

“People should think deeply about what they really want, beyond material things, and look at what their heart really wants”



PHOTO: KY CHENG

A time for reflection

Eleven people from diverse walks of life share their thoughts on the festive season with **Andrea Li**, revealing what the occasion means to them

LU PING

Taiwanese author and director,
Kwang Hwa Information and Culture Centre

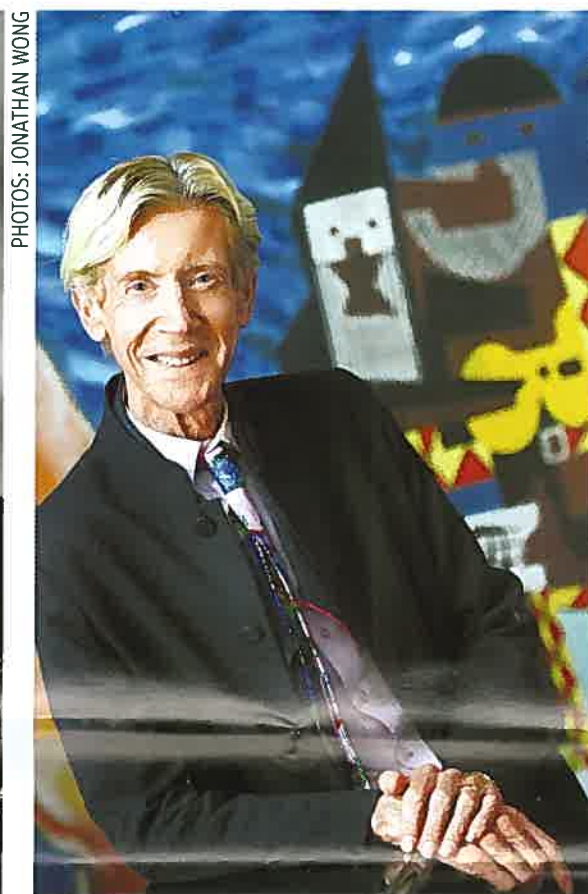
“To me, Christmas means sharing with others. With the world situation tougher than usual this year, now is the time for reflection,” she says. “People should think deeply about what they really want, beyond material things, and look at what their heart really wants.” Though Ms Lu is not Christian, she remembers, as a child, attending midnight mass with her parents in Taiwan, congregating with others in the spirit of sharing. The fresh smell of a Christmas tree, cards depicting snow scenes, reindeers and sleighs and *The 12 days of Christmas* carol are the memories that most define the festive season for her.

KAN TAI-KEUNG

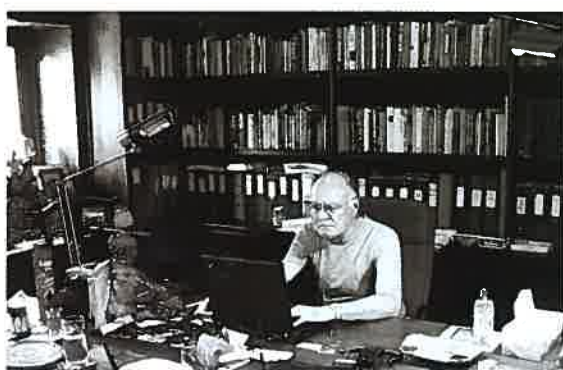
Graphic designer, founder, Kan and Lau Design Consultants

Mr Kan's treasure box contains piles of homemade Christmas cards he collected from schoolfriends while growing up in Guangzhou. Though he has never celebrated Christmas, Kan (below) remembers his father, who was working in Hong Kong at the time, sending him Christmas cards, in an effort to widen his collection. These days, he designs a Christmas card for his company each year. Kan finds joy in simple memories, so the ideal gift would be anything that has moved his heart. His wishes for next year are simply to be happy, peaceful and healthy.

"If a person is happy, it can be like Christmas every day"



PHOTOS: JONATHAN WONG



KEVIN THOMPSON

Director, The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts

Mr Thompson (above) is pondering longevity, having lost his father just before last Christmas and with his father-in-law arriving in Hong Kong in time for his 90th birthday. He has plenty planned for the festive season, beginning with the sharing of *il panettone* with his colleagues in the run-up to the day, enjoying Christmas Eve tea at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel with his wife, before culminating in a lengthy Christmas Day brunch with friends. Mr Thompson recalls childhood Christmases in the north of England, wassailing with brass bands, collecting for charity in the cold and carolling in hospices and respite centres before arriving home exhausted and full of mince pies.

