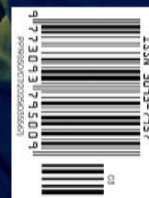
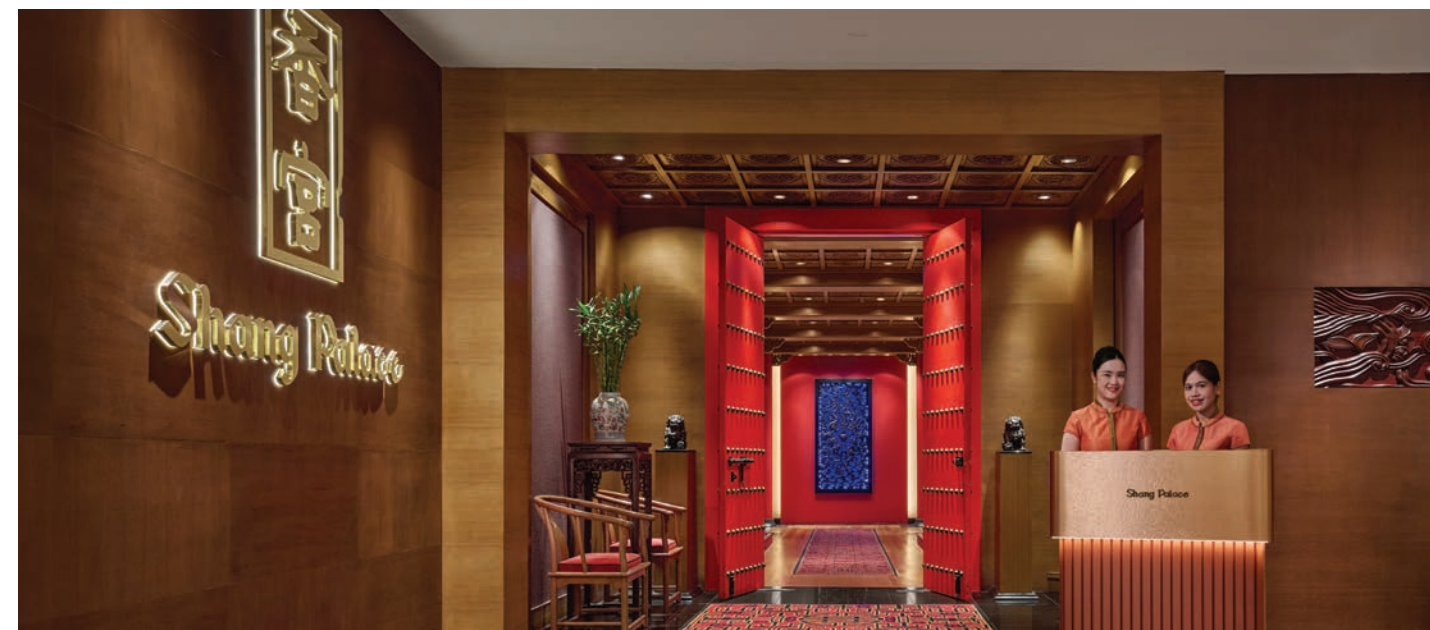


Palate.

On Their Terms

*Chef-owners Aidan Low and YC Chong of
Akar and Terra reimagine Malaysian fine dining*





AN ICON OF CANTONESE DINING, BEAUTIFULLY RENEWED

At Shang Palace, a distinguished legacy enters a refined new chapter. The restaurant unveils a thoughtfully refreshed interior, enhanced with elegant furnishings, intricate detailing, and a harmonious palette that reflects sophistication and serenity. Blending contemporary comfort with timeless Oriental elegance, the renewed space offers a graceful setting where tradition meets modern refinement, ideal for intimate family celebrations and important business gatherings alike.

Honouring its Cantonese culinary heritage, Shang Palace presents time-honoured classics crafted with precision, from delicate dim sum and roasted Peking duck to double-boiled soups, premium seafood, and wok-fried specialties rich with "wok hei." Each dish reflects balance, purity, and depth, served in an ambiance as refined as the cuisine itself.



For reservations, please call (60 3) 2786 2378
or email us at dining.KL@shangri-la.com

The Best Caffeine Perk-Me-Up at Bukit Bintang

Strong, smooth, creamy, and exotic —
all types of coffee beans, no questions asked.
Come home now, coffee connoisseurs!

浓郁顺滑，酸韵醇厚，奇珍异豆，尽享非凡风味。
咖啡爱好者，一起品味生活的香醇！

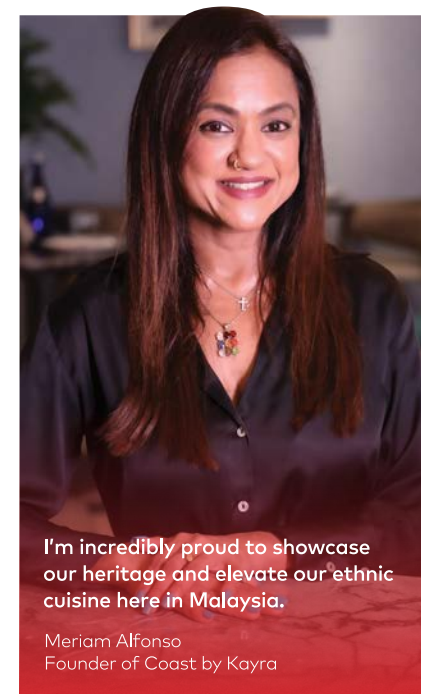


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|----|-----------------------|-------------------|----|--------------------|-----------------|
| 01 | The Messengers by JWC | L131-132, Level 1 | 06 | V88 Cafe & Bar | L112-1, Level 1 |
| 02 | Come True CAFE | L113-1, Level 1 | 07 | Cong Caphe | L143, Level 1 |
| 03 | Bean Brothers | G36 | 08 | Tarbush | LG06-LG07 |
| 04 | Coast by Kayra | G03-G05 | 09 | Opera Café | G29A |
| 05 | Café Marais | Ground Floor | 10 | Rue de Paris Table | UG31 |

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THE HOME OF MICHELIN FLAVOURS 米其林指南



2026 米其林必比登推介 Another Michelin Moment for COAST by Kayra — Bib Gourmand 2026

Coast by Kayra is once again
recognised in the 2026 Michelin Bib
Gourmand, reaffirming its refined
take on Kerala cuisine in Malaysia —
where heritage meets modern
elegance.

Introducing the Latest Kerala Paste
Collection: from Biryani to Roast
Gravy Masala and Pollichatthu
Masala, each jar brings Michelin-level
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Savour now at
G03-G05, The Starhill

2026 米其林入选餐厅 Li Yen Proudly Retains Michelin Selected Status for 2026

With embroidered wall panelling, velvet
banquettes, and bronze-framed mirrors,
the restaurant sets the stage for a luxurious dining
experience. The menu features classic Canton-
ese dishes, including dim sum, honey-glazed
BBQ Iberico pork, and roast goose.

Visit us now at
Level 1, The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur



2026 米其林入选餐厅 Shanghai Restaurant Honored as Michelin Selected for 2026

The veteran chef crafts Shanghaiese
classics, with the must-try xiao long
bao featuring soupy pork filling in
delicate, pleated skin.

Visit us now at
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A Space Beyond Commerce

The place is a vibrant lifestyle and community hub that blends modern urban design with a relaxed, social atmosphere.

Unlike a traditional shopping mall, it focuses on creating a space where people can gather, work, dine, and unwind.



Atmosphere & Vibe

The Campus, Ampang is more than a lifestyle hub. It is a reflection of shifting urban priorities - where experience is valued over efficiency, and community over convenience. In doing so, it offers a glimpse into the future of public spaces in Kuala Lumpur: spaces that are not just visited but lived in.

Open Table

Oh, the
unexpected brevity of it all.
I didn't think this moment would come
so soon—and twice over. Less than a year ago,
I penned a farewell I thought would last a while longer,
however, it turns out that time in publishing moves at the speed
of ideas, and not calendars as we know it.

Of course, I'm grateful. As I step out of my role as Editor-in-Chief of *Palate*
and *Nomad*, I'm setting out to build a bigger and longer table as Top 30 Media's
Group General Manager. The conversations I started here were never meant to end
on the page, but now I move on from voice to vision, and thus from writing stories to
building the ecosystems that support them. To Alvin, thank you for seeing in me
something I didn't know was there.

This time, I leave my editorial and content team in the knowing hands of Andrea Wong. A
woman I've worked with, learned from, and share the same values and ethics with. While
the voice may shift form, the point of view will remain. I'm still in the room; it's just going to
be a bigger one. So, to my band of co-conspirators, thank you for believing in *Palate* and
for all the heart you've put into getting it off the ground. I see you. Now soar.

And back to regular programming. This issue sees us directing our first cover story,
stepping more deliberately into the role of storytellers beyond the byline. We bring
chef-owners YC Chong of Terra and Aidan Low of Akar together to celebrate two
brilliant minds doing things on their own terms—fitting, as Malaysia's fine dining
scene evolves into something more self-defined, less derivative. They earned
their Michelin stars on the same day and operate just doors apart, where
camaraderie naturally follows. Enough from me. Head to Page 48.

Speaking of doing things on their own terms, I realise now
that if editing is about what makes the cut, then
leadership is about what makes it possible.
Wish me luck, please!

Tengku Zainab Ajlaa
Editor-in-Chief
(turned Group General Manager)

Photography: Kim Mun; Styling: Mughni Che Din, Surya Annari; Makeup: Joey Yap;
Hair: Nicole Ng; Jacket and skirt: Kate Spade; Jewellery: personality is own.

Palate.

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CLOSE QUARTERS

On a quiet stretch of the same row, just a few doors apart, YC Chong and Aidan Low are rewriting the terms of Malaysian dining. Fresh off their Michelin stars, the chef-owners of Terra and Akar are not rivals so much as reflections—neighbours in proximity, contemporaries in craft, and co-conspirators in a shared pursuit. Their food could not be more different, yet it arrives at the same question: what might Malaysian cuisine become when approached with rigour, curiosity, and an unspoken sense of kinship?



On Aidan: Jacket, shirt, trousers, and tie, Hackett
On YC: Jacket, sweater, shirt, and trousers, Hackett
PHOTOGRAPHY: Aaron/Lensworks;
STYLING: Andrea Wong; GROOMING: Joey Yap, Nicole NG; PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANT: Abhar

graze

Jungle Booked

Firmly embedded in the region's culinary conversation, Dewakan charts a steady, confident ascent—now landing at No.62 on Asia's 50 Best Restaurants extended list, with a remarkable 22-place climb. Under Darren Teoh, the restaurant continues to push the boundaries of Malaysian cuisine through an approach that is at once intellectual and scientific. Grounded in research and expressed through thoughtful culinary experimentation, Dewakan draws its dishes from indigenous ingredients in a way no other restaurant does.

Words: TENGKU ZAI



The Pleasure Quarter

Once a place for learning, now a playground for your appetite. The Campus Ampang is where comfort bites and sweet treats collide.

Words: PATRICK LOH

Before the lattes, hot plates, and gelatos, The Campus Ampang was once home to The International School of Kuala Lumpur. With breezy open-air hallways and cavernous halls that have since traded textbooks for tasting menus, its past still lingers in the bones of the space. First established in 1976, the school welcomed over 400 students from around the world, and quickly grew into a vibrant hub.

Today, it's been reimagined as a one-stop dining playground and community space, where elevated restaurants sit comfortably alongside quick bites and dessert spots, spanning just about every cuisine you can think of. The energy hasn't faded but simply evolved. The Campus Ampang now blends modern sports facilities, educational spaces, retail offerings, and a lively dining scene into one dynamic destination. It's easily one of our go-to hangouts, so while there is a plethora of cuisines on offer, we've rounded up a few of our favourite must-visit spots to get you started.



Dancing Fish

At Dancing Fish, expect Malay-Indo flavours turned up to eleven—bold, punchy, and deeply comforting. A Michelin Bib Gourmand darling for three years straight, this spot is best known for its namesake Dancing Fish: a whole tilapia fried to a dramatic crisp and served upright like it's mid-performance. The menu leans into crowd-pleasers including Buntut Belado (spicy oxtail), Udang Sambal Hitam, and Bebek Goreng, alongside an impressive lineup of over 20 house-made sambals. Drinks like lemongrass pandan coolers and tamarind iced tea keep things refreshing, balancing all that glorious heat. Go hungry, and preferably with friends.

Tel: +603-4266 6855



Meraki Café

Meraki leans into that effortless 'slow café' charm where brunch stretches into late afternoons and no one's in a rush. The name itself means doing something with soul, and it shows in a menu that blends Western café staples with wholesome, feel-good plates. Expect creamy pastas, hearty sandwiches, and all-day breakfast sets alongside lighter bowls and salads for the virtuous days. Drinks are just as thoughtful. Enjoy their wide selection of smooth coffees, matcha lattes, and refreshing coolers. It's the kind of place you go for a meal and accidentally stay for a second coffee.

