

Green peace



Star Bites

Fashion designer Eric Choong, who now says no to meat, talks about why he has gone green.

By FEI YONG

If you want to make fashion designer Eric Choong go weak in the knees, just tempt him with something sweet. "I love dessert!" he declared as we sat down to lunch at Woods Eco-Cuisine restaurant.

Looking at his slender frame and glowing complexion, I find it hard to reconcile such a picture of health and serenity with decadent sweets, and told him as much.

Choong attributed it to the "eat healthy and live happy" philosophy that has become his guiding principle in life.

As he savoured the tangy Enzymatic Carrot

Woods Eco-Cuisine

25, Jalan Telawi 2
Bangsar Baru
Kuala Lumpur
Tel : (03) 2287 0959
Fax : (03) 2287 0969
www.macrobiotics-malaysia.com

Soup that June Ka Lim, Woods' macrobiotics expert has served up, Choong explained that he turned to vegetarianism about a year ago.

"My decision was primarily driven by health reasons. After witnessing so many of my friends and acquaintances suffer from all sorts of illnesses, I got a wake-up call. All the recent food scares didn't help either. I vowed to take better care of my health and firmly believe that prevention is better than cure," he said.

A devout Buddhist, the Ipoh-born designer remarked that he was simply putting into practice the dharma (Buddha's teachings) he had studied and learned from his spiritual master, Tsem Tulku Rinpoche.

"I didn't become a vegetarian overnight. It was a gradual process as I slowly adapted to the dietary changes.

"After I stopped eating meat, my whole being seemed 'lighter'. I also discovered a growing sense of inner peace. Nowadays, I



Eating healthy: Eric Choong digging into the healthy platter of Nasi Ulam 'Sayur Lodeh' and other side dishes at Woods Eco-Cuisine. - Photos by Ching Yee Sing



can deal more easily and calmly with whatever aggravations that come my way.

"In the past, I used to be so stressed out and short-tempered. Not anymore. I even feel more energetic now, possibly because of my healthier diet. And I'm taking better care of myself," Choong revealed.

Tucking into the delicious platter of Nasi Ulam with Sayur Lodeh, crisp Vegetable Fritters and refreshing Purple Cabbage Kerabu with gusto, Choong was all ears when Lim outlined what went into each of the specialties.

"Our nasi ulam has 14 types of fresh herbs with organic brown rice being the main ingredient," she said.

When Choong looked a little hesitant about sampling the Sayur Lodeh, Lim assured him that the mildly spicy mixed vegetable curry was cooked with soy milk instead of coconut milk.

"I've always avoided curries, spicy food and coffee due to my gastric problem," Choong confessed.

Lim suggested he try organic rice milk as a substitute for cow and soy milk. "It's a proven remedy that has helped me overcome my gastric pains," she vouched.

Choong, who eats like a bird, said he would start the day with a cup of Milo and a bowl of oats or some bread with peanut butter. The one dish he simply can't do without is soup.

"It must be the Cantonese in me!" he quipped. "I also love Teochew porridge and chee cheong fun with yong fiew, Ipoh's version of yong tau foo (stuffed beancurd with fish paste)."

Choong said that he spent most of his weekends doing voluntary work for the Kechara Buddhist organisation.

"I used to chase after fame and fortune which was self-centred and quite meaningless," he said with candour. "Now I leverage on my own status as a designer to do good deeds that help, inspire and benefit others, and draw support for worthy causes that I believe in."

As he tucked into the slices of German



A slice of delicious-looking Banana Cake with Soya Cream (above); German Apple Cake (left).



(Pic far left) Fill your basket with organic products like rice milk at Woods Eco-Cuisine.

Apple Cake, Banana Cake with Soya Cream and Apple Pie, Choong definitely looked like someone who had had his cake and eaten it too.

"After 25 years in the fashion business, I still enjoy the whole creative process," said the designer who still has brides-to-be swooning over his stunning bridal gowns and evening dresses.

"Meditation, prayers and dharma studies have taught me to be more accepting of life. I'm content to live happily and help others whenever the opportunity arises," he said.

■ In this monthly column, celebrities dig about their lives and fave eats over a tasty meal.