PETER SO MAN-FUNG

Fung shui consultant

Christmas holds no particular meaning to Mr So (above left) other than contributing another day to the city's public holiday calendar. He will be skiing in Hokkaido, Japan and holidaying in Tokyo before returning to Hong Kong in the New Year. "There is no need to celebrate Christmas. I always tell people if a person is happy, it can be like Christmas every day," he says. Mr So hopes anxious investors use the holiday to relax and take time out from all the depressing economic news. "People shouldn't worry every second the market fluctuates. Take a break this holiday and revisit the situation again next year," he adds.

MARC FABER

Editor and publisher, *The Gloom, Boom & Doom Report*

Faber (above) will be missing his late mother this Christmas, who died last Boxing Day at the age of 93. He will be returning to St Moritz, Switzerland, where she lived and where the family congregates each year to go skiing. As a child, Faber and his brother always put together a present wish list with requests for everything from tents and kayaks to guns and parachutes, with the list growing longer each year. "I can still smell the burning candles on the Christmas tree and remember the elegant parties in the inner family circles my relatives arranged every year. There is, after all, something to be said for tradition," he adds.

CATHERINE EVE TROTMAN

Founder, Inside (furniture and lifestyle store)

Ms Trotman (above right) has powerful memories of childhood Christmases in England: the bewitching smell of a real Christmas tree, the enchanting decorations, candlelit carol services in the local 700-year-old church, a heavy Christmas stocking at the end of the bed, flaming brandy poured over the Christmas pudding and a big log fire. Now, with a family of her own – three young children – Christmas remains as exciting as ever, and Ms Trotman hopes to impart some of the magic she enjoyed as a child to her children. Her family will spend the day with three other families, savouring every bite of a traditional Christmas lunch.

VINCENT THIERRY

Head chef, Caprice, Four Seasons Hotel

Having to work when the rest of the world is on holiday is an occupational hazard in the hospitality industry. For Mr Thierry (right), who will spend much of the day cooking for guests, the real Christmas will begin later. When his shift ends, he will rush home, open a bottle of wine, turn on the Christmas music and enjoy a simple meal with his wife and children. As a child, the Frenchman enjoyed a very different Christmas. "Every Christmas my family would have goose roasted over a crackling fire, winter vegetables, potatoes and Christmas cookies. Snowing outside and the smell of the fire, the cracking and popping sounds, the heat on my face, the light of the Christmas tree and the presents. These things mean Christmas."



“Personal effort and thought are far better than an expensive price tag”

PHOTO: OLIVER TSANG



PILAR MORAIS
Executive director, Chi Residences

It has been such a busy year for Ms Morais (left), who returned to Hong Kong last year to help her father Philip Morais develop serviced apartment brand *Chi Residences*, that there has barely been any time to think about Christmas. However, she is looking forward to winding down and spending some quality time with her family. She grew up enjoying traditional Christmases with early morning family gatherings opening presents under the tree before a late afternoon lunch with friends and family. On the subject of gifts, she says the personal effort and thought that have gone into presents are far better than an expensive price tag.

EMMA MATTHEW
CEO, Asia-Pacific, Quintessentially (private concierge club)

This is a particularly special Christmas for Mrs Matthew (below left). Having married earlier this year, she and her husband will be spending their first Christmas together at her parents' home in Cornwall, England. She is looking forward to a family trip to the church, wrapping up warm, mulled wine, food in abundance and plenty of laughter. Mrs Matthew, who was raised in Hong Kong and Singapore, recalls similar memories of childhood Christmases spent around the tree in the square of the Cornwall village to which her family returned each year. “On Christmas morning, my siblings and I would pile into my parent’s bedroom at the crack of dawn, where all six of us would open our stockings together,” she says. These days, she tends to exchange small gifts with her husband before jetting off on New Year trips together. They will go to the Harbin ice festival in mainland China this year.

PHOTO: EDWARD WONG



BRUCE ROCKOWITZ
Chairman, Pure Group and President, Li & Fung

Given this year’s economic roller-coaster ride, Christmas is a timely opportunity to take a break from the stress and enjoy the moment with friends and loved ones, says Mr Rockowitz (below). The Canadian native has the perfect Christmas holiday planned: skiing in Whistler and sunning and sporting in Hawaii. For him, the ideal Christmas gift would be something straight from the heart. He loves it when his daughters create art or when his fiancée Coco Lee writes him a song. The businessman hopes for the world to see some positive signs of economic improvement in 2009.



DAVID YEO
Managing director, Aqua Restaurant Group, Ankh Concepts

Having grown up with all the trappings of a traditional Christmas, it must be frustrating for the restaurant entrepreneur not to know what he will be doing for Christmas this year. With several of his overseas projects still a work in progress, Mr Yeo (left) says he does not yet know which country he will be celebrating Christmas in, and that’s reason enough for him to make no plans for the day. “Regardless of where I’ll be, I am sure I will take a break on the day itself,” he says. That uncertainty aside, he does have a specific goal for the New Year: getting back into the gym with a serious fitness regime and shedding some weight.