



## 'Flavors' brings Scandinavian taste to Taiwan

Opening their own restaurant involved a smorgasbord of challenges, but for Ola Kronkvist and Stephanie Wang, the trouble was worth the chance to work side by side and share one of their greatest passions — cooking

BY SHELLEY HUANG  
STAFF REPORTER



Swedish chef Ola Kronkvist chops onions while talking about his experience opening the restaurant Flavors in Taipei.

What do Ikea furniture, hand-painted wooden figurines called Dala horses and meatballs served with lingonberry jam have in common?

They are all from Sweden — and they can all be found at Taipei's only Swedish restaurant, Flavors, a cozy establishment on an alley off Renai Road (仁愛路) that serves traditional Swedish dishes made with organic, locally grown ingredients.

Chef Ola Kronkvist owns the restaurant with his wife, Stephanie Wang (王舒妍). The couple opened the restaurant to bring Swedish food to Taiwan and create a home for themselves and their guests.

And for Kronkvist and Wang, "home" is a fair description of the restaurant where they spend almost every waking moment — and say they enjoy each day.

While both love cooking, Wang usually takes care of the guests at the restaurant and deals with suppliers, while Kronkvist is the main chef.

"I'm the husband chained to the stove," he said with a hearty laugh.

But he's not complaining. "I am so happy to come to work every day," 35-year-old Kronkvist said. "I love my job."

"A lot of people say we under-charge, but I tell them money isn't the motivation for this restaurant," he said.

For Kronkvist and Wang, the real motivation was the chance to work side by side.

The couple met while studying at a hotel and restaurant school in Switzerland. Rather than the traditional approach of flowers and chocolate, Kronkvist said he wooed Wang with his culinary creations.

As a chef, Kronkvist said he believes people connect over food because "you make moments with it."

As an example, he said, imagine offering

someone a cup of tea brewed with leaves you plucked at a mountain tea plantation. A personal touch adds a whole new aspect, he said.

Wang and Kronkvist said spending a leisurely afternoon cooking a meal together was still one of their favorite activities.

And cooking is a collaborative effort. The pair go to the grocery store together and plan the cooking together.

"We discuss what we're going to buy, what we're going to make ... The whole process is fun," Wang said.

But opening a restaurant was a challenge. Only about 30 percent of restaurants survive the first year and the figures go downhill from there, they said. Add to that the effects of the recession on consumers' spending habits and you have a recipe for stressful times.

"When times are tough, it is good to have a strong team behind you — I think that's why we're strong, because we're married and live a happy life together," Kronkvist said.

Despite the daunting obstacles, Wang and Kronkvist were determined to try their hand at running a restaurant because they wanted to work for themselves and design their own work environment.

Kronkvist said he wanted a respectful and cheerful work environment. He said hotels and restaurants in Taiwan were often stressful places to work, with managers shouting at employees, who in turn are expected to continue working with a smile for the benefit of customers.

That "just doesn't work," Kronkvist said. Reflecting on their experience opening a restaurant, Kronkvist said Taiwan was a good environment to start a business.

It encourages entrepreneurship, he said, although being a foreigner can add more challenges to an already long list of tasks,

including registering for licenses and finding equipment and suppliers, he said.

"I'm lucky because I have my wife and she speaks Chinese," Kronkvist said. "Nobody can cheat me because she's from this country. It makes a difference."

Kronkvist added that he was making an effort to learn Mandarin, but that his vocabulary was still limited.

"Give me a small plate" and "Do you have a reservation?" are no problem, he said. But until he learns more Chinese, Wang will have to take care of that department.

Although Wang has translated the restaurant's offerings into Chinese, the couple said they disagree sometimes on what to call their traditional Swedish dishes.

As Mandarin names for dishes are often not as direct as English, Wang said translation poses a challenge. Direct translation into Chinese risks making menu offerings sound less appetizing, she said.

And the pair work hard to offer an appetizing menu. The dishes at Flavors are made with good quality, locally produced ingredients, Kronkvist said.

"Freshly produced food in close proximity is always better than transported food," he said, explaining why he believes restaurants should shun imported ingredients.

Kronkvist said he also sees the locally grown, organic products he uses in his food as "a good way to represent Taiwan" and support the local economy.

"Taiwan has some of the best seafood and fresh produce that I've come across," he said.

Having lived in 15 countries, Kronkvist is in a position to make comparisons.

"I've seen the world," he said.

On his life in Taiwan, Kronkvist said: "Taiwan is a very safe place because most people understand a little English or they will find

someone who understands it," he said.

