational costs, higher potential margins and more development within the region."

Off-Duty

01 Page-Turner

I enjoy reading fiction and am currently reading *Before We Were Yours* by Lisa Wingate.

02 Home, Truly

I usually spend Sundays with my family. On Friday and Saturday nights, I usually meet my friends for drinks and, quite often, karaoke sessions.

03 Union Jack Calling

I enjoy London for its beautiful historical architecture and cosmopolitan setting.