

*Janice Wong continues to push the boundaries with her edible art installations*



## *How I got here*

### CONFECTIONERY ARTIST AND CHOCOLATIER **Janice Wong** ON HER CAREER JOURNEY

**S**ingaporean chef Janice Wong is one of Asia's most inspiring culinary talents and has won multiple Best Pastry Chef awards. As well as creating edible art installations and innovative desserts for clients, her own global brand, Janice Wong Singapore, is available in Selfridges.

**I WAS COMPLETING MY DEGREE IN ECONOMICS WHEN I REALISED THAT FOOD – PARTICULARLY SWEET FOOD – WAS THE PASSION I WANTED TO MAKE A CAREER OUT OF.** As a child growing up in Tokyo, I was surrounded by amazing confectionery and desserts, and have really vivid memories of Meiji chocolate, sweets, bubblegum and enormous choux buns. I knew I wanted to reimagine all the tastes I had such an affection for and start something really creative.

**AFTER UNIVERSITY, I TRAVELLED THE WORLD FOR TWO YEARS, WORKING IN RESTAURANTS AND ATTENDING DIFFERENT CULINARY SCHOOLS.** I began in Paris, where I studied patisserie, then went on to Oriol Balaguer in Barcelona, where I learned the craft of chocolate – a transformational

**INNOVATION HAS BEEN AT THE HEART OF EVERYTHING I HAVE DONE SINCE THE VERY BEGINNING.** At the dessert bar, we were the first people to make chocolate crayons that you could eat along with the paper you'd drawn on, and I've continued to push boundaries with edible art installations. Nothing blows people's minds like coming to see a tunnel made of sweets or a ceiling made of marshmallow – and then being told you can eat it. It's a part of the job that I always find really exciting.

**I'VE BEEN VERY FORTUNATE TO WORK WITH SOME MAJOR CLIENTS, INCLUDING CHANEL AND PRADA, BUT CREATING MY OWN BRAND HAS BEEN REALLY SPECIAL.** My reputation has grown so much that I was invited on to *MasterChef Australia* in 2017 as a guest judge for the pressure tests. I made a cassis plum dessert that became the most famous dish of that series, and our dessert bars became very busy. Janice Wong Singapore has grown organically all over the world, and we're now stocked everywhere from Macau to London. Chocolate has always been my first love, and we've tried to remain really creative, even in retail.

*'Innovation has been at the heart of everything I have done'*

experience in itself, as Spanish chefs are extremely imaginative. I then went to New York and Melbourne and worked for a Michelin-starred chef in Mallorca, trying to expand my knowledge and work out my own philosophies as a chef.

**MY FIRST BUSINESS, A 2AM DESSERT BAR IN SINGAPORE, WAS A BIG TURNING POINT.**

I wanted to create an experience where people could enjoy a glass of wine or cocktail with a dessert in beautiful surroundings, and the location – a 1,000-square foot glass house with dramatically high ceilings – was key. It was a word-of-mouth hit, and looking back, it sparked the beginnings of everything. Back in 2007, there were very few Asian female chefs putting their name to things, so we were very, very busy during that first year.

**EVEN NOW, IT AMAZES ME HOW DIFFERENT TASTES ARE GLOBALLY; WHAT WORKS FOR ONE CULTURE MAY NOT FOR ANOTHER.** For example, in Singapore, customers do not like vegetables in their desserts, whereas in Japan, beetroot on your cake is very welcome! If I were to open a dessert bar in London, I'd be putting salted caramel everywhere – it's very well liked. **IT HAS DEFINITELY HELPED TO HAVE A BUSINESS BRAIN BEHIND ALL THE FLUFFY IDEAS.** There are things I couldn't have achieved very easily without my degree in economics, such as the sustainability model for the business I'm working on now. During Covid-19, we made Singapore's first single origin bean-to-bar chocolate – until now, no one else had thought of planting cocoa in Singapore. It's very much another form of innovation – just one that requires a different part of my mind.