

Former actor Desmond Shen turns naturopath, publishes book

The book, which he put out with his wife, a certified naturopath and holistic health educator, contains health-promoting and anti-cancer recipes

Jeanmarie Tan

By his own admission, former television actor Desmond Shen's life journey has been "very drama".

From 1988 to 1994, he made a name as a popular leading man on Channel 8 dramas. But after he exited the entertainment scene, things hit rock bottom.

His father died suddenly in 1996 after a gallstone procedure went awry, and Shen rushed into marrying his then girlfriend to turn his bad luck around. That ended in divorce after less than a year, and he calls it a "scar" till today.

His diversified businesses in Singapore and China tanked. He was declared a bankrupt in 2000 and even contemplated suicide.

But like all good redemption stories, Shen managed to rise from the lowest point of his life.

He found faith in 2001, cleared his \$3.5 million debt in three years and met his future wife, Ms Chua Kay Tse, at a church event.

The couple, who married in 2009, have been advocates of naturopathy and natural reflex therapy for the past two decades.

Naturopathy is a form of healthcare that uses natural remedies to help the body heal itself.

It embraces many therapies, including herbs, massage, acupuncture, exercise and nutritional counselling.

Shen, 58, is the principal consultant and founder of Eagle's Therapy Management & Consultancy at Furama City Centre, while Ms Chua, 44, is a certified naturopath, holistic health educator and nutritionist.

Last week, the couple released *Living A Life*, a 419-page holistic health manual to support disease prevention and chronic health concerns.

Endorsed by Dr Lam Pin Min, former senior minister of state for health and transport, and a panel of other medical practitioners, the book documents the Shens' combined 60 years of naturopathic clinic experience, 40 recipes for



health and for cancer patients and 21 patient testimonies.

Their labour of love took two years to come into fruition, and they spent \$200,000 to publish 10,000 copies in English and Chinese and on promotional activities, photography, videos and events.

Ms Chua tells *The Straits Times* there is nothing "mystical" about naturopathy and that "the science and logic of nutrition is an untapped area".

"Being healthcare professionals ourselves, we wanted to write something to help our patients and many others who don't understand why health is so important, especially during Covid-19."

"This book not only supports people now, but also after that. You don't know what's coming, but illnesses will still be around. But as long as you build your immune system and keep healthy, then a lot of issues will be resolved."

But Shen stresses they are "not doctors".

"We help maintain your health by using our experience, but we can't treat you. That's why we work closely with doctors," he adds.

He had gravitated towards this profession back in 1981, after his mother was diagnosed with terminal nasopharyngeal carcinoma – a rare tumour of the head and neck – and he started seriously researching natural medicine and reflexology.

After nine months of performing intensive twice-daily reflexology on his mother, she made a full recovery from cancer and it became his

lifelong aspiration to excel in this field.

His mum, now 89, is in good health.

The couple, who made a choice not to have children, are also readying themselves to be travelling missionaries in the future.

So, do not expect Shen to return to the small screen any time soon. Since he left show business, he had appeared in only small roles in tele-movie *Recipe* (2013) and Channel 8 dramas such as *The Little Nyonya* (2008) and *The Journey: A Voyage* (2013).

He does not keep in touch with any of his peers and would not want to act again.

After all, during his six years at Mediacorp – then known as the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation –

he broke three contracts.

He says: "Acting is only a hobby. I had the opportunity and it's enough."

Shen admits that immersing himself in a role was always a "painful" experience, and cringes whenever he sees himself in television reruns because he never thought he was good.

He says: "I don't dare to face it and I cannot accept it. I remember there was this newspaper article headline long ago, 'Why did you quit showbiz? Because I can't act.' And it's true."

Desmond Shen and his wife Chua Kay Tse (both above) spent two years and \$200,000 to publish 10,000 copies of their book in English and Chinese and on promotional activities, photography, videos and events. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

jeanm@sph.com.sg

• *Living A Life* (\$53.50) is available at Books Kinokuniya and Popular.

Home is where the art is

Yamini Chinnuswamy
Correspondent

Since last week, tenants of four conservation shophouses in Geylang and River Valley have been living with works by home-grown artists on their walls.

And in an unusual move, the artists – Nature Shankar, Leow Wei Li, Yen Phang and Khairullah Rahim – will each get 10 per cent of the rental profits from the respective shophouse their works are displayed in, for the next five years or until their works are sold.

