



*Janice Wong works
her magic on her
intricate sweet
creations*

QUEEN *of the* DESSERT

Do play with your food – pastry chef Janice Wong has rewritten the rules, writes Amy Broomfield

Fresh from a trip to South America in search of quality chocolate, Singaporean chef Janice Wong is buzzing with gastronomic inspiration. “I tasted things I never knew existed,” she says, scrolling through snaps of cacao pods on her phone. Among them is a video of a dragon’s-blood tree being sliced to release a bright red sap used as a flavour and dye. “I have always tried to reference new foods to something I know, but in Peru, there were things I couldn’t compare to anything.”

The 35-year-old pastry chef is also, in her own way, incomparable. With the launch of her restaurant 2am:dessertbar in Singapore 11 years

ago – a sleek 60-seater where dessert is the main event – she became known for challenging her country’s often-clinical approach to gastronomy. Redefining dessert with creations that are as much art as they are food, layers of flavour are delivered in vibrant, theatrical displays that wouldn’t look out of place in a museum. Take her signature cassis plum, inspired by the Japanese cherry blossom: a sphere of aerated blackcurrant and white chocolate on a bed of yuzu pearls, ume-liqueur granita and blackberry pastel, it is filled with a yogurt and elderflower foam, then topped with a disc of plum-liqueur jelly. >



Clockwise from right Janice Wong's *Shades of Purple* painting; the chef's painting-inspired Purple dessert; a box of her chocolate crayons; Wong's Garden creation in her 2011 cookbook

JANICE WONG Chocolate Crayon Box £85 for 40. Food Halls, Ground Floor; and harrods.com ^(H)

The visit to South America, says Wong, was the second landmark experience in her life. The first was a six-month exchange programme in Melbourne, which she embarked on in 2005 while earning her degree in economics from the National University of Singapore.

"I would spend days on farms learning how cheese and wine are made," she recalls. "The produce there is so different to what we have in Singapore, which is prepacked and super clean. We don't get access to flavours such as earth, grass and smoke, and I wanted to bring those home."

After finishing her degree in 2006, she promptly did an about-turn, retraining as a chef at Cordon Bleu Paris. "I love learning – there is always something to learn every day," she says. She soon landed stints with eminent chefs including Oriol Balaguer in Barcelona, Will Goldfarb in New York City and Thomas Keller in Napa Valley, absorbing their expertise while honing her own culinary style.

Wong then began to expand her portfolio quite literally, creating seven life-size edible installations for the launch of her first book, *Perfection in Imperfection*, in 2011, including a marshmallow ceiling and a bed of sugar coral reef. Commissions began pouring in from the likes of Fendi (a wall of edible orchids)

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and Tiffany & Co. (a chocolate New York skyline sparkling with sugar diamonds). In 2013 and 2014, Wong won Asia's Best Pastry Chef award in Asia's 50 Best Restaurants, and in 2016 she opened a second dessert bar – bearing her newly famous name – this time in Tokyo, where the menu includes a miniature rock garden with flavours of wasabi and burdock root. "I use local ingredients in all my desserts," says Wong. "In Singapore, I take advantage of the incredible spices, like chilli and ginger, whereas in Japan we use ingredients from all 47 provinces, such as rare citrus fruits."

Wong has now launched a confectionery range, continuing the theme of art-meets-food: chocolate paint pots come with a canvas and brushes, while chocolate crayons (in flavours including passion fruit and dulce de leche) can be used to draw on rice paper.

"For me, to be able to enjoy food and play with it enhances the whole experience," says Wong. "Play is such a big part of my life. I don't think I'll ever stop playing." □