Tel: +6011-3725 7605



Pizza Duo

As the name hints, you get the best of both worlds at Pizza Duo: mix-and-match two flavours on a single pizza, perfect for the indecisive. The menu leans into classic Italian comforts, with wood-fired pizzas taking centre stage like Margherita, Pepperoni, and more indulgent picks like truffle or burrata-topped creations. Beyond pizzas, there are pastas and hummus to round things out, but let's be honest, you're here for the crust. Pair it with a chilled soda, matcha, or coffee, and you're set for a laid-back, carb-happy feast.

Tel: +6012-368 2980

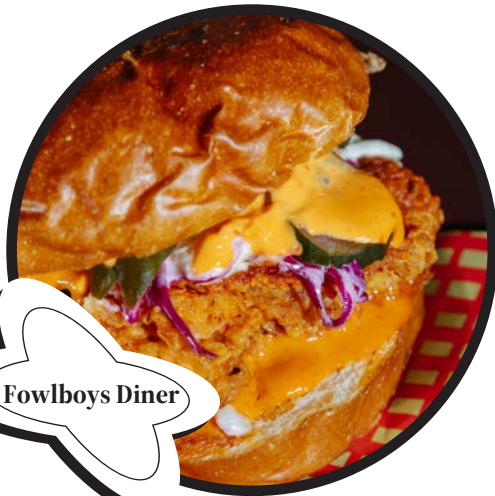


Bingbing's

For something icy, cheerful, and dangerously easy to over-order, Bingbing's is your go-to sugar rush stop. As its name suggests, Bingbing's is all about Korean *bingsu* (funaly shaved ice dessert) and fruit-loaded concoctions that come in unique, locally-inspired flavour options. Ranging from Malaysian favourites like Kaya Toast and Onde-Onde to more classic options like Koko Krunch and Mango Passionfruit, it's hard to pick a favourite. The only solution?

Keep coming back so you can try them all.

IG: @bingbing Smy



Fowlboys Diner

If fried chicken is your love language, Fowlboys Diner speaks it fluently. Styled like a retro American diner with vinyl booths and neon-lit charm, this spot serves up Southern-inspired comfort food with serious attitude. Fowlboys Diner is best known for its golden, buttermilk fried chicken that's crispy on the outside but juicy within, and its cult-favourite Chicken & Waffles combo. Go beyond the basics with the fiery Nashville Sandwich and the cheekily named Sugar Daddy, both bound to leave you wanting more.

Tel: +6016-607 7601



Piccoli Lotti

Piccoli Lotti is where things get delightfully indulgent. This artisanal gelateria brings a slice of Italy to Ampang, serving up small-batch gelato that's creamy, rich, and never overly sweet. Expect a playful mix of classic and locally inspired flavours like Pistachio, Strawberry Cheesecake, Pulut Tai Tai, and Durian. Pair your scoops with crispy waffles or go all in with soft-serve topped with fun extras. It's just the right kind of dangerous, because you'll go for one scoop and leave with three.

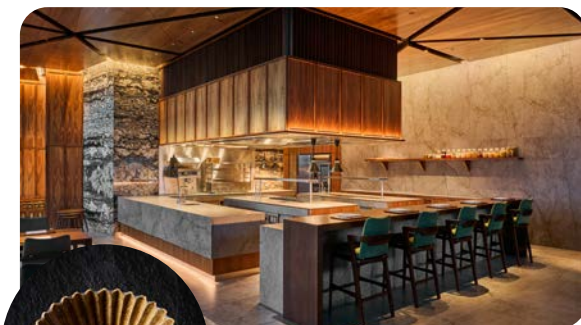
IG: @piccolilotti.my

A Skyline of Flavours

From refined plates to late-night pours, Ilham Tower gathers five distinct dining experiences under one roof.

Words: PATRICK LOH

KLCC is busy in the best and most chaotic way possible. Between the endless cafés, restaurants, and malls, the real challenge isn't finding food, it's deciding where to actually go for a good meal, a decent drink, and maybe a skyline view that doesn't come with a crowd. If you're around Ampang Park, here's an easier answer: Ilham Tower. Under one roof, you'll find a mix of newly opened fine-dining spots, elevated eateries, bars, and dessert stops. We've done the rounds for you and here's what's worth your time.



K Restaurant KL

At K, Chef Hidemichi Seki isn't here to import Japan, but to interpret Malaysia. Set 274 metres above sea level at Ilham Tower, the restaurant brings a kaiseki sensibility to local ingredients, where *pais patin* from Pahang, guinea fowl, eel, and even nasi ulam are treated with precision. A dedicated forager sources ingredients across the peninsula, ensuring what lands on the plate feels considered, not ornamental. Dishes like Turmeric Bud Porridge and a reworked Cantonese Corn Soup with Century Egg show restraint, without lacking depth. For Chef Seki, it's simple: let the ingredients speak but just in a slightly more refined voice. *Tel: +6012-409 2114*



Gaia's KL

High above the city on Level 37, Gaia's KL brings Langkasuka flavours into a modern, grill-led setting that feels relaxed but never careless. The menu leans into fire—courtesy of the Mibrasa charcoal oven—coaxing depth from dishes without overcomplicating them. Think Toro Miang Kham, where tuna meets caramel, galangal, and herbs in a neat, punchy bite, or Chargrilled Mackerel Masak Nanas paired with a bright, turmeric-laced pineapple sauce. Add a sweeping view of KL, with Merdeka 118 in sight, and you've got a spot that balances flavour, fire, and perspective.

Tel: +6012-600 0371



Neo Bar KL

Looking right at home next to Gaia's, Neo leans into the in-between—part cocktail bar, part creative playground. The menu reads like a series of memories, reworked into drinks that feel nostalgic but unexpected. The Childhood Truce riffs on Neapolitan ice cream with avocado vodka and strawberry panna cotta, while Silent Sour balances tropical brightness with a sharp edge. Beyond theatrics, its 'Sip-Cycle' menu repurposes unused ingredients into new pours, keeping sustainability in mind. Add a skyline that shifts from sunset to city lights, and Neo becomes less about categories, more about mood. *Tel: +6012-600 0287*



Sal's KL

On the ground floor sits Sal's, a sandwich bar that knows exactly what it's doing. The 'Sal's Signature Hero Rolls' line-up keeps things tight: a Bánh Mi with a Western spin, a classic Reuben, and a few other crowd-pleasers in between. You could go for a wrap, but the croissant version is the move. It's flaky, buttery, and just indulgent enough. The Smoked Salmon and Cream Cheese? An easy yes. Add a cappuccino, affogato, or mocha if you're in the mood, or switch things up with the 'Kombucha of the Month' or their Homemade Lemonade. Simple food, done right, no overthinking required. *Tel: +6012-694 9114*



Söfte

Parked in the same space as Sal's is its sweeter alter ego, Söfte, a soft serve ice-cream spot that doesn't play it safe with flavours. Think Kaya Toast, Strawberry Cheesecake, and Black Sesame Praline swirling into cones that are familiar and fun. Matcha fans are well looked after too, with options like Japanese Cheesecake Matcha, Japanese Matcha Latte, and Japanese Hojicha Latte keeping things mellow and earthy.

And then there are the cakes. The kind that quietly convince you to 'just have a bite' and somehow keep you there for hours. Chocolate Entremet, Carrot Cake, Berry Banoffee, Yuzu Tart, Raspberry Pistachio Brownie ... you get the idea. Want your cakes custom made? Sure, Söfte's got you covered. *Tel: +6012-694 9114*

Around The World In 80 Bites

At Marina Bay Sands, the world comes together in a single skyline, as a collection of restaurants turns one address into a delicious culinary journey across continents.

Words: TENGKU ZAI



LAVO Coastal Italian Restaurant and Rooftop

Perched 57 floors above the skyline, dinner here feels like a destination in itself—an Italian feast elevated by city views and a sense of occasion. Think coastal pastas and vibrant antipasti that pair as effortlessly with sunset wine and myriad cocktails as the restaurant builds up to having an electric evening atmosphere, a vibe shared with its famed Vegas counterpart. *IG: @lavosingapore*



Wakuda Singapore

Dinner at Wakuda Restaurant & Bar channels the pulse of Tokyo through the lens of famed chef Tetsuya Wakuda and echoing the concept's counterpart in Las Vegas. At the sushi counter, the omakase unfolds with seasonal precision—each course serving up peak ingredients, but with unique twists. This is a meal best experienced as a slow, considered progression into the evening. *wakudajapanese.com*



Maison Boulud

A sense of French conviviality anchors every meal at Maison Boulud, where Daniel Boulud translates the spirit of the family table into a polished waterfront setting. Seasonal ingredients are treated with finesse and respect while a deep cellar and thoughtful wine programmes extend the evening into a lingering, expressive affair. *IG: @maisonbouludsg*



Jin Ting Wan

Within a setting inspired by Song Dynasty elegance, Jin Ting Wan reimagines Cantonese fine dining through the lens of Executive Chef Albert Li. Dinner unfolds with refined wok craftsmanship, elevated classics, and regional touches guided by tea and wine pairings. All in an atmosphere of deep blues and gilded accents designed by AvroKO. *IG: @jintingwansg*



RISE

Everything everywhere all at once. When having breakfast at RISE, the table reads like a passport and your holiday morning begins with a generous spread, but really all meals unfold into a globe-trotting affair. From chilli crab to wagyu *rendang*, sashimi to European classics, it's indulgence without borders, best enjoyed over prosecco as dusk settles into jazz-lit ease. *IG: @riserestaurantsg*



Estiatorio Milos

Now, we move over to Greece. Rooted in the philosophy of sharing the Aegean at its purest, Estiatorio Milos is guided by the legacy of chef and restaurateur Costas Spiliadis. The meal moves from an open seafood display to plates that celebrate simplicity—whole fish baked in sea salt, zucchini and eggplant crisped into signature form, and lobster pasta complemented by an expansive Greek wine selection. *estiatoriomilos.com*



Spago Bar & Lounge

At Spago Dining Room, Wolfgang Puck brings his Beverly Hills legacy sky-high, pairing panoramic pool and city views with a distinctly Californian ease. Here, East meets West in audacious ways—think tuna tartare cones, *laksa*-laced sea bream, and *kaya* toast reimagined—best experienced over a languid, impeccably composed meal. *IG: @spagosingapore*



Mott 32 Singapore

Blending Hong Kong heritage with a New York namesake, Mott 32 Singapore brings a modern lens to time-honoured Chinese cuisine. The star of the show here is the signature apple-wood roasted Peking duck (a word to the wise: pre-order ahead) alongside refined plates such as the triple-cooked short rib and lobster *ma po* tofu. *mott32.com*

A TAPESTRY OF ASIAN FLAVOURS

At Sunway Pyramid, familiar Asian flavours shine, with locally owned eateries delivering comfort, character, and every reason to return.

Deciding where to eat can sometimes feel like a group project no one asked for, until you end up at a mall. At Sunway Pyramid, the options are endless, and somehow, everyone still finds what they want without too much negotiation.

While it's easy to default to Western plates, there are plenty of locally owned Asian offerings here that more than hold their own. If you're looking to keep things closer to home, here are some spots in Sunway Pyramid worth making a beeline for.



CILI KAMPUNG

If you're in the mood for proper kampung cooking—the kind that leans unapologetically on sambal, herbs, and spices—Cili Kampung delivers without overthinking it. Standing tall at Terrace, it's where beef, chicken, and seafood come dressed in familiar flavours that feel like someone's been perfecting the recipe for years. These dishes should be on your table: Sup Tulang Warisan, Masak Lomak Beef, Terung Goreng Belacan, Ketam Berempah, and Lemak Bakar Masam Manis.



ORIENTAL KOPI

The queues say it all. Oriental Kopi has become a go-to for comfort plates that hit fast and hit right. They're popular for many dishes including nasi lemak, mee siam, hor fun, and the Signature Egg Tart. While you're waiting for a table, plan your order: Nanyang Curry Chicken Rice, Rendang Chicken Nasi Lemak, Traditional Pan Mee, and Chicken Herbal Soup.



A'DECADE

This is where hawker classics get a little glow-up without losing their soul. A'Decade keeps things familiar but sharp, so expect dishes like Nasi Kerabu with Percik Ayam, Curry Wanton Mee, Prawn Mee, Rendang Chicken Rice, Satay, Fried Lekor, and Char Koay Teow. Desserts? The usual suspects, and we're not complaining: Ais Kacang, Nyonya Cendol, and Teh Tarik.



POKOK CAFÉ

Come for the glasshouse, stay for the plates. Pokok Café balances leafy, light-filled aesthetics with food that doesn't shy away from flavour. This outlet brings a few exclusives worth showing up for: Chili Padi Pesto Pasta, Nasi Lemak Platter with Rendang Daging, Hot Chick Burger, and Steak & Egg.