The pioneering partnership is the brainchild of boutique co-living developer Figment, which leases out living spaces in luxuriously appointed shophouses. It is held in conjunction with Singapore Art Week, which runs until Jan 23.

Typically, when displaying artworks in a space such as a gallery, artists receive revenue only if and when the artwork is sold.

The artworks displayed in Figment's shophouses will also be available for purchase.

Figment's founder and chief executive Fang Low, 33, describes the move as a way to introduce more funds into the art ecosystem. "I believe this is the first time (such a payment arrangement) has ever been done," he says.

The tenants dwelling in each

shophouse will have a personal connection to the works displayed in their living spaces, he adds.

"Just walking by the pieces every day, people will naturally build an attachment to them that you may not get from looking at an artwork in a gallery."

Artist Leow, 27, whose works are displayed in Gallery House at Lorong 24A Geylang, agrees.

"In a gallery, there is limited time to spend with an artwork. However, the co-living space at (Figment's shophouses) creates more time and space for viewers to relate to the works," she says.

Her works, with their three-dimensional use of household materials such as kitchen sponges, complement the airy, minimalist feel of Gallery House.

Over at Alexandra House, also at Lorong 24A Geylang, are the works of artist Phang, 42.

He describes the partnership as "a reminder that we don't make art in isolation just for ourselves in a solipsistic manner".

He was inspired by the raw brick and dark wood of Alexandra House to create the sepia-toned art series, *Still Here*.

"Texturally, there is a warmth I really appreciated with the bare brick wall... It led me to see space as a whole body, with its repeated movements, silences, rhythms."

Some of his works can be found opposite a long Turkish bath situ-



Artist Yen Phang, whose works are displayed at Alexandra House in Geylang, was inspired by the raw brick and dark wood of the unit to create his sepia-toned art series, *Still Here*. PHOTO: KHOO GUO JIE

ated beyond the warm wooden entrance hall.

According to Figment, the artworks will be showcased in the shophouses for at least the next five years. If an artwork is sold, its

artist can select a new piece to take its place.

Mr Low notes that Singaporeans may not feel much ownership towards art in Singapore, but Figment's partnership provides a way

FIGMENT'S VIRTUAL SHOPHOUSE TOURS

WHERE Online
WHEN Today and Jan 22, 11am
ADMISSION Free, register at str.sg/wMay

for people to slowly and surely identify as patrons of the arts. "It is one way of enabling people to contribute back to the local arts scene," he says.

Anyone wishing to see the artworks will have to join a long waiting list of people seeking to rent studios in any of Figment's 24 boutique shophouses.

The studios, whose rentals go from \$2,000 to \$4,000 a month, are available for minimum three-month leases.

Mr Low says they are increasingly popular among Singaporeans keen to experience life in a conservation shophouse.

But the public will still be able to take a peek into the four shophouses in Figment's artist partnership.

The company is hosting virtual tours today and on Jan 22, with Figment's curator Jen Quinn appearing as an avatar to take guests through each digitally rendered shophouse using augmented- and virtual-reality technology.

Figment will also launch a blockchain token called \$FIGMENT in the middle of the year. These tokens will be distributed to tenants as well as partner creators.

Mr Low says \$FIGMENT, which will be issued on the Ethereum blockchain, is intended to function as "a souped-up rewards programme" similar to Singapore Airlines' KrisFlyer or hotel chain Marriott's Bonvoy.

But unlike conventional rewards schemes, he hopes the tokens will offer a more robust way to reward community-building.

"Any new value created by the \$FIGMENT token would be fairly attributed throughout our entire community of creators and members," he says.

The blockchain is essentially a decentralised digital ledger. Mr Low likens it to owning a country club membership and having a stake in how the club is run.

"Typical rewards programmes don't give such governance authority. They're just used as financial perks. But the \$FIGMENT tokens will allow us to shift to a more community-led, community-owned environment, very much like an artist collective or artist co-operative," he says.

For instance, blockchain tools such as Snapshot will allow Figment's members and partner creators to easily vote on community matters such as which artists to partner with next.

But for all the vaunted benefits of blockchain, the technology is not without controversy, with critics decrying the high energy consumption involved in mining cryptocurrencies such as Ether and Bitcoin.

Mr Low acknowledges these criticisms.

"We are not trying to have a carbon-negative impact, so we have earmarked that 10 per cent of any token proceeds will go towards (carbon) offsets, specifically rainforest planting."