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CREAM OF THE CROP

Jack of many trades he may be, but timber heir DAVID YONG is a master in the making. He shares with MELAINNE CHIEW his plans to reinvent the traditional trade

GEOMETRIC SCANDINAVIAN LIGHTS hang from exposed pipes that snake across linear designs at the House of MU at Mohamed Sultan Rd. The fine diner is dotted with solid Burmese teak pieces but one that stands out is the enormous slice of tree trunk for an eight-seater dining table, its smooth polished top adorned with eye-catching graining. David Yong, one of three partners here, says the wooden slab was sawn off a tree from Myanmar.

The modern European restaurant resembles a furniture shop. One section is modelled after a Scandinavian-style living room — with minimalist sofa and study — and by no accident, too.

House of MU, the last word stylised as the Mandarin word for wood, is also a concept store, with its furniture available for sale. “We wanted a rustic feel and designed the place to highlight the wood furniture, which was made in our factory. We did only manufacturing and trading previously, but now we’re venturing into retail and lifestyle,” says Yong, whose family owns several timber trading businesses. “We source only Burmese teak wood aged at least 50 years.”

This multi-faceted concept reflects Yong’s personal ambition:

A multi-hyphenate at 31, the lawyer by training is also CEO at Burma Teak Asia, a lifestyle furniture brand. It’s one of the family-owned businesses he grouped under Evergreen Assets Management Holding Limited. “We have four timber processing and manufacturing factories in Myanmar, a timber trading company, and now, House of MU. Everything was fragmented and this holding company manages our different businesses under one group. I hope to get it company listed in future, and I’m pushing for a listing in Hong Kong.”

This tireless entrepreneur says he hardly sleeps, because he’s constantly working on upcoming projects. “We plan to open more lifestyle businesses like House of MU, and dance clubs, for example, that play EDM. I like the entertainment and lifestyle scenes, so I’m trying to integrate it into our businesses. The timber trade has always been traditional, so I want to help give it a youthful, modern twist.”

Yong splits his time between law firm G S Lim & Partners, where he is a partner, and his timber businesses. In October, he will set up his own firm, DY & Associates. Legal training, he says, is very handy for his entrepreneurial ventures.

“Running a business is not that simple. There are many legalities involved, especially with contracts and the many licences to apply for. We also have to liaise with the authorities often,” he lets on.

In the evening, you might spot this fun-loving man about town chilling with friends at House of MU or a hip hotspot. But it’s all for work, he maintains: “I’m looking to open a club with some partners, so I had some drinks and checked out

possible locations until 6am. We’re considering a 6am club.”

Sleepless nights are a habit for him. “I enjoy what I do, so it doesn’t feel like work. I’m passionate about every business I partake in, be it cars, furniture, concept stores, or entertainment,” says Yong, who also owns a car workshop D’s Graffiti Garage with a fellow ExoticCars Club member.

He adds, “I think it’s very important to have the right partners to help you with certain aspects of the business. For instance, I have two partners at House of MU with relevant F&B experience. I’m quite flexible by nature, but I am also very result-oriented and my focus is on the endgame.”

My favourite furniture... Is a 2-m-tall wooden piece created by our craftsmen in Myanmar.

Home is... Where I spend time with my family and close friends.

I am motivated by... The fear of failing.

I regret... Nothing. Everything happens for a reason.

I am inspired by... Successful friends and family members. **■**