

THE Cover

WOMAN of Substance & Strength

Passionate, captivating, funny & giving – business owner and entrepreneur Sofi Sui shares a few secrets of her success.

WORDS: JENNIFER SCHOON



Tweed zip up jacket
\$790, Tri-coloured fedora
\$160 from **Emporio
Armani**;

Happy Sport 5 diamond
watch with red bracelet
\$10,467, Ice Cube Rock
Rihanna necklace
\$7,308, Ice Cube bracelet
\$4,981 from **Chopard**.



Sleeveless knit top \$430 from **Emporio Armani**;

Happy Sport diamond steel and gold bracelet watch \$20,748, Happy Hearts ring \$3,327 from **Chopard**.

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rphaned as a baby, Sofi Sui was soon adopted, but that's not where the happily ever after begins.

Her adoptive mother was young, well to do, and Sofi was more a novelty than a cherished addition to the family. Parenthood lost its charm, and Sofi was abandoned for months at a time with different caregivers, without any indication of when she would see her mother.

With the neglect, and no semblance of permanence or normalcy, came confusion for the young Sofi. She remembers being made to do lots of chores and tasks and constantly being scolded for no apparent reason.

The amazing thing is that Sofi, now in her mid 40s, is not looking for understanding, empathy or even an apology; she shares openly to underscore the ideals and goals that have shaped and influenced her life, choices and passions.

As early as 12, Sofi realised that she could only depend on herself to get what she wanted and to move forward. We all have pain and disappointment, hurt and anger that no one sees she says. "And why should they?" she asks.

"It would be really easy to blame someone, anyone, for the wrongs in life, but it does no good and offers no consolation". She believes that it takes work to be happy, and her motto has always been, "Decide today who and what to be tomorrow."

At 18, she divined that a career in the hospitality industry would suit her personality, and she applied for an internship with a renowned chain. The advice she was handed went something like 'Why do you want to work in this tough industry? With your looks you can climb anyway'.

That totally annoyed her and she, not to put too fine a point on it, flipped the bird. Needless to say, she didn't get the internship but she did go on to work in the hospitality industry - hotels, F&B and casino chains in Hong Kong initially, and later in other places.

Never one to just do one thing, Sofi was drawn to property and stock investments, and soon had amassed - with an initial \$100,000 loan from her mother - a portfolio worth \$10 million.

Sofi credits her success in investment, then, to being blessed to have met property and investment gurus who were generous in sharing lessons, and experiences. And Sofi is an excellent listener and an even faster learner.

Then came the 90s crash, and overnight the 25 year-old was left with \$50,000; and the belief in herself that she could rebuild it all.

Fast-forward many jobs and ventures later to the acquisition three years ago of Pasta Brava Italian restaurant, arguably one of the better known in Singapore.

It was a purchase that was meant to be, as she'd had a long association with the landlords and even a minor share first in the restaurant.

"The previous owner was not too nice once the purchase went through, and I think the intent was not to see me succeed," shares Sofi. That in itself spurred her to do just the





opposite. She thrives on challenge. Now in its 27th year, Pasta Brava has never been more successful.

It took 16-hour days doing everything from sweeping floors, cleaning kitchens to reviewing and fine-tuning every dish. "There are 70 items on the menu and I can prepare every one of them."

Get Sofi talking about food and she a runaway train. She's adamant that food must be healthily prepared with good ingredients and should remain affordable.

She's determined to keep delivering at Pasta Brava and her personal baby SOFI café + pizza next door. The menu for the latter was largely developed by Sofi herself, and she does often prepare the desserts. Her favourite and a must try is the sticky date pudding!

Describing herself as a born psychic, "That's why I am so good in the stock market. Answers come. I feel people's vibes and energy. I always have time for people and their problems or situations", she shares.

That's the main reason she opened the café, so people can come and feel at home. A space where they will always have someone to listen to them, share their moments; good or bad. "I want it to be a comforting space, like coming home. And here, there's always someone to talk to".