His first impression of the country as a child came from the "Made in Taiwan" toys that were ubiquitous in Sweden back then.

Since moving to Taiwan, he has relished learning about the culture and is now a self-proclaimed *taike* (台客), he said, adding that he wished more Taiwanese appreciated their home for what it is.

That includes appreciating the hot, humid summer, he said.

"Now that summer's here, most Taiwanese just say: 'Oh it's going to be so hot.' But I [am picturing] my Taiwan Beer on the porch," he said.

Another of Taiwan's charms, he said, is the food stands. Kronkvist said he enjoyed traveling and testing roadside food stands across the country.

The delight, he said, lies in finding the gems that are often deceptively humble.

The customers may be sitting on plain plastic chairs, but "they do it because this cold noodle [dish] is one of the best you've ever had," he said.

Kronkvist started cooking when he was only four. He learned to make his home country's classic meatballs at an age when most kids could barely eat the dish without getting sauce all over themselves.

His grandmother taught him, and the dishes he learned were mostly traditional Swedish cuisine such as the apple cakes he offers at Flavors.

Although Kronkvist said he sometimes misses Sweden, he has found a new home in Taiwan and his restaurant is a special source of joy.

"When guests come here and they don't want to leave — that's what I like, that's the passion behind all this," he said. "If you have passion for what you do, it will reflect in what you do."

## Center promotes European studies and exchanges

**TEAMING UP:** Seven local universities participating in the EU-funded network will launch programs in EU studies at the graduate and undergraduate levels

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA

The EU Centers program added a Taiwanese consortium to its network on Friday, with seven local universities led by National Taiwan University (NTU) launching a Taiwanese EU Center.

The aim of the four-year program, based at the NTU campus, is to create a foothold for EU studies at Taiwan's institutes for higher education and to serve as a resource for information on Europe for a broader audience.

The seven participating universities will also launch EU study programs at the undergraduate or graduate levels.

Taiwan is the third East Asian country to join the EU Centers program, which was launched in 1998 and is funded by the European Commission.

### EU FUNDING

The European Commission is providing a grant of 1.1 million euros (US\$1.54 million) over the next four years for the project, while the rest of the budget will be covered by the participating institutes: NTU and National Chengchi, National Chung Hsing, National Sun Yat-sen, National Dong Hwa, Tamkang and Fu Jen Catholic universities.

The EU Center will offer

workshops and seminars on EU policies as well as summer classes for high school teachers on topics related to Europe.

An opening ceremony was attended by representatives from the European Commission and the European Parliament, as well as Minister of Foreign Affairs Francisco Ou (歐鴻鍊), Minister of Education Cheng Jui-cheng (鄭瑞城), the presidents of the seven universities and members and directors of European offices in Taipei.

The collaborative effort marks a significant step in EU-Taiwan cooperation, Ou said.

The EU Center "Taipei characterizes the way in which relations between Taiwan and the EU have continued to expand," Ou said.

### ACADEMIC EXCHANGES

"Taiwan and Europe have a lot to offer each other," said James Moran, director for Asia of the Directorate General for External Relations of the European Commission. "This center provides a chance to make a difference."

The ceremony, hosted by the European Economic and Trade Office, featured a performance of Ludwig van Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* in English, French and Mandarin by a Taipei children's choir.

Cheng said approximately 2,500 students from Europe are studying in Taiwan and 30,000 Taiwanese students in Europe, adding that the center would strengthen academic ties.

The EU Center network in the Asia-Pacific region includes South Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand.



### DRAGON OUT OF WATER

Foreign students at Kaohsiung County's Shu-te University vie last Wednesday in a dragon boat race — sans water — at the school's promotional event for Thursday's Dragon Boat Festival. PHOTO: CNA

## Strays get love and care as 'community pets'

BY JENNY W. HSU  
STAFF REPORTER

Big Yellow (大黃) and Little White (小白) are a fair deal better off than your average stray dog in Taiwan. They may not have owners, but you would never know it from the faux-diamond-studded collars around their necks or their impeccably shiny coats.

The homeless Big Yellow and Little White are in fact loved and cared for by an entire community. Along with several other strays, a Taipei County community considers them "community dogs" and cherishes them appropriately.

Patricia Kortmann, who moved to Taiwan from Germany almost two decades ago, said she started the idea with two expatriate friends in a Taipei County mountain community near Wulai (烏來) about a year ago.

The idea, she said, was to help strays rather than send them to shelters where animals are destroyed if not claimed by their owners or adopted.

In the past, residents of the community would call in the county dog catchers to deal with strays that wandered into the area. At Taipei County shelters, such animals are destroyed after seven days.

"We would fight with the dog catchers. Then finally we were able to convince the Sincian City Government and the management to stop the dog catching service in our community on the condition that we would take care of the

dogs," she said.

And so the concept of community pets took shape.

Today the community takes care of 10 dogs and several cats. Although the animals have no owners, they are fed and cared for by residents on a daily basis.

Driving around the hilly community, one sees cat "hotels" on pillars along the side of the road, built by residents and other volunteers.

Kortmann declined to disclose the name of her community, saying that people occasionally exploit the residents' goodwill by taking their unwanted pets there to dump them.

She estimated that between 15 and 20 dogs are abandoned at her community each year. She believes most of the dogs are dumped by nearby puppy-breeding facilities, noting that many of them cannot be sold because of physical defects.

The community has adopted the catch-neuter-release (CNR) model, catching stray animals, paying for them to be neutered or spayed and vaccinated, and releasing them where they were found.

The CNR method, which has been introduced in cities all over the world as authorities seek a humane option to deal with strays, is effective, advocates say, because the animals can no longer breed and because they stay in one general area due to their territorial instincts,

discouraging other animals from settling there.

The strays can then be cared for as "community dogs," without owners but with an area where they are relatively safe and feel at home.

Not everyone in Kortmann's community was happy with the idea at first, but gradually the effectiveness of the CNR method became evident, she said, and the group won wider support.

Early this month, the group set up a booth at the community's annual fair to raise funds to care for the animals by selling donated goods.

One woman bought a pooper-scooper for NT\$50 and donated another NT\$300.

Many residents in the community know the animals by name and on the group's blog, residents can discuss the animals. In one message on the site, a resident said her family was upset when one of the community dogs, Lucky, went missing. She said they were later relieved when the dog turned up again.

In addition to CNR, the group looks for homes for the strays they find and sponsors workshops to train pet owners to handle their animals, said Kortmann, who also cares for seven rescued dogs at home.

And to promote responsible ownership, the group has set up



Patricia Kortmann of Germany plays with a purebred Weimaraner that was abandoned near her home last month. The dog is being cared for by a member of a Taipei County community and is available for adoption.

boxes around the area with plastic bags to remind dog owners to clean up after their pets.

The effectiveness of the CNR and "community pet" program has drawn the attention of another community nearby, which is interested in adopting the same measures, Kortmann said.

The next goal for her community is to convince nearby farmers to stop using metal animal traps that have maimed or killed many dogs and cats in the area.

Last month, as Kortmann and her husband walked their dogs in

the woods, two of the dogs were caught in traps. When her husband tried to free them, his fingers were also caught.

After helping more than 70 dogs since the community began its program, Kortmann said the lesson to learn was that "anything is possible with the support of your community."

"It is hard at first, but as people see what you are doing is genuinely good for the community, they will warm to it. In fact, they might even end up helping you," she said.

## African handicrafts in exhibit at Taipei mall

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA

An exhibit of African handicrafts opened last Saturday at the mall next to Shangri-La's Far Eastern Plaza Hotel in Taipei, with the goal of promoting understanding of African cultures.

"Fascinating Africa: Handicraft Expo 2009" runs through Sunday and was organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of its efforts to increase knowledge in Taiwan about the continent.

The ministry said it hoped the exhibition would lead to commercial opportunities between Taiwanese and African companies and enhance economic and trade relations, as one of the government's policies was to promote "economic and trade diplomacy."

Burkina Faso Minister of Culture, Tourism and Communications Philippe Savadogo was one of several representatives and dignitaries to attend an opening ceremony, which featured a performance of Western African music by the Ensemble Musical des Amis.

"Culture knows no borders," Savadogo said. "I believe this exhibition will allow you to better understand the talent, tastes, abilities and lifestyles of Africans."

Swazi Ambassador Njabuliso Gwebu, chairperson of the Africa

**"This exhibition will allow you to better understand the talent, tastes, abilities and lifestyles of Africans."**

— Philippe Savadogo, Burkina Faso culture minister

Group of Ambassadors and Representatives in Taiwan, expressed hope that the handicrafts on exhibit would win the appreciation of Taiwanese.

The expo features more than 2,000 handicrafts, including traditional musical instruments, batik, wooden and bronze sculptures from Burkina Faso, Gambia, Sao Tome and Principe, Swaziland, South Africa, Nigeria and Libya.

In conjunction with the exhibit, classes in hair-braiding, drumming and face-painting are also being offered.