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The fresh factor, simply put

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MAKE it fresh, make it simple and better still, make it seafood.

That's the way Annie Yap, CEO of GMP group likes her food. And if the senior headhunter ever had to recruit chefs, one is pretty sure what qualities she would be looking for. "I'll try something new at least once, but I prefer simple cooking that is not saturated with too much flavouring," she says. "My father's healthy eating habits have influenced me since I was young. He eschewed too much salt, sugar, artificial ingredients and flavouring in his diet. Freshness of ingredients is also very important to me."

In fact, "fried bee hoon is one of my favourite dishes because it's non-fussy", she adds. "I'm not a fan of rich and heavily spiced food, so I don't eat a lot of cheese (except for blue cheese) and Indian food."

It's no surprise then, that Ms Yap counts Tokyo and Hong Kong as her favourite dining cities, considering that both the Japanese and Cantonese are well known for their fondness of fresh seafood with little embellishment.

"Tokyo's culinary delights are big influences on my food choices," she says. "Japanese food is centred on freshness and simplicity, and is high on quality for money. One of my preferred haunts is Tsukiji Wholesale Market."

For something more upmarket, she heads to Gompachi. "It serves excellent soba and very fresh sashimi. Freshness is never compromised there. It also provides a conducive setting for business entertaining, and it lists US President Bush as one of its patrons."

Still, she makes a concession for an unlikely city - Prague, where "my favourite restaurant is Flambee - a former cellar turned restaurant that serves French cuisine in a cosy and inviting ambience". She is also partial to wide, open spaces and recommends a meal at Yering Station Restaurant in Melbourne. "I simply love the rack of lamb," she enthuses. "And the scenery is something you can't get in Singapore - wide, open fields, sheep and cows."

In Singapore, Ms Yap's restaurant of choice would be Wahiro at Katong Mall, to which she takes her many guests. "It serves very good Japanese cuisine - I can't emphasise enough how important freshness is to me." If she doesn't entertain at Wahiro, it would be at whatever restaurant her clients prefer. Mostly, they tend to be fairly conventional continental restaurants as "what I've noticed about my overseas clients is that most of them would not go near durians or try dishes with chicken feet in them".



Ms Yap dining at Halia at Botanic Gardens; she prefers food that is not saturated with too much flavouring

That doesn't mean that she hasn't been subjected to some strange food when she goes overseas. "One of the most memorable dining experiences was in China. For experience's sake, I sampled anteater and dog meat. The anteater was cooked in soup. Dog meat, as with many exotic meats, tasted like chicken. It was an unusual gastronomical experience.

"One of the strangest things I have ever had was in China too - snake eaten four ways. The first two were drinking the blood and gall. Then we had fried snake skin and soup boiled with the flesh and bones."

While exotic dining may be all good and well, Ms Yap is more comfortable with familiar favourites. With two young children in tow, her preference is for family-friendly places such as East Coast Lagoon's hawker centre or Pontini for casual dinners. She also enjoys cooking as a destressing hobby - her speciality is pig trotters with vinegar, which is more of a confinement dish but tasty enough for regular meals.

Otherwise, you'll find her tucking into satay bee hoon at East Coast Lagoon, at a stall which she has been patronising for the past 30 years.

"I find comfort in its simplicity and the fact that it has been one of my favourite foods since I was young," she says. "I will readily brave the stall's long queue - I have it at least once every fortnight."