What keeps Sofi invested in the businesses is actually her desire to be there for the team; growing their ability and talents and be able to provide all with a livelihood. She feels that responsibility strongly and takes it very seriously. And to be a fair employer; if you will work she will and does employ people with special needs, the elderly and even the homeless.

A mass of contradictions, and trying to keep her on point is like trying to catch a rainbow, once engaged though Sofi is relentless and unstoppable. She is a whirlwind with long long legs and an elfin smile. She's charming, generous, outspoken, with a wicked sense of humour.

And she has one last thing to cross off on her bucket list. Sofi wants to be a talk show host or co-host. A long time fan of the likes of Oprah, Walters and Stewart, she reckons a cross between a cook and advice show would be just up her alley.

I wouldn't bet against that happening. The lady does tend to get what the lady wants.

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What do you enjoy most about playing golf?

I have ADHD...so being able to FOCUS on that bloody tiny ball for 18 holes is already challengingly fun for my mind. But it is the open space and being around nature that reminds me how beautiful the world is, and that's what makes this a super sport.

What other sport or exercise do you participate in?

I love to dance or do dance fitness. When I first found Zumba, I was so into it that I trained for, and became, a Zumba part time instructor for four years. I can dance non stop for hours. I love badminton too.

If you need advice, or to discuss something important, who would you turn to?

It depends on what kind of advice I need, but 90% of the time I am the advisor. Since I was 16, for some reason people have found it easy to open up to me and ask for advice or just to have me listen. So most times now I talk to God whenever I have problem, and just wait for the answer through that little voice to speak. Nor sure if it's the voice of a guardian angel or just my inner self. It does work though.





Sequin jacket \$590, Drawstring sequin shorts \$430 from **Emporio Armani**;

Ice Cube Rock Rihanna necklace \$7,308, Ice Cube ring \$4,598, Ice Cube Rock Duo ring \$1,561, Ice Cube Rock Rihanna ring \$1,879 from **Chopard**.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY **GEOFF ANG**
 MAKEUP **EUNICE WONG**
 HAIR **HECTOR ZHUO, CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF KIMROBINSON**
 LOCATION **PASTA BRAVA AND SOFI CAFÉ + PIZZA, 11 CRAIG ROAD**

What traits do you most like about yourself?

My kindness and sensibility. They come naturally. Sometimes I think is being kind silly? There have been occasions that have given me pause to wonder. I think I best use these two traits to care for and look after the livelihood of the team that works for me. Being able to support and nurture them brings me comfort. That's no BS.

Describe yourself in three words

FUNNY, PASSIONATE, STRONG

What's your beauty regime?

There isn't a routine and I don't do anything much. Where's the time? I guess I'd look a lot better if I invested a bit more time and care but I have little patience for all that cream work. I'd like to work in a facial but there's always something more challenging to do with the time. I just try to sleep as much as I can. Being well rested is the best for my mind, skin and body.

What's a typical day like?

Work and more work! I am not a morning person but since opening SOFI Cafe+Pizza a few months ago I am up early and here by 8.30am to help with breakfast. Then I'll work right through till 11.30pm everyday. That for me is a really productive day. I am a workaholic. Period. I do however schedule in time to be with my daughter Chloe in pockets through the day. And a quick and effective 15 minute gym session.

What would you tell the 12 year-old Sofi now?

I would tell Sofi and, my coincidentally now 12 year-old daughter, to be a woman of substance. I learnt that lesson by trial and error. Don't take life, or anyone too seriously. Live life the way you want and always remember to be kind, be nice, be strong and be totally independent.

What's your fashion passion ?

I wear fashion according to my mood when I wake in the morning. If I feel like kicking ass that day, I will be in my favourite Lulu Lemon gym wear showing skin and muscles. If I am in a girly mood, I will either wear a chiffon dress or sundress for the day. Whatever I wear, has to match with the interior and concept of my restaurant and cafe.

Describe your personal style

I favour a sporty and sexy look. I don't follow trends; I follow how I feel and whether I like what I see on me in the mirror. I love Chanel though, since I was 12, and it is the only shop I can stay and shop for more than two hours. 