RICH KOPITIAM

A good kopitiam keeps things exactly where they should be: comforting, familiar, and always within reach. Think nasi lemak, chicken rice, kaya toast, and soft-boiled eggs, best paired with kopi or teh. Go for the essentials: Rich Signature Nasi Lemak, Kampung Fried Rice with Ayam Berempah, Hainan Chicken Rice, Ipoh Hor Fun, Original Egg Tart, and Butter Kaya Toast.



VERRONA HILLS

A little European charm, a little Malaysian flair. Verrona Hills leans into baked goods, pastries, and slow afternoons, but throws in a few surprises for local palates. The Nasi Lemak Risotto with Sambal Prawns brings the Malaysian-Western fusion to an unimaginable level. Also worth your time: Basque Cheese Toast and Pan-Seared Salmon with Garlic Cream Sauce.



MUGIN YORUYA @ M CRUSH

When you're ready to pivot from local flavours, Mugin Yoruya offers a modern Japanese detour. It's less about tradition, more about interpretation, with yakitori, izakaya plates, and rice bowls that keep things a little elevated. Highlights that should be on your table: Wagyu Skewer, Uni Roll, and Zuwaigani Don.



VCR

One of KL's early brunch favourites that never quite left the conversation. VCR does what it does best—Australian-style coffee, inventive dishes, and a crowd that always has a laptop nearby. If you're settling in, go for these signatures: VCR's Big Breakfast, Pyramid Breakfast, or the Sunway Pyramid-exclusive Pyramid Granola.



AFTERMEAL

Dessert here is not an afterthought but the main event. Aftermeal's Japanese-style kakigori is shaved ice at its most indulgent, layered with flavours that go from nostalgic to slightly indulgent. Order with intent: Iron Lady Milk Tea Kakigori, Royal Matcha Latte Kakigori, and Dark Milo Kakigori.

Beyond The Usual

You’ve heard of tequila, but have you tried Sotol? Or maybe you’ve had a stiff drink before breakfast, but not one like Denmark’s Gammel Dansk. These five spirits are like nothing you’ve had before—so grab a glass and ready your passports.

Words: COLIN GOMEZ



The world of spirits is replete with all manner of elixirs, some more welcoming and others taking a little more getting used to. You have, of course, your whiskies, your vodkas, and your gins, which most will know about, as well as your less ubiquitous liquors like absinthe or mezcal, but that’s only scratching the surface of what’s out there.

Take a glance around the world and you’ll find that many cultures have taken local ingredients, whether fruits, plants, or grains, combined them with time-honoured techniques, and distilled them into spirits you probably didn’t even know existed. And that’s precisely what this list is about. Here are five spirits from different corners of the globe that’ll leave you wondering what else the world of booze is hiding.



SIGANI
Distilled from Muscat of Alexandria grapes grown in the vineyards of the high Andes, typically at over 1600 metres above sea level, Singani sits proudly as Bolivia’s signature grape spirit. It has a protected status, being declared a Geographical Indication (GI), and occupies an important role in Bolivian culture, featuring heavily in national festivals, religious holidays, weddings, birthdays, and the like. With its floral, subtly fruity notes, it’s an eminently drinkable spirit that is definitely on the more delicate side of the spectrum.



SOTOL
A wild-harvested Mexican spirit made from the Dasylirion plant (aka “desert spoon”), Sotol is primarily produced in Chihuahua, Durango, and Coahuila. The plant takes between eight to 15 years to mature, and yields are low at typically only one bottle per plant. Once mature, the heart (*piña*) of the plant is harvested and the leaves are removed. The core is then roasted (often in pits lined with lava rock or fired wood), after which it is crushed, fermented, and frequently double-distilled. The flavour varies wildly by terroir, sporting anything from bright, grassy, and herbal nuances to earthy, leathery, and peppery undertones.



LAKKA
Lakka is a Finnish liqueur flavoured with wild Arctic cloudberries that are hand-harvested in bogs and swamps, and is named after the Finnish word for cloudberry. Once they are harvested, the cloudberries are macerated in alcohol for a period of two to six months, after which sugar is added to sweeten the deal. Its rich amber-honey colour visually illustrates a bittersweet taste that pairs well with coffee or works swimmingly in a cocktail.



ARAGH SAGI
Aragh Sagi (roughly meaning “doggy distillate”) is an Iranian moonshine distilled from fermented raisins or dates. Typically around 45 to 55 per cent ABV, it can get up to as high as 70 to 90 per cent in homemade versions. While you can expect wide variations in quality, those on the higher end of the scale have been likened by some to grappa. The 1979 Revolution may have put an end to the legal production of aragh sagi, but still, it lives on, available for purchase in altogether more illicit markets.



GAMMEL DANSK
Our last stop on this list is Denmark, where we’ve arrived to take a closer look at Gammel Dansk, a bitters liquor that is deeply embedded in Danish culture. Traditionally drunk by Danes on certain festive occasions, it’s also not an uncommon sight to see it enjoyed over a hearty breakfast or brunch. It has a distinctive herbal flavour, one that houses a lot of complexity owing to the multitude of herbs, spices, and citrus peels that go into its production. Definitely the sort of drink you’d best take a sip of before committing to a glass. And on that note, cheers!

Photography: Wikimedia Commons; Wikipedia; Instagram / @gammeldanskd; Freepik

Here Tonight, *Gone* Tomorrow

For 90 nights only, a raw space transforms into a stage for food, light, and sound before vanishing without a trace.

Words: PATRICK LOH

All good things come to an end—that's the deal. A quiet rule the universe seems rather committed to. Your favourite TV show, that once-a-year dish on a seasonal menu, even the bag of chips you swear you'll pace but finish in one sitting—it all fades out eventually. And now, so does the 90D dining experience, but not without first leaving a mark.

Set high above KL on Level 50 at Conlay by E&O, this limited edition dinner unfolds in a raw, almost cinematic space, transformed into something far more atmospheric. With only 60 seats for 90 nights, food, light, and sound move in sync, deliberately choreographed into a multi-sensory performance. At the helm is Chef Toraik Chua, alongside Jun Ong, with co-creators William Lee and Kent Chua of RCX Group. Together, they blur the lines between dinner and theatre.

SETTING THE STAGE

Seats are limited. Time, even more so. Kedah-born Chef Toraik Chua, former Executive Chef of three-Michelin-starred Zén Singapore, brings with him a pedigree shaped by intellectual cooking, honed during his time at Noma in Denmark—one of the world's most influential kitchens. At 90D, that discipline takes on a new form: a 90-night run where every detail is intentional and every course purposeful.

Eight courses unfold like chapters in a story, with each one rather unexpected. Food-wise, the experience celebrates Malaysian produce through a farm-to-table lens—clean and minimal at first glance, but layered where it matters.



William Lee, Kent Chua

'BIG BANG' BY JUN ONG

Created by KL-based international light artist Jun Ong, 'Big Bang' anchors the entire space. It pulses, shifts, and quietly dictates the rhythm of the meal, guiding transitions and courses to the rhythm of a curated playlist. Paired with sound and menu, the light show is almost hypnotising, but in the best way possible.

THE JOURNEY

The menu unfolds in thoughtful sequences. A frothy 'Vichyssoise' of leek, mint, and pine nuts arrives soft and green, setting a gentle tone before the room slips into deeper hues. Then comes 'K.F.C',



K.F.C



Coral Grouper

a playful reconstruction of a drumstick made from giblets, hiding a fermented cherry core, meant to be eaten with your hands—no cutlery, no rules.

From there, 'South East Asia' brings together king crab, coconut, and the 90D reserve caviar, elevated further with bright lights and a crisp Ignited Saketini should you wish to imbibe. The 'Coral Grouper' follows, brightened with mango and citrus, as the room is bathed in a warm orange glow that mirrors its vibrant flavours.

Chef Toraik Chua at work

'Flower & Fruits' rounds off this chapter with rose, *tapai*, and potato, delivering a delicate, nuanced complexity.

And just when the evening teeters on indulgence, the unexpected happens. A human disco ball emerges from the shadows, ascending mid-air in a surreal aerial performance, alongside a graceful ballerina on ground. It's theatrical, slightly absurd, and completely mesmerising.

Then, just as quickly, calm returns. The 'Big Bang' softens, the room exhales, and the night settles into warmth, ending on a spiced dessert that feels grounding, almost nostalgic, because 90D isn't just about what you taste but what stays with you.



Wagyu

A 90-day project by design, it leans into impermanence. Because nothing lasts forever. When it ends, everything disappears—the lights, the tables, the cutlery, the bar—as if it were never there. But memory has a way of holding on.

Priced at RM798 per person with alcohol pairing, this is a fleeting moment, a story told once and never again. With 90D running only until 2 August 2026, consider this your cue to secure a seat before it disappears.

Wine 101

Feeling overwhelmed by wine lists, fancy French names, and expert jargon? Relax—this friendly primer gives you everything you need to place your order confidently.

Words: COLIN GOMEZ



Navigating the world of wine when you're still wet behind the ears can be a terrifying prospect. Perhaps it's the snootiness with which the people in the know seem to approach it, or maybe it's the deluge of unpronounceable French words that trail in its wake. While the world of wine can indeed seem intimidating in its breadth and complexity, you don't have to be a sommelier to know enough to get by. That being said, here's a basic introduction to wine for all you budding oenophiles out there.

Getting To Know The Spectrum Of Wines

Generally speaking, you can divide wine into a few basic categories. You have your reds, whites, rosé, and then your sparkling wines. Red wines come from red grapes, deriving their colour and more tannin-intensive sensibilities from extended skin contact after the grapes have been pressed.

White wines, on the other hand, come from light-skinned grapes or dark-skinned grapes that have had their contact with the skin minimised. Rosé comes from red grapes that have been in contact with their skins just long enough to develop their signature pink hue. And finally, sparkling wine—of which champagne is probably the most prominent example—gets its characteristic bubbly fizz from a secondary fermentation.

Dry Or Sweet. What Does It All Mean?

In terms of taste, you can think of wines as lying on a spectrum that ranges from dry on one end to sweet on the other. Dry wine simply means that almost all the natural sugars in the grapes have been fermented into alcohol, leaving very little sweetness left. Sweet wines, on the other hand, retain more of their residual sugar, which, naturally, makes them taste sweeter.

Having said that, there are other factors that can influence how "dry" or "sweet" a wine comes across. Among these are the tannins, the acidity, the body, and the alcohol level of the wine in particular. But here's a quick tip: if you're looking for a cleaner, crisper sort of taste, opt for a dry wine. If you want a wine that dances sweetly on the palate, you'll find good purchase in a Riesling, Moscato, or one of the Port-style wines.



Photography: Freepik, Vecteezy

The Usual Suspects

When looking at a wine menu, you'll often find it divided between reds and whites. Some common varietals of red include Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Merlot, and Syrah/Shiraz. With red wines, you can generally expect a more tannin-heavy profile than you would get from the other styles. They tend to be medium to full-bodied, for the most part, and exhibit notes of dark fruits (Merlot, Shiraz), or red fruits (Pinot Noir).

Turn your attention to the whites, and you'll likely have seen names like Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, or Pinot Grigio/Gris, perhaps. These tend to range from light to medium-bodied, carrying citrus notes and other refreshing fruits like apple and pear. Grapes with a sweet or off-dry character include Riesling (though it can also be dry) and Moscato, a light and approachable wine that's sweet and ideal for new drinkers.



Matching Your Wine To Your Meal

Now we've come to the convergence between wine and food, and this isn't necessarily as complicated as it seems. In fact, just keep a few simple rules in mind, and you can have everybody at the table convinced that you know what you're doing. If you're eating something hearty and savoury—say, red meat with a rich, decadent sauce, for example—you'll want to go with a dry, full-bodied red. This is so the tannins in the wine can cut through the fat and richness of the dish, offering some nice contrast and keeping things from becoming cloying.

Something lighter on the other hand, like chicken, fish, or salad, calls for a crisp white. The acidity in the wine acts somewhat like a squeeze of lemon, helping keep the flavours from becoming flat. The lower tannin content also means that the wine will complement the subtler textures of the chicken or fish, instead of overpowering them.

And there you have it—a quick guide to spotting your dry from your sweet, and a few grape names worth remembering. With just a touch of know-how, you can order a glass that actually fits your taste, or pick out a bottle for the table without breaking into a sweat. Sure, there's a lot to learn about wine, but like with most things, you only need to know a little to go a long way. **P**



Liquid Poetry

Astor Bar plays host to a night of cognac-led creativity as Martell takes centre stage—where New York glamour meets modern mixology, and the cocktails are worth lingering over.

Words: PATRICK LOH

There are bars, and then there are rooms that set a mood. Astor Bar at The St. Regis KL falls firmly into the latter. Inspired by the gilded glamour of old New York, it feels like stepping into a well-kept secret—low-lit, intimate, and elegant. The kind of place where cocktails aren't rushed, and conversations stretch long past last call.

Enter Guest Shift—Raising The Bar, St. Regis' signature series that invites some of the world's most compelling bartenders and brand voices behind the counter. This edition welcomed Eloi Parent, Brand Ambassador for Martell Mumm Perrier-Jouët, who arrived with a clear mission: to show just how expressive Martell Noblige can be when placed in the right hands.

His special menu? Thoughtful, refined, and confident.

The Martell Negroni leaned classic but composed—vermouth and Italian bitter liqueur wrapped in Noblige's smooth, rounded warmth. The Espresso Martini followed with a sharper edge, where cold brew and coffee liqueur met cognac in a surprisingly seamless partnership.



Then came the crowd-pleasers with depth: Martell Lychee-T, a fragrant blend of lychee syrup, Chinese black tea, and citrus. Meanwhile, Penicillin Noir offered a darker, moodier turn with honey, ginger, lime, and tea layered into something comforting despite its complexities, which in turn made the sip an addictive one.

Overall, the evening was a reminder of what Raising The Bar does best: spotlighting craftsmanship, encouraging experimentation, and proving that great spirits—when paired with creativity—can still surprise us. So, for us, Astor Bar didn't just raise the bar, but rewrote the script. **P**

Photography: Unsplash

Save Our Souls

Quietly opening its doors in the city, Save Our Souls is redefining KL nightlife with intentional design, thoughtful music curation, and a dancefloor that values feeling over flash.

Words: PATRICK LOH

Save Our Souls has entered KL's party scene and it's already making noise in and out of the space. Tucked into the city's ever-evolving nightlife circuit, Save Our Souls (SOS) feels less like a new club chasing hype and more like an oasis for those who believe nights out should mean everything. It's the kind of micro club where you'd go for "only one drink" and leave wondering why the sun is already up.

At first glance, this club in Eco City's Mercu Aspire tower seems low-key. There's no overworked neon lights or excessive theatrics. Instead, the space leans moody and intentional with low lighting, considered textures, and a layout that encourages movement rather than posturing. It feels intimate without being claustrophobic, cool without trying too hard. A space that understands atmosphere is built, not bought.

Music is where SOS really shows its hand. When here, you won't find a playlist-on-shuffle situation. The programming leans toward carefully curated sounds—think hip-hop and R&B, as well as house, techno, and left-field electronic beats in a secret tunnel that prioritises rhythm and emotion over chart appeal. DJs are chosen for taste, not just follower counts, and the result is a dancefloor that feels engaged rather than distracted.

Whether you're dancing front and centre, leaning against the bar with a drink in hand, or screaming in your friend's ear through the loud music, SOS gives you space to exist as you are. It's a rare thing in a city where clubs often confuse exclusivity with enjoyment.

The bar menu mirrors that same philosophy—well-executed, unfussy, and designed to fuel the night rather than steal the spotlight. Cocktails are balanced and drinkable, spirits are treated with respect, and nothing feels gimmicky. It's about keeping your glass full and your night flowing.

What really sets SOS apart, though, is its sense of intention. There's a feeling that the people behind it genuinely care about cultivating a community, not just filling a room. It attracts a crowd that's diverse in style but aligned in mindset—creative types, music lovers, and curious night owls coexisting on the same floor. But it doesn't need to shout because it knows the right people will find it.

SOS may be fairly new, but it feels like it's been waiting for you all along. A club for those who miss dancing for the sake of dancing. For conversations that spill into dawn. For nights you'll be struggling to rememehr the fuzzy details of, but are sure were great.

KL nightlife didn't know it needed this—but now that it's here, it's hard to imagine the scene without it. **P**

Tel: +6012-684 2428

Photography: Unsplash



Sweet Reverie

Forget sugar highs. Kotsu Kotsu delivers serenity in every slice. This new Japanese patisserie in Desa Sri Hartamas brings delicate layers, divine precision, and the kind of cakes that whisper luxury instead of shouting indulgence.

Words: PATRICK LOH

Step into Jalan 24/70a in Desa Sri Hartamas and you'll find something unexpected—a softly lit patisserie, a glass display shimmering with cakes, and an unmistakable sense that dessert might just have changed shape. This is Kotsu Kotsu, the latest venture by Japanese-F&B entrepreneur Kota Furuya, and it's bringing a distinctive Japanese cake experience to KL.

For years, Furuya has built his Tokyo-inspired empire in our city (think ramen, yakiniku, yakitori). Yet, with Kotsu Kotsu, he returns to a concept he had on his mind from the start—a Japanese patisserie dedicated to sponge, roll cakes, chiffon, and the art of “omiyage,” the gift tradition of Japan. “We wanted to create a market for Japanese cakes in Malaysia,” he explains.

What makes this patisserie special isn't only the concept, but how meticulous it is. Furuya spent 300 days refining recipes, adapting to Malaysian eggs, milk, and humidity. He imported a back-oven from Japan (costing around a whopping RM360,000) to retain the moisture of the sponge cake—because yes, in true Japanese fashion, that sponge matters.

The result is a space where cake feels refined rather than indulgent in the heavy, cloying sense. A peep at the front window display invites you in like a gallery of edible art: silk-smooth rolls, delicate sponge layers, fruit accents, and understated flavours that hint at sophistication rather than sugar overload. According to one review, the Chocolate Strawberry Cake “stole the show ... balanced cocoa and refreshing fruit” at Kotsu Kotsu's launch.

Inside, the ambience mirrors the product. Designed by Japan's Design Room 702 (responsible for Kansai International Airport's executive lounge), the interior blends minimalism with warmth—earthen textures, gentle lighting, copper accents. Even the staff uniforms and Arita porcelain plates are part of the design story.

Now, let's talk cakes. If you're starting somewhere, acquaint yourself with their Kinako Roll: roasted soybean sponge, cream, mochi and brown-sugar jelly all wrapped in a fine roll, priced around RM16 per slice. Then, there's the Pistachio Cake—layered, nutty, lightly decadent yet never heavy. Or the Fruit Cake: 10 delicious layers of sponge, cream, and fruit (kiwi, mango, raspberry, orange) that manage to feel both plush and fresh. It's also important to note that Kotsu Kotsu is halal-friendly.

At Kotsu Kotsu, the flavour profiles are subtle: less bombast, more craft. For chocolate fans seeking gooey richness, this might feel tame. But for those who appreciate the lighter, gentler brush stroke of pastry—it's a revelation. One description nails it: “Japanese precision, patience, and a deep respect for simplicity.”

There's another layer to the story here: gift culture. In Japan, a cake isn't just a treat, it's a gesture. Kotsu Kotsu's packaging, its gift boxes, represents thoughtfulness in presentation. You're not buying dessert for a friend, you're offering kindness.

For KL's dessert scene, this is significant because it marks a shift. The city, used to heavy cheesecakes, molten chocolate, and sticky buns, is now welcoming a different sensibility—light sponge, artful composition, Japan-inspired elegance. Whether you drop in after dinner, pick up a gift, or simply linger for a slice and tea, Kotsu Kotsu asks you to slow down, appreciate the layers, and savour each moment.

In an age of big flavors and louder statements, Kotsu Kotsu represents craft. Under the spotlight, what stands out isn't only the cakes—it's how they're made, how they're showcased, and how they make you feel. **U**

Tel: +6012-411 2369

Photography: Unsplash



Flavours & Perspectives

Chef Son Jong-Won And Chef Masashi Horiuchi sit down with us to uncover quirks, guilty pleasures, and a love for food that transcends fine dining.

Words: PATRICK LOH

We had the rare opportunity to bring together Chef Son Jong-Won—of one-Michelin-starred L'Amant Secret and Eatanic Garden in Seoul, South Korea—with Chef Masashi Horiuchi of Potager KL. While their kitchens are known for refinement and exacting standards, what unfolds in this edition of 'Unfiltered' was anything but rehearsed.

In a candid, lighthearted exchange, the two chefs speak about the small joys that fuel their creativity, their go-to hacks that keep service smooth, and the street food staples they can't resist when they're off the clock. It's a reminder that even the most accomplished chefs find inspiration in simple, everyday flavours; and that behind the accolades, they're still just people who love to eat, laugh, and share a meal.



FAVOURITE KITCHEN TOOL

Chef Son swears by one simple item: a roll of bright green tape. It's his secret weapon for keeping the kitchen organised—labelling everything from raw ingredients to finished plates. “I don't really need it to remember what's what,” he admits, “but having the tape calms me down when service gets hectic.”

MIDNIGHT GUILTY PLEASURE

Even Michelin-level chefs aren't immune to late-night cravings. For Chef Son, weekends mean raiding the nearest 24-hour

convenience store and carting away 10 to 20 bags of potato chips. “I don't finish them all at once,” he laughs. “I just taste a few, then stash the rest for later.”



WEIRDEST FOOD COMBO

Cup noodles are meant to be quick and easy, but Chef Son can't resist giving them a professional twist. His go-to hack? Spicy Korean instant noodles loaded with fresh cilantro and a squeeze of lime. “It changes everything,” he says.



FAVOURITE MALAYSIAN STREET FOOD

“Definitely *bak kut teh*,” says Chef Son without hesitation. First brewed in Klang in the '30s as a dockworker's breakfast, this herbal pork rib soup has grown into an iconic comfort dish.

BEST JAPANESE RESTAURANT

For Chef Masashi, “It's at home, when my wife is chef for a change,” he shares. “She makes the most authentic Japanese dishes.” Nothing beats the comfort of a home-cooked meal. **U**



Scent, Served

Guerlain and Palate converge for an afternoon where scent, flavour, and florals unfold in dialogue. An immersive encounter where fragrance leads, and the senses are drawn into step.

Words: TENGKU ZAI, PATRICK LOH; Photography: QUE

GUERLAIN
PARIS

We tend to credit taste, sometimes even sight, but it's smell that shapes our judgement when it comes to food. It reaches us before the plate does—often before we're aware of it—and determines whether something registers as appetising, layered, or worth our attention. By the time we take a bite, the decision has, in many ways, already been made.

Guerlain understands this better than most. In collaboration with *Palate* and hosted by YM Tengku Shaheera Abdullah and YM Tengku Zai, the maison created an immersive afternoon for over 20 ladies that married tasting and smelling—part high tea, part olfactory exploration, and entirely indulgent.

Fragrance and flavour aren't so different. Both are built on layers—florals, spices, fruits—notes we recognise as easily on the plate as in a bottle. The likes of fig, cherry, and vanilla are familiar and comforting, regardless of their form.

Only 60 of each Guerlain Exceptional Creations are made for collectors



Guerlain L'Art & La Matière



Eva Lian



Che Puan Sarah Shahdan



Divided into three stations, the experience centred on a buffet line of Guerlain's most iconic scents from the L'Art & La Matière range: *Pêche Mirage*, *Néroli Plein Sud*, *Santal Pao Rosa*, *Tobacco Honey*, *Cherry Oud*, and *Angélique Noire*—each composition an opportunity for discovery. At the centre sat two limited edition Exceptional Creations, their presence marking the room's focal point and, for many, the most closely examined works on display.

YM Tengku Zai, YM Tengku Shaheera Abdullah



Minji Park, Isabelle Zhang Xin Yu



YM Tengku Yasmin Nastasha, YM Tengku Zai, YM Tengku A'liaa Muna



YM Tengku Asra Jehan, YM Tengku Zai, YM Tengku Alana Shah, YM Tengku Shaheera Abdullah



Datin Sri Cristy Chiang, Che Puan Winnie Low, Christine Cheah



Che Puan Puan Sri Dato' Habibah Yusoff, YM Tengku Shaheera Abdullah



Nynaa Harizal, Pema Han



High up on level 75 of Merdeka 118, the private room of Park Lounge was filled with friends, family, and new connections in the making, the atmosphere easy and unforced despite a guest list that included members of royalty and high society. Conversations flowed between light bites and perfume blends, with our guests moving intuitively through scents that seemed to align with mood, style, and, at times, something more personal.

Nawiza Ariff, YM Tengku Alana Shah, YM Tengku Asra Jehan, Che Puan Sarah Shahdan, YM Tengku A'liaa Muna



Of course, it wasn't only about fragrance. Our trio of beauty stations introduced Guerlain's skincare offerings too. The day featured the ultra-luxurious Orchidée Impériale Black range, alongside hand massages that allowed guests to experience the serums and creams first-hand—an added layer to the entire ritual beyond scent alone.

Guerlain Orchidée Impériale Black



Guerlain Orchidée Impériale Black The Treatment



Aliya Akbar receives a hand massage



And because this is *Palate*, food was never an afterthought. Elegant bites like Avocado Cones, Arctic Shrimp Salad, and Apple & Celery Toast made their rounds, while the Coconut Date Sensation and Yuzu Blossom Spritz brought a measured brightness to the room. Taken together, it all sat in the same register—considered, restrained, and attentive to the smallest detail—much like the fragrances themselves.

Chicken Coronation Croquette



Avocado Cone



Dessert trio



Coconut Date Sensation



YM Tengku Yasmin Nastasha



Aliya Akbar, Pema Han



The Guerlain Team



Nynaa Harizal



Angie Lai Tay



Ivanna Salehudin



Zena Khan, Rishita Madhey Valiram



Aliya Akbar, Che Puan Puan Sri Dato' Habibah Yusoff, YM Tengku Zai, Pema Han



Tabled *By* Women

A gathering between Palate and Women of Excellence that moved beyond ceremony into conversation, connection, and possibility.

Words: TENGKU ZAI

In partnership with:



There are dinners—and then there are gatherings that foster something deeper. At Shangri-La Kuala Lumpur, *Palate* hosted an intimate *buka puasa* at the Garden Room in conjunction with International Women's Day. The dinner brought together the 2025 honourees and partners of Women of Excellence. Not for ceremony, but for connection in its most natural form.

There was, by design, no real agenda. A short welcome by Group General Manager Tengku Zai set the tone before the evening eased into conversation. Around the room, introductions gave way to shared ideas, and shared ideas to something more enduring.



Tengku Zai



Danielle Graham, Adeline Chen, Dr. Harvinder Harchand



Shirena Hamzah, Dato' Professor Mandy Chew

With just 27 guests along a single viking table, the atmosphere was deliberately intimate and generous in spirit. The culinary experience, specially conceived for the evening by Executive Sous Chef Annie Yam with the support of Executive Chef Eric Fettke, reflected that same level of care. It began with a lobster salad layered with carpaccio, crispy shrimp, and a delicate lobster aioli—an opening the chefs describe as delicate and feminine. Seared Hokkaido scallops followed, paired with cauliflower purée, orange beurre blanc, and herb oil, before giving way to a main course of Black Angus done two ways: grilled and braised, accompanied by a confit bon bon, stuffed morel, and a rich mustard jus. Dessert arrived as a composed hazelnut royale with salted caramel crèmeux, honeycomb ice cream, and mango gelée—a thoughtful finish to a menu that existed only for that night.

Executive Sous Chef Annie Yam



Sunitha Thayaparan, Anuja Ananthan



Black Angus done two ways



Zena Khan, Professor Emeritus Dato' Tiffanee Marie Lim



Amy Blair, Natalie Kniese



Aida Zunaidi



Viyern Ooi, Ivanna Salehudin



Dr. Harvinder Harchand and the Lush team



Dr. Louisa Ponnampalam, Shirena Hamzah, Ivanna Salehudin, Aileen Lee



Su-En Kam, Viyern Ooi



Adding a tactile, playful layer to the night, Lush Malaysia hosted a hands-on soap-making station. An unexpected but fitting touch that invited guests to create, linger, and engage beyond the dinner table.



Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir



Pathmini Alexander, Sofea Mastan



Danielle Graham, Veen Dee Tan



Datin Raja Riza Shazmin, Sarah Lian, Danielle Graham, Adeline Chen, Tengku Zai, Veen Dee Tan, Farah Ann Hadi





Tengku Zai, Sunitha Thayaparan



Yazmin Aziz, Rina Abdul



Viyern Ooi, Tengku Zai, Yazmin Aziz, Veen Dee Tan, Farah Ann Hadi, Ivanna Salehudin, and Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir all dressed in Hanya



Amy Blair, Anuja Ananthan, Natalie Kniese, Dato' Professor Mandy Chew



Veen Dee Tan, Ivanna Salehudin



Pathmini Alexander



Zena Khan, Sarah Lian



Danielle Graham, Adeline Chen, Tengku Zai, Sofea Mastan, Aida Zunaidi, Datin Raja Riza Shazmin



Dr. Harvinder Harchand



Farah Ann Hadi, Tengku Zai, Datin Raja Riza Shazmin



Aileen Lee, Tengku Zai, Adeline Chen, Dato' Professor Mandy Chew

What resulted went beyond a shared meal. The evening culminated as a quiet affirmation of what Women of Excellence has always stood for. Many of these women first met through the platform and have since gone on to collaborate in meaningful ways. That evening, new connections were formed just as effortlessly—plans were made, follow-ups promised, and the beginnings of future projects set in motion. No panels, no pressure. Just a roomful of remarkable women, showing up, breaking fast, and finding common ground. Let this be the legacy we leave behind.



Aileen Lee, Tengku Zai, Adeline Chen, Dato' Professor Mandy Chew

LOVE *thy* Neighbour

On a short stretch of TTDI, two newly Michelin-starred restaurants sit just a few doors apart. Behind them are chef-owners Aidan Low and Chong Yu Cheng—friends, neighbours, and unlikely contemporaries whose very different paths have converged at the forefront of Malaysia's evolving fine dining scene.

*Photography: AARON LEE/LENSWORKS
Styling: ANDREA WONG
Grooming: JOEY YAP; NICOLE NG
Photography Assistant: ABHAR
Words: COLIN GOMEZ*



On Aidan: Jacket, knitted polo shirt, and pants, Boggi Milano

On YC: Jacket and pants, Boggi Milano; shirt, stylist's own

It's fair to say the Malaysian gastronomic scene has come on in leaps and bounds. Where fine dining was once characterised largely by European mimicry or hotel dining rooms, it has since evolved into something far more compelling: chef-driven, identity-led cuisine. This forward movement has been charted by some heavyweight names, not least the inaugural recipients of Michelin stars in the country—the two Darrens, Chin and Teoh, whose establishments laid down a marker for KL as a legitimate fine dining destination—as well as Su Kim Hock and Bee Gaik Lean, who carried the torch for Penang.

In their wake, a constellation of new talents has emerged with their own distinct takes on food. Two of the brightest belong to Aidan Low of Akar and Chong Yu Cheng of Terra Dining, more commonly known as YC. Along with their newly minted Michelin stars, the pair also share the spotlight as the cover stars for this issue.

It is something of a quirk of circumstance that their restaurants—located just a few doors apart—received their stars on the very same day. Two freshly anointed Michelin establishments, led by a headstrong pair of chefs from wildly different backgrounds, standing in such close proximity? It has all the makings of Netflix's next fiery culinary drama. The reality, however, is far less combative. Despite their differing educations, both men share remarkably similar ideas about what food should represent. They also happen to be good friends.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, KITCHEN

It's a temperate Tuesday morning when the shoot begins at Terra. Stepping out of my car, I'm greeted by the restaurant's discreet entrance—a terracotta-toned façade framing a heavy wooden door and the small "T" logo. Inside the lounge, the first thing to catch my eye is a roughly 70-year-old pestle and mortar illuminated beneath a soft spotlight. The second is the unmistakable red star with a heart in the corner—that small badge of approval that most restaurants can only dream of displaying on their shelves.

The lounge looks much as it usually does, except today it's cluttered with the paraphernalia of a photoshoot. Light stands, softboxes, and cables render space to manoeuvre at a premium. Picking my way through the equipment, I turn the corner to find the shoot in full swing. A cluster of tripods and crew members surrounds a wooden island, and at the centre of it all, leaning with easy composure against the warm grain of the timber counter, are YC and Aidan, angling themselves this way and that to sate the hunger of the clicking shutters.

I peer over to see that the photos come out swimmingly, with the first of them being a study in camaraderie. It features YC and Aidan leaning against the textured, sand-coloured walls of Terra Dining. Clean and stripped-back, the shot captures them grinning at something just off camera, lending the image a faint hint of voyeurism. It proves to be the perfect opener and sets the relaxed tone that would come to characterise the rest of the shoot.

Another image, this one altogether more striking, is a double-page spread of the duo mid-meal. It's a deliberate departure from the typical buttoned-up chef portrait, capturing the pair illuminated by a harsh cinematic flash as they dig into a spread of noodles, fried chicken, and local favourites with messy, joyful abandon.

The solo portraits, however, offer a more measured perspective. YC is captured in a moment of silent reflection, dressed in a sharp suit and looking off-camera—a stark contrast to his usual habitat in the heat of the line. Later in the spread, he appears in his element, navigating the kitchen with the focused intensity of service.



Suit and shirt, Wardrobe



On YC: Tuxedo and shirt, Wardrobe
On Aidan: Tuxedo and shirt, Wardrobe



“Food was never something I thought would be my profession. I opened a restaurant before I knew how to cook, which is unconventional, to say the least.”

-CHONG YU CHENG

Aidan's portraits, meanwhile, show him seated in gentle repose within his own restaurant, perhaps illustrating the calm before the proverbial kitchen storm. But subsequent frames emphasise the technical precision of his craft, with one particularly atmospheric image capturing him working the pass, plating a dish beneath the clinical glow of the kitchen lights.

When the shoot wraps, we head to the back of Akar to sit down for the conversation that would eventually become what you're reading now. It has been a long day, but the two chefs appear no less energised than they were that morning.

FROM NAGANO TO ALSACE

Their backgrounds, as mentioned earlier, could hardly be more different. To hear them recount it, however, really begins to illustrate the many trajectories a career like theirs can unexpectedly spring from. For Aidan, the signs were visible from childhood. At family gatherings that inevitably revolved around food, he could often be found hovering around the kitchen instead of horsing around with his cousins.

“I think at around 11 or 12 years old, I'd already decided I really want to make food my profession. I'm not sure how I came to that conclusion, but I figured it wasn't just a hobby at that point,” he says. By 15, he had already enrolled himself in a culinary programme, setting in motion a journey that would eventually take him through two of the great bastions of fine dining: Japan and France.

“So I figured, okay, let's see what Japan has to offer. I went there, spoke zero Japanese, chose a small town just outside of Nagano, which is quite unusual because there people don't really speak English as well. So I picked up the language in two or three years and hopped through a few restaurants as well. I kept busy in the kitchen and then landed myself in a school in Osaka, which I think is one of the top culinary schools in the world.” The school in question was the Tsuji Culinary Institute in Osaka, one of Japan's more formidable culinary schools.

After travelling around the Land of the Rising Sun for a time, Aidan eventually made his way to France—specifically Kaysersberg in Alsace—where he trained under Olivier Nasti at the two-Michelin-starred Le

Chambard. “It was a very nice experience, but it was a very challenging one as well. It's a small town and everybody knows everybody. I was the only Asian guy there. Where I go, what time I sleep, when I do my shopping. Everybody would know.”

Eventually, he returned to Malaysia. After working in a few establishments, he launched Akar as a pop-up. The concept gradually grew into a permanent restaurant, though not without its trials—the arrival of COVID-19 just nine days after opening, not least among them. Six years on, Akar now celebrates its first year as a Michelin-starred establishment.

THE UNLIKELY CHEF

YC's route into the culinary world was decidedly less direct. “I guess food was never something that I thought would be my profession, even up to the point where I opened a restaurant,” he says with a laugh. “So I'm the other way around. I opened a restaurant before I knew how to cook, which is unconventional, to say the least.”

Originally trained in accounting—a decision rooted in pragmatism and driven by the prospect of obtaining an Australian permanent residency—YC eventually realised the drudgery of a nine-to-five wasn't for him. Returning to Malaysia, he drifted his way through a number of professions before hospitality entered the picture.

The turning point came when plans were set in motion to open a wine bar in Ipoh. Everything was going smoothly until the head chef abruptly resigned—followed shortly by the rest of the kitchen team. What followed was an unexpected crash course in cooking.

“So they gave me one month's notice,” YC recalls. “And I was like, sure, yeah, I'm not going to keep you. You want to leave, I can't keep you. But in that one month, you still have to serve your notice, and I will be your intern. I will go to the market with you. I will buy things with you. I will learn how to fillet a fish, how to debone a chicken, that sort of thing.”

He takes a moment to revisit the chaos of the time. “In that one month, I had to pick up everything, and then I was left pretty much on my own, other than my current sous chef, Sean. So he came into the kitchen with me, and we started from there.”

With neither of them formally trained, the pair operated with a certain creative freedom. “So because none of us at the time were culinarily trained, we were not boxed into a French or Japanese or Italian cuisine. It was just whatever we could think of. Whatever we wanted to experiment with, we just did it.” Eventually, as the pair gained confidence, the restaurant expanded from simple café fare into dinner service. As was the case with many establishments, though, the pandemic forced repeated resets of the team.

By 2022, things had stabilised, but YC, as is a running theme in his life, found himself mired in the clutches of boredom. “I was like, okay, I probably need to leave the country and go to a real restaurant to learn. But I didn’t see any restaurant in Malaysia I could really benefit from. Also, I felt that I needed to be put in a completely new environment. And that way, I can’t fall back on family. I can’t fall back on friends.”

By what he deems sheer luck, he secured a stage at Frantzen, the boundary-pushing three-Michelin-starred restaurant in Stockholm. It was a stint that would prove to broaden his culinary and personal horizons on an immeasurable scale. It was while he was there, taking shape within the crucible of just about the finest practical education a young chef could hope to receive, that his sister called with news of an available shop lot in TTDI.

“She gave me a call and said, ‘I found a shop in TTDI. Very hard to come by. Rental is reasonable. Do you want to take it?’” And I said okay, right, I’ve no idea what the hell I’m going to cook, but let’s sign the lease.” And so Terra was born.

BLURRED LINES

For all their differences, the two chefs have arrived at not entirely dissimilar destinations—geographically speaking, at least. Asked to describe what they actually do at their restaurants, Aidan takes a pensive

“They may think we take traditional dishes and modernise it, but what we’re doing doesn’t fall into one nice, neat category. The lines are blurred.”

-AIDAN LOW

gap before answering. “I think we play around a lot? With what we find, with what new things we discover,” he says.

There’s an awareness in the way he says that, as if he knows full well that the answer doesn’t quite match the solemnity you’d typically associate with a Michelin-starred kitchen. “A lot of people have misconceptions of what Akar really is. They may think we take traditional dishes and modernise it, but that’s not really what we’re doing. I think that what we’re doing doesn’t really fall into one nice, neat category. The lines are very blurred.”

YC nods. “I think diversity is our greatest strength in Malaysia,” he says. “We hardly ever stick to our own cuisine in the sense that we can have three different cultural cuisines in a day, and it doesn’t feel like it’s planned.” “Yeah,” Aidan adds. “It’s just part of our rhythm.” Malaysian dining habits have, after all, always been relatively porous in the boundaries between them.

“The core of what Terra does is to represent that sort of culture through food,” YC continues. “But again, it doesn’t fall into any categories. I’m not just turning Laksa into something smaller and more refined. There’s more to it than that.”

THE WEIGHT OF A STAR

It is precisely that willingness to blur boundaries that has brought both men their Michelin stars. For many chefs, the accolade represents the pinnacle of the profession. Yet the reality, it seems, can be a touch more complicated.

“I still have a lot of imposter syndrome. I still don’t see myself as a chef,” YC says candidly. “Do I bring a different voice to Malaysian cuisine? Yeah, sure. Is the food good? I would like to think so. Is it interesting? Yeah. But at the end of the day, you know, it’s like what Michelin says. The stars belong to the restaurant and not to the chef.”



On Aidan: Blazer and shirt, Wardrobe: trousers, stylist's own; boots, personality's own.



*“I still have a lot of imposter syndrome.
I still don’t see myself as a chef.”*

-CHONG YU CHENG

He shrugs slightly. “It is natural for some people to be competitive and want to be recognised for their effort. Yes, it creates stress, pressure, and all that. I would be lying to say that I don’t feel it.”

I ask Aidan about his experience with the iconic star that, though small in its physical dimensions, can weigh disproportionately heavily. He takes a moment to recall. “I’m trying to think back. What did I feel when we were back on stage?” he muses. “To be very honest, I dreamed about the moment.”

Yet when the moment finally arrived, the emotions he expected never quite materialised. “All this time, I thought I would be in tears, but when I was on stage, I didn’t feel anything. I did not feel a single thing.” Only later did the significance of it all begin to settle in. “I feel like this is not really a destination; getting awards and recognition isn’t really why we opened a restaurant. But with that said, it does give us a voice.”

CHEF TO CHEF

With the recognition of the wider culinary world now firmly in place, I ask them about a different kind of respect—the kind that comes from one another. “To be very truthful, I’ve always admired his courage,” Aidan says of YC. “Just to have come from

a totally different background to opening a few restaurants, I think it takes a lot of courage ... and some stupidity.” “You only do this if you’re dumb,” YC adds, laughing.

Aidan continues: “What he has contributed to the food world, giving it a very different point of view. You don’t have to wash dishes for 14 hours for somebody, or wash rice for three years and then only start making sushi. You can do it like this guy.”

YC then offers his own perspective on his counterpart. “I’ve eaten his food three times. And to be honest, on the first visit, when he had very kindly invited me to dine before Akar closed for renovations, and no offense, the food was technically there, but I felt like the direction was a bit confused.” Aidan listens without protest.

“He was doing pop-ups while the restaurant was being renovated, and just in those few weeks, I could feel this sort of honing in, this clarity starting to take shape. And for a chef to be able to have this sort of neuroplasticity, or the ability to change in such a short time is a rarity. Trying out the menu after the renovation, I told him, “You execute at this level, and the inspector comes and eats this meal, it’s an easy star for you.” I told him that. And you know,

chefs are very often very stubborn creatures.” Aidan nods in agreement there.

“He’s receptive,” YC continues. “Whether or not I’ve affected him, I can’t say. But I can see he’s a person who changes, refines, who hones in at a remarkable speed, and that’s what I really respect.”

Sitting just a few doors apart, Terra and Akar could easily be cast as competitors in the traditional narrative of fine dining. But the reality feels less combative and more collaborative. When in conversation, there really is no sense of rivalry—only a mutual curiosity about what Malaysian food might become when freed from rigid definitions and reimagined together. Their collaboration suggests a future where tradition is no longer a constraint, but a playground. And perhaps that is the real significance of their proximity. Not two chefs vying for supremacy, but two voices contributing to a larger conversation about Malaysian cuisine. If the previous generation proved the country deserved a seat at the global dining table, chefs like Aidan Low and Chong Yu Cheng are beginning to decide what Malaysia will say once it gets there. But for now, that conversation happens on a short stretch of TTDI, where two restaurants sit only a few doors apart. **D**



Edge Of Expression

At the Lark Distillery in Pontville, Tasmania, where shifting seasons shape both landscape and spirit, Master Distiller Chris Thomson oversees a house style determined by place, experimentation, and fortified depth. Within this setting, Fire Trail, Devil's Storm, Ruby Abyss, and the travel-exclusive Cinder Forest emerge as distinct expressions of the island's character—built on locally sourced barley, extended fermentation, and rare fortified cask maturation. Each new whisky reflects the distillery's philosophy of taste-led creation, while the sculptural bottles echo Tasmania's raw landscapes. Together, they form a portfolio that distills something beyond flavour—a sense of origin and intent.

Words: TENGKU ZAI

ustenance

Stirred Wisdom

We caught the sought-after mixologist in KL and tapped into his philosophy, creativity, and life beyond the bar.

Words: PATRICK LOH

Hidden beneath the neon buzz of Moxy KL in the bustling Chinatown district lies Lavantha Bar—a moody, intimate hideout where the lighting is soft, the cocktails are clever, and on this particular evening, the air was charged with the presence of Remy Savage. Revered among drinks connoisseurs for his obsessive knowledge of spirits and his art-driven approach to cocktails, Remy is the sort of bartender who can make you rethink your entire relationship with a glass.

His story reads like the résumé of a man chasing—and also catching—his passions across continents. After years of travelling and bartending around the world, he settled in Paris and became the face of the bar Little Red Door. There, he didn't just shake drinks—he shook up the way people thought about drinking. Remy approached cocktails with philosophical curiosity, treating every element—from lighting to menu design—as part of a grand experiment in how humans experience flavour.

He left Paris in 2017 for what he calls his “dream job” at Artesian in London’s Langham Hotel, where he spent more than two years resurrecting one of the most iconic bars on the planet. Then came Le Syndicat, then A Bar With Shapes For a Name—an instant hit that soared onto the World’s 50 Best Bars list within a year. By 2023, Remy was ranked the 6th Most Influential Industry Figure in the Bar World 100. Suffice to say, this here is a man knows a thing or two about drinks—and even more about ideas.

So how did his collaboration with Martell begin? With passion, persistence, and a healthy dose of humour. “I spent about four years

essentially begging for a job that didn’t exist,” he laughs. Martell eventually called, intrigued by his genuine love for cognac. With his constant globe-hopping, Remy quickly noticed something: cognac is enjoyed very differently from Nigeria to Malaysia to France. His mission with Martell is to shape a global, modern vision for how the spirit can live in cocktails—without losing its soul.

Art plays a huge role in Remy’s process. Each of his bars is built around a different art movement. One Paris bar might be inspired by a particular philosophical school, while in London he channels minimalism or functionalism. Cocktails must follow the rules of that movement—yes, even cocktails need discipline. For the Art, Technique, Taste, and Intention (ATTI) collaboration—a Martell initiative featuring world-renowned artists, bartenders, and creatives—Remy approached mixology the same way an artist approaches a canvas: by asking how flavour, design, and intention come together to create an experience.

He sees cognac cocktails as the perfect balance of complexity and accessibility. “Cognac is easy to enjoy but incredibly complex,” he says. That’s why his drinks tend to use as few components as possible—letting the cognac take centre stage. This is especially true with Martell, which he praises for its unique distillation method. By removing yeast sediments, Martell produces a spirit that is “linear, direct, very clear.” A minimalist’s dream.

Before bartending, Remy studied philosophy—and it shows. He approaches flavour like a thinker: questioning, refining, searching for clarity. “The same way you want to find truth, maybe what we want is to find the thing that gives a guest a nice experience,” he muses. “Maybe it’s just one good cocktail.”

Recently, Remy has been diving deep into classic cocktails. Running multiple bars across Paris, London, Lyon, and soon New York, he designs each project around an art movement, and his

upcoming New York opening is inspired by Art Deco. This has led him back to the classics, which he believes every bartender must understand to evolve the craft: “You need to understand how classics work in order to build upon them.”

When asked if he’ll open a bar in Asia one day, he grins. “It’s kind of a dream,” he admits. But juggling multiple venues requires clever navigation—so for now, it remains a dream parked gently on the horizon.

To Remy, luxury isn’t about price, but intention. A cocktail, he says, is one of life’s most accessible luxuries. Unlike a two-hour fine-dining experience, a cocktail offers an elevated moment that’s crafted, thoughtful, and fleeting in the best possible way. “It’s the luxury of a moment well spent.”

Introducing cognac to new audiences, he insists, isn’t difficult at all. Early in his career, a guest challenged him to make a Negroni with Martell Cordon Bleu—and it changed everything. Turns out cognac works beautifully in classic cocktail structures. Its grape-based origins give it acidity, fruitiness, and approachability. Swap cognac into your favourite classic, Remy suggests, and you’ll understand its charm instantly.

If he had to capture the spirit of Martell in one cocktail, he’d choose one from his Paris bar, Bamboo: a highball built entirely from grape-based ingredients—cognac, verjuice, grape sugar, water. Simple, expressive, and undeniably Martell. A love letter to the tiny but mighty grape, in liquid form.

Off-duty, Remy’s world is blissfully ordinary. At home, he loves making drinks for his wife and spending time with their two daughters—a 10-year-old and a toddler. “When you make a drink for someone you care for, it’s a very special thing,” he says. In that moment, the world’s most influential bartender becomes simply a husband and father, stirring a little love into a glass. **D**

Price of Perfection

Hanwoo beef is often called Korea's crown jewel of dining, prized even more than Japan's famous Wagyu. From its rarity to its cultural significance, here are five reasons why this homegrown delicacy commands a higher price—and why it's worth every bite.

Words: PATRICK LOH

When it comes to luxury beef, Wagyu—and its perfectural expressions such as Kobe or Miyazaki—usually steal the spotlight. Revered worldwide for its marbling and melt-in-your-mouth texture, Wagyu is the word that comes to mind when diners picture prime steaks and sizzling yakiniku. But in South Korea, another prized cattle sits on the throne: Hanwoo.

Hanwoo is often considered Korea's culinary crown jewel, commanding prices that can surpass Wagyu—yes, even the highly coveted Japanese A5 cuts. But what exactly makes this Korean native breed more expensive than its Japanese rival? The answer lies in heritage, rarity, and the cultural pride that surrounds every cut. Here are five reasons Hanwoo beef can cost more than Wagyu, and why it deserves a place in your food vocabulary.



1. RARITY AND EXCLUSIVITY

Hanwoo cattle are unique to Korea and fiercely protected as a national treasure. Unlike Wagyu, which is exported widely across the globe (with licensed breeding programmes outside Japan), Hanwoo is almost entirely consumed domestically. In fact, less than 0.5 per cent of Hanwoo beef makes it outside South Korea.

This exclusivity drives up demand and value. For Koreans, serving Hanwoo isn't just about dining but a gesture of respect, status, and generosity. You'll often find Hanwoo on the table during ancestral

rites (*charye*), weddings, and the Lunar New Year. Gifting premium Hanwoo sets is also a common practice, especially during Chuseok (Korean Thanksgiving) and Seollal (Lunar New Year), where prices can skyrocket in response to festive demand.

With such a limited supply and cultural prestige, Hanwoo has become a commodity as much as it is cuisine, and that rarity alone pushes its price tag higher than Wagyu.



2. BREEDING AND FARMING PRACTICES

Raising Hanwoo cattle is a labour-intensive process that requires patience, skill, and deep respect for tradition. Farmers in South Korea typically raise their cattle in smaller herds, often on family-run farms where meticulous care is given to each animal.

While Wagyu cattle are also pampered—sometimes even fed beer or massaged to encourage fat marbling—Hanwoo farming focuses on natural, locally sourced feed like rice straw, barley, and corn. The result is meat that reflects Korea's terroir, its flavour closely tied to the land and grains of the peninsula.

This artisanal, small-scale farming model inherently drives costs up. Unlike industrial beef production, Hanwoo cattle are not

mass-produced, and the government enforces strict traceability programmes to ensure quality and authenticity. Every cow is tagged and tracked from birth to plate, adding another layer of assurance and expense to the process.



3. UNIQUE FLAVOUR PROFILE

Here's where food lovers lean in: Hanwoo doesn't just look different, it tastes different. Wagyu is famed for its heavy marbling and rich, buttery flavour, often described as so decadent it borders on overwhelming. Hanwoo, on the other hand, offers a more balanced experience.

The marbling is delicate but not excessive, allowing the natural beef flavour to shine through with a subtle sweetness and clean finish. Koreans often describe Hanwoo as 'pure' or 'honest' meat, and it's intensely beefy without being greasy. It pairs perfectly with Korean barbecue rituals, where the emphasis is on dipping sauces, leafy wraps, and communal sharing.

This distinctive taste—a marriage of tenderness and robust character—is part of what makes Hanwoo so revered. For many, Wagyu can feel indulgent in small doses, but Hanwoo is the beef you can savour bite after bite without palate fatigue. And that kind of experience comes at a premium.

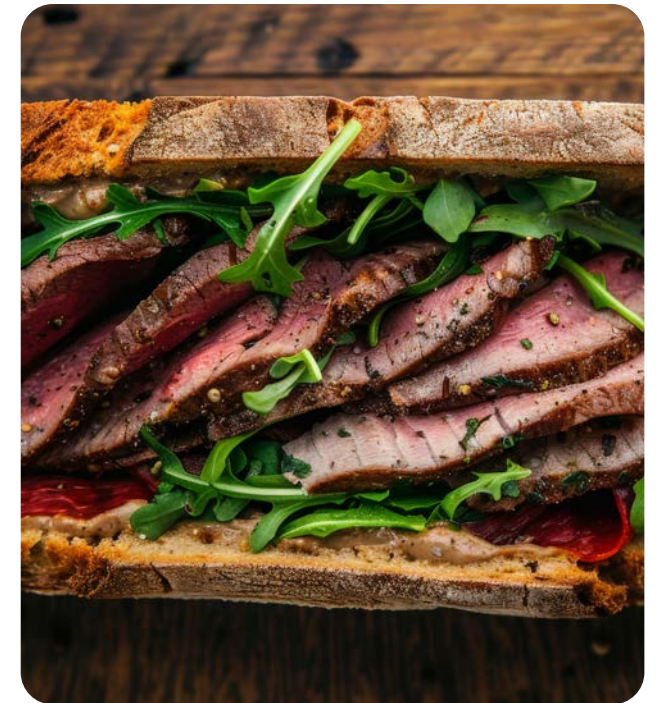


4. CULTURAL VALUE AND NATIONAL PRIDE

If Wagyu is a Japanese export brand, Hanwoo is a South Korean identity marker. It's woven into the country's food culture and social rituals, symbolising prosperity, respect, and pride. A meal featuring Hanwoo won't be an ordinary dinner, but a celebration.

This cultural weight directly impacts its price. Koreans are willing to pay more for what they see as a national delicacy, and producers know it. Beyond taste, eating Hanwoo is an expression of supporting local farmers and preserving heritage. That sense of patriotism is something Wagyu, despite its global fame, doesn't quite carry outside Japan.

It's also worth noting that Koreans don't view Hanwoo as just another premium option; they see it as the gold standard. Even in luxury hotels and Michelin-starred restaurants across Seoul, Hanwoo beef is showcased as the pinnacle of the menu. In short, it isn't just another protein. It's a cultural icon, and people are happy to pay accordingly.



5. SUPPLY, DEMAND, AND SEASONAL SPIKES

Economics 101 plays a major role here. Hanwoo beef production is limited, demand is high, and prices fluctuate dramatically during peak seasons. Around the holidays like Chuseok and Seollal, the cost of premium Hanwoo gift sets can surge by 30 to 50 per cent.

Compare this with Wagyu, which, thanks to export channels and larger production networks, is relatively more accessible. Even high-grade A5 Wagyu has become easier to source internationally, slightly stabilising its pricing. Hanwoo, on the other hand, remains fiercely local, driving prices up as availability tightens.

The South Korean government has even had to intervene now and again with subsidies and supply programmes to ensure affordability for everyday consumers. But for the most sought-after cuts—ribeye, sirloin, tenderloin—scarcity continues to keep Hanwoo firmly in the luxury bracket.

BEYOND PRICE

At the end of the day, comparing Hanwoo to Wagyu isn't only about numbers on a menu. It's about two culinary philosophies. Wagyu delivers a luxurious, marbled indulgence that melts like butter on the tongue. Hanwoo, meanwhile, offers a nuanced, terroir-driven experience that feels lighter, cleaner, and deeply tied to Korean culture.

So why is Hanwoo often more expensive than Wagyu? Because it's more than beef. It's heritage, pride, and an edible story of Korea itself. For those lucky enough to taste it, Hanwoo is a reminder that luxury isn't only about richness, but trarity, respect, and flavour that tastes like home. **D**

French Connection

A Malaysian chef in Singapore, working through a French lens. We talk to Executive Chef Vincent Yong of Maison Boulud on tradition, inspiration, and why some old habits should never die.

Words: TENGKU ZAI



Sharing hearty meals



Framboise Rose

Sometimes, it takes leaving home to see just how far it travels. In Singapore's Marina Bay Sands, at Maison Boulud—one of the most quietly assured dining rooms on the island right now—Executive Chef Vincent Yong is doing exactly that. Malaysian-born and KDU-trained (that's Kolej Damansara Utama in collaboration with the prestigious Swiss International Management Institute), he's spent two decades rooted in classical discipline and shaped by some of Marina Bay Sands' most exacting kitchens. A longtime presence there, he helped build out charcuterie and raw bar programmes, mentored rising talent, and led the revival of Daniel Boulud's storied *l'oreiller de la belle aurore* for the World's 50 Best stage.

On a recent trip—one crowded with numerous very good meals—his was the one that stayed with me. Not for theatrics, but for its clarity of thought and sheer deliciousness. There's a certain pride in seeing our own hold court abroad, even if just across the causeway. As part of the opening team at Maison Boulud Singapore, Vincent leads with rigour and intent, shaping seasonal menus while instilling a culture of high standards and forward thinking. A Malaysian making his mark, Vincent walks us through the thinking, the training, and the convictions behind the food.

YOU TRAINED IN MALAYSIA, BUILT YOUR CAREER IN SINGAPORE, AND NOW HELM A FRENCH INSTITUTION—HOW DO YOU DEFINE YOUR CULINARY IDENTITY?

My culinary identity is a journey that reflects every place and person who helped shape me. Malaysian food is straightforward and full of memories, and those childhood flavours never leave you. They shaped the way I understand comfort, warmth, and sincerity in cooking.

When I came to Singapore, the pace was faster, the expectations were higher, and discipline was non-negotiable. I was lucky to have a mentor who was strict. He taught me to respect every process, no matter how small. When I moved to the former Santi I handled ingredients I had never seen before, and learned that respecting ingredients was not just a rule. It was a philosophy.

Now at Maison Boulud, my cooking has taken on a distinctly French, or rather, Daniel Boulud's spirit. Western cooking styles have similarities, but French technique has a depth that continues to inspire me. Today, I honour where I come from, stay true to what I have learned, and always cook with intention.

HAVING COME UP THROUGH KITCHENS SHAPED BY BOTH SANTI SANTAMARIA AND DANIEL BOULUD'S LEGACY, WHAT TENSION OR HARMONY EXISTS BETWEEN SPANISH RIGOUR AND FRENCH PRECISION?

Spanish and French cuisines develop flavours in different ways. Spanish cooking is often more straightforward, and flavours come together quickly. French cuisine involves more steps, even for something as simple as making a sauce. A lobster bisque, for example, relies on a layered method and the richness of butter and cream. At Santi, I formed the backbone of my respect for ingredients. At Maison Boulud, under Chef Daniel's philosophy, I learned the importance of intention and seasonality.

At the end of the day, both cuisines remain grounded in the same credo—it is about consistency, discipline, and the values that carried me from one kitchen to the next.

AS A MALAYSIAN LEADING A MAJOR RESTAURANT IN SINGAPORE, DO YOU FEEL A RESPONSIBILITY TO REPRESENT WHERE YOU COME FROM?

I feel honoured every day when I walk into Maison Boulud. I never imagined I would one day be the Executive Chef of a French restaurant, especially one with such a strong legacy. I do not feel an official responsibility to represent Malaysia, but I do carry a sense of pride. When Malaysian guests dine with us, there is an immediate sense of connection. There is warmth and familiarity in those moments. I can see that they feel proud to see a Malaysian leading a French kitchen, and that gives me quiet motivation.

YOUR FORMATIVE YEARS AT SANTI WERE STEEPED IN CLASSICAL EUROPEAN DISCIPLINE. WHAT'S ONE KITCHEN RITUAL YOU STILL INSIST ON TODAY?

The ritual that has never left me is the sharpening of knives. I believe strongly in the saying that a craftsman must first sharpen his tools before he can do good work. When my knives are sharp, I feel grounded and ready. It sets the tone for the day and reminds me of the discipline I have cultivated throughout my career.



Another habit that stayed with me is my sense of organisation. At Santi, everything had its place, and that discipline became muscle memory. Even today, I instinctively reach for things where they should be. I make sure my team practices the same discipline, because good mise en place will always show itself when service becomes intense. A well-prepared kitchen is the difference between chaos and harmony.

IN TODAY'S EVOLVING DINING CLIMATE, WHERE DOES TRADITION SIT FOR YOU?

Tradition is the foundation of our craft. Without it, there is no structure and no meaning behind what we do. But tradition should not be rigid. It must remain open to improvement and evolution. Technology has changed how kitchens operate. Better equipment allows us to shorten cooking times while maintaining or even improving quality. I see technology as a companion to tradition rather than a replacement.

PRECISION IS A WORD OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH MAISON BOULUD. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU?

Precision is not about making something look perfect. Precision is about consistency, discipline, and the ability to repeat excellence day after day. Precision begins long before plating, from how a carrot is cut to how a sauce is seasoned to how ingredients are stored. I constantly remind my team that if there is one thing we must achieve every day, it is consistency. I hold myself to the same standard. Precision is not about pressure. It is about pride in our craft and food.



YOU'RE KNOWN AS A HANDS-ON MENTOR. WHAT'S AN IMPORTANT LESSON YOU INSTIL IN YOUR BRIGADE?

Discipline, manners, and attitude. Young chefs must learn these three things before anything else. They must follow instructions carefully and master the basics before they can create freely. Curiosity is important, but the fundamentals must be strong.

I also try to teach them empathy. I want them to understand different perspectives. When I teach my team about *pâté*, which I have been making for years, I share the methods I tried that did not work and explain why they failed. This helps them avoid unnecessary detours and teaches them the reason behind the process. It builds understanding rather than blind repetition.

WE HAVE TO TALK ABOUT THAT UNI CUSTARD SPECIAL. IT WAS THE MOST MEMORABLE DISH OF OUR TRIP.

The inspiration came from Chef Daniel Boulud's cookbook titled *Daniel: My French Cuisine*, specifically the recipe for Langoustine & Uni Chaud Froid. The dish caught my attention because it balanced richness with elegance. I used the recipe as a foundation and added my own elements.

I believe sea urchin and caviar complement each other beautifully. The key is to handle them with care. I kept the uni custard lightly seasoned, and the langoustine consommé was intentionally very light. This ensured that both ingredients could shine together without becoming heavy or overwhelming. The goal was harmony rather than indulgence.

BEYOND THE UNI CUSTARD, WHAT DISH ON THE CURRENT MENU RESONATES MOST?

The *Pâté En Croûte* is the dish closest to my heart. It represents everything I value in cooking, including discipline, attention to detail, patience, and the appreciation of tradition. The preparation requires time, effort, and complete focus. The pastry must be precise, the meat must be properly marinated, the foie gras must be done perfectly, and the mushrooms must be thoroughly washed. The consommé requires multiple processes. Even the slicing must be done with care.

When you finally see the dish on the plate, it looks simple and elegant, but the work behind it is immense. It shows how I've improved over the years and that is why it means so much to me.

ARE THERE ANY DISHES ON THE HORIZON THAT SIGNAL A NEW CREATIVE DIRECTION?

Maison Boulud is evolving toward a more soulful expression of French cuisine, inspired by Chef Daniel's journeys and his childhood memories of home-cooked meals in Lyon. The cooking is honest, crafted with care, and guided by the seasons.

In fact, we are introducing a new menu series that spotlights a different region of France. Each regional menu features dishes and ingredients emblematic of its locale, paired with wines from the same area that reflect the character and spirit of the region.

IG: @maisonbouludsg





A Closer Look At Bak Kut Teh

A dish with working-class roots and enduring appeal, bak kut teh is simple, unpretentious, and just deeply satisfying as a whole.

Words: COLIN GOMEZ

Photography: FreckleMedia Commons, WordPress

Bak kut teh is a dish that is, and will always remain, close to my heart. A lot of that is down to those late nights when my dad would pack my brothers and me into the car to go out for as much *bak kut teh* as we could stuff down. Then, on the way home, I'd often find myself stretched out in the back seat, slipping blissfully into a food coma, aided by the hypnotic intervals of streetlamp amber that filtered in through the car window.

The question, "What's your favourite food?" is a ubiquitous one. It's also one I despise, as I can never pick just one to call my favourite. So I often tell people that it more closely resembles a top three, with *bak kut teh* firmly entrenched as a perennial occupant of that hallowed personal trinity.

The origins of this dish are among the many topics of cultural dispute between Malaysia and Singapore, with each laying spirited claims to its invention. But we can split the difference, at least a little, in this regard, as the two countries enjoy quite different variations of this hearty bowl, with the Hokkien version being the predominant choice here, and the Teochew interpretation the one preferred across the Causeway. But let's leave Singapore aside for a minute and talk about the one we know and love.

A popular theory of origin is that it was invented in Port Klang in the early 20th century to supplement the diet and aid the constitution of the coolies toiling away at the docks. Some believe it was brought over from Fujian, China, where it was based on a Quanzhou dish consisting of beef ribs stewed in herbs known as *niu pai* (beef steak).

The name *bak kut teh* literally translates to "meat bone tea", and this is due to the similarities the broth bears to herbal tea, rather than it containing any tea leaves at all. Indeed, *bak kut teh* is, at its core, a dish of pork ribs cooked in a hearty broth of herbs and spices that include star anise, cinnamon, cloves, dong quai, fennel seeds, and garlic. The meat stews for hours in the broth, rendering it succulently tender and infused with flavour. You'll often also find some additional ingredients in there, which can include offal, choy sum, pieces of dried tofu or fried tofu puffs, as well as some varieties of mushroom.

Bak kut teh is frequently served with a side of *yau char kway* (donuts), and one of my favourite things in the world is leaving a few pieces in a bowl of broth and letting them soak for a bit before biting into them. The oiled crunch of the skin, paired with the

pillowy softness of the soup-soaked centre, makes for a near-orgasmic gustatory experience. We mustn't forget, of course, the dipping dish of soy sauce, chopped chilli, and minced garlic, offered as a condiment in case you feel like a little more punch.

As far as beverages are concerned, *bak kut teh* is normally taken with a glass of tea to wash it down. This is because the crisp bitterness of the tea works well to dissolve the ample amount of fat in the dish and provide refreshment to the palate in between bites.

If you're looking for the best *bak kut teh* around, the general consensus is that you'll find it in Klang, which might, in fact, be just about the only reason to go there. It was finally designated a national heritage dish in 2024, but not without opposition from some quarters. This is because, being a pork dish, *bak kut teh* is generally off limits for the majority of the population.

However, variants that swap the pork out for chicken or other alternatives do retain much of the same deliciousness, and are well worth a try for those who don't consume pork. Humble, unpretentious, and savoury like little else, *bak kut teh* is an often overlooked gem in the rich pantheon of Malaysian delicacies. **D**

The Many Lives of Chef Adek

Datin Hamidah Abdul Hamid, lovingly known as Chef Adek, has lived many lives: designer, homemaker, entrepreneur, and, eventually, one of Malaysia's most respected chroniclers of its culinary traditions. This is the story of how those lives came to shape one another.

Words: COLIN GOMEZ

Our lives are not one singular narrative, as we tend to view it, but rather a collection of different, smaller lives that coalesce into a whole only when viewed from a distance. Perhaps you used to be a dancer, before the tides of time gradually lapped at and eroded your bodily grace. Or maybe you were once an engineer who, one fine day, decided that you'd laid your eyes on a blueprint too many and then traded in your hard hat for an espresso machine and a portafilter. Such metamorphoses are common and are not to be viewed as a falling short, but rather as the natural conclusion of one season, making room for the next and lending the whole of a life greater depth for having moved on.

One of my favourite such reinventions is the one undergone by the subject of this article, Datin Hamidah Abdul Hamid, fondly known as Chef Adek. These days, she may be more known for her deeply insightful cookbooks that detail treasured heritage recipes from her hometown state of Johor as well as across Malaysia, but what many might not know is that she was, at one time, one of the brightest stars in KL's nascent fashion scene of the '80s—a designer with an uncommon touch whose creations were greatly sought after.

When I first caught wind of her story, I was immediately intrigued—after all, how could I not be? I've witnessed my share of reinventions, but rarely have I encountered someone who has excelled so fully in two distinct lives. That sense of intrigue stayed with me as I travelled to her residence, quietly sequestered in a peaceful pocket of Bukit Jelutong, for an afternoon chat.

I arrive outside her home, a low-slung house layered with terracotta roofs, screened behind palms and overreaching greenery. I ring the doorbell, and the automatic gates whirr to life before sliding away with a lazy mechanical chatter. Datin Hamidah greets me at the door and ushers me in with the easy warmth of a grandmother receiving company. We sit on her sofa and she offers me a drink. Introductions made, she settles comfortably into her seat. "So ..." she says at last. "What would you like to know?"

She clutches a notebook with an assemblage of scrawls, spanning one page and then halfway down the next. She'd come prepared, evidently, but I tell her that I'd much rather hear it from her off the cuff. It's an approach that's led to not just many a great interview for me, but full-blown conversations too. And so we agree to take it from the top.

Our story begins many years ago, when Datin Hamidah, then a bright, starry-eyed young girl of 20, was all set to move to the UK to further her education and her own becoming. It was while staying at her cousin's house there, in the midst of preparing for her move, that she would come face to face with the man who would remain by her side for the years to come. He was, at the time, a friend of her father's and well known to the family. Datin Hamidah's mother, in particular, was a big fan of the young man. Over the next few days, the man's mother visited the house with a proposal: she'd like Datin Hamidah and her son to be wed. "This was 54 years ago and they were still matchmaking," she explains. She ended up saying yes, but of course, it came at a cost. Accepting the proposal meant that all the dreams she'd dreamed, all the exciting turns she'd envisioned her life taking, would now all come to nought.



“In the family, I’m known as a good cook. So something just clicked.”

-CHEF ADEK



“That was why I ...” she begins slowly, before trailing off. She takes a moment to collect herself and continues. “Life just brought me to this, and I just followed, do you know what I mean? But I felt very restless, very useless, because I felt that had I furthered my studies, I knew I could’ve been somebody.”

What she couldn’t have foreseen at the time, though, is that she would eventually go on to leave her mark on this world and become the somebody she’d always aspired to—just perhaps not quite in the ways she’d intended. It was shortly after getting married that Datin Hamidah settled into the role of housewife and found herself with quite a bit of time on her hands.

She’d always been someone precociously creative, stretching back to her youth, and so she took to designing clothes as an outlet. It wasn’t long before those around her took notice of her latent talent for it. “I used to design my own clothes and every time I would go out, somebody would give me a good word for it. Then, sometimes they asked me to design theirs too. Some of them encouraged me to start doing it from home, and so I did. And then it just caught on, you know? So aggressively. My friends kept saying, “Why don’t you open a proper shop?””

Datin Hamidah then began to actively consider the possibility, and after much work to dispel the clouds of hesitation and self-doubt, she began her foray into the world of fashion. “So, I opened in ’85 ... or ’86, I’m not sure,” she recalls hazily. “I joined the first Fashion Aid. All the other designers in the show were long-time and established, and here I was, this unknown woman coming in.”

Despite being a newcomer contending against a sea of heavyweights, her talent shone through, and that show proved to be her big break in the industry. “After that show, one of the other designers, this man named Alvin, came to my shop in Yow Chuan Plaza just to show his appreciation for me. He said, “You know, I took 10 years to bring up my name, but you’re already up.” I said, “*Tak ada lah*, just *suka-suka*,” but he said, “No, you take it seriously.” And that was how I got involved in the fashion world. After that show,

people got to know me. *Alhamdulillah*, it lasted quite some time,” she says, a tinge of wistfulness in her voice.

It was a heady time, with fashion opening countless new avenues for her. Even now, decades later, many of her clients still have and wear the pieces they’d bought from her. Things were going well, to say the least, and Datin Hamidah was riding the winds of an unprecedented rise. She hit her stride and was thriving in just about all the ways she could. But as it’s said, all good things must come to an end, and so it proved to be the case here.

“At 41, I had two babies to take care of,” she shares. “Then I was living in Shah Alam and my shop was in Yow Chuan, so I couldn’t be going every day. That’s where I started losing the staff. So in my mind, you know, it was painful, and I gave up.” Time resumed its inexorable march, and eventually her children grew up and were now busying themselves with the preoccupations of emerging adulthood, like college and navigating their burgeoning social lives. Again, Datin Hamidah found herself with time on her hands. This time, she decided to exercise her creative inclinations through a wedding business. This, too, went swimmingly, before the demands of the practice began to take their toll. “I just tried it for a while, then it became too taxing,” she recalls. “Sometimes you do weddings until two, three in the morning; four o’clock even.”



And thus began a return to a life of domesticity, one more relaxed altogether and largely absolved of external demands. Little could she have known that fate was working quietly in the background to set the stage for her third great reinvention, this time as a chef.

It all started with a visit from her cousin, Datin Kalsom, her partner-in-crime and someone for whom her admiration is palpable when she speaks of her, as she often does throughout the course of our interview. Datin Kalsom, among the many hats she wears, also happens to be an author.

Datin Hamidah tells me the story of this encounter that would eventually go on to result in two nationally acclaimed cookbooks. “Again, I had nothing to do. One day I was talking to my cousin. In the family, I’m known as a good cook. So something just clicked, and she said, “Don’t you want to write a cookbook?” I said that I’d had it in mind, but that I wasn’t a journalist or writer. She said never mind; we’ll do it together. And that’s how it all got started.”

A project that started out with much enthusiasm quickly gave way to frustration when the realities of putting together a cookbook from scratch began to bubble up. The central issue was that, like most gifted home cooks, her dishes were the product of instinct and muscle memory.

“I didn’t like how much hard work it was because, as always, I had no written recipes,” Datin Hamidah says. “What I do, I’m so used to *campak-campak*, because that’s the old phrase. But to do a book, I have to be very specific.” That meant that what had come to her so naturally before, something she did without a thought, she now had to pause and go over with a fine-toothed comb. “I had to weigh the ingredients. Some of the dishes I had to cook twice, three times, just to get that taste.” Indeed, it was a painstaking process of trial and error. She powered through, though, and the book eventually found form. It was an instant hit, finding fans near and far and even necessitating reprints.

It was on the back of this success that Yayasan Warisan Negara took notice and reached out to Datin Hamidah and her cousin for what was to be a monumental undertaking. They wanted this plucky pair to venture across the country, documenting a list of heritage recipes known only up to that point by word of mouth or perhaps a few scraps of weathered paper sitting on someone’s kitchen counter somewhere. These recipes—the building blocks of Malaysia’s rich culinary tradition—were in danger of being lost with the last generation of hands that still knew how to cook them.

And so it was that Datin Hamidah and Datin Kalsom set off on a sweeping journey across Malaysia, where their task was to get on the ground and track down locals who knew how to cook the dishes on their list. As if it wasn’t already an endeavour of immense difficulty, many of those they found didn’t have any kind of recorded recipes from which to draw, as they, much like Datin Hamidah, cooked more by feel than any sort of definable method.

This meant that she had to observe every step of their process, from the ingredients they used to the techniques they employed, note them down, and then return to her own kitchen to replicate it. Many batches came and went before she managed to capture the very same taste. It helps, though, that she has something of a gift in this regard—an instinctual understanding that allows her to simply observe how someone cooks and then reconstruct it on her own. And so it was that, after an extensive voyage down the length and breadth of the country, thanks to the efforts of Datin Hamidah and Datin Kalsom, that these recipes were set down for posterity.

Datin Hamidah counts a multitude of high-profile admirers of her cooking, not least Robert Kuok, who, in addition to being the main sponsor of her second book, commissioned her to cook for an intimate gathering celebrating his 95th birthday at his exclusive Mariner’s Club in Hong Kong.

That’s just one of the many highlights her culinary career can count, and she combs the banks of her memory to share another with me. “Another unforgettable stint was at JW Marriott in Frankfurt, Germany, where I introduced Laksa Johor to the guests. I cooked it singlehandedly for 200 people, and the compliments from them were overwhelming. A German guest even came to my table and said to me, “I can’t stop dreaming of enjoying this dish by the beachside.””

Trip down memory lane complete, Datin Hamidah then suggests adjourning for lunch. She tells me that she’s cooked for me, which is a pleasant surprise. I hadn’t managed to have lunch before coming over, and so was especially looking forward to it. I dig into the big plate of *bihun* she’d fried up and, as grandmothers do, she insists I go back for seconds and then thirds.

As I eat, my eyes wander over to the wall of photos overlooking the dining table. It’s filled with pictures of her children. She goes over each of them, one at a time, telling me about what they’re like, what they’re up to now, and, most of all, how proud of all of them she is.

They’re coming by later, she tells me—all of them together for dinner. “Oh, what’s the occasion?” I ask. Turns out there’s none in particular. They just pretty much come by on a weekly basis to have dinner as a family. She’s very lucky, I offer. She nods quietly in agreement. Looking off into the distