



PHOTO: TERENCE TAN

"I'm not a corporate animal and I can't stand office politics. I wanted to get out of the rat race and do something I really enjoyed."

— MR KAN, showing off his Red Arowana which costs more than \$50,000

Gone fishing

Leaving a high-profile job to become a farmer may make Kan Tien Siong seem like a strange kettle of fish, but he was just following his heart

► Leong Chan Teik

IT'S a deceptively basic approach to business success: Put your money where your heart is. And before you take the plunge, acquire business experience to help you manage your investments.

That is how it has been for Mr Kan Tien Siong, 57, and his passion for arowana, an endangered species of fish which originated long before human beings walked the earth.

He grew up in a kampung and, although he went into a career in banking and stockbroking, he retained a love for fish, birds and dogs, and even bred them.

He kept dozens of arowana in his aquariums and garden pond at home.

As passionate as he was about them, especially those with red and golden scales, with

work it was a different story. He felt a disconnect with his career, despite the good money.

Even when he became chief executive officer of a listed company, Ace Dynamics, which produces industrial gas, it wasn't enough to quell the dissatisfaction with the direction his life had taken.

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That finally came about 10 years ago when he turned 47 and had financial freedom.

His savings and his profits from his investments in shares and properties enabled him to make the dramatic switch from being a corporate chief to fish farmer.

He dreamt big: he tendered to rent 2.8 ha

of vacant land — equivalent to four football fields — in Lim Chu Kang to build his farm.

Mr Kan knew he was risking big money — he has pumped in more than \$3 million over the years — but was determined to live the life he wanted.

"If the farm did not succeed, I could always go back to working for other people," said the father of two girls.

He had another safety net: his wife earned a handsome salary as a senior vice-president in a bank.

As it turned out, his passion and hard work over the years have made his farm, Panda Aquatic Centre, a success. It is thriving with more than 1,000 arowana fish, which have a market value of as much as \$50,000 each.

The farm is guarded by eight Rottweilers, six of which were bred by him.

Aside from Singaporeans, his customers come from countries such as Indonesia, Japan, Taiwan and China. They are enough to keep his farm busy and profitable, so he does not do exports. "And why would I need so much money, anyway?" he asks.

Though the arowana is considered an endangered species, worldwide trade of the fish bred in captivity in Singapore is allowed by international convention.

Mr Kan has become an authority on the fish, having co-authored a book titled *The Dragon Fish* with the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority. You can find out more about arowanas at his website www.arowana.com.sg

An interesting fact he tells you is that the arowana's lifespan can cover dozens of years — which means it can be an enchanting life-long companion.

"Its majesty, power and grace continue to fascinate me," he says.

His wife, Helen, has been won over too. "Before I met my husband, I didn't know a thing about arowana. I've since learnt to appreciate it and its beautiful colours. And I must say my life is fuller now as I share his wider interest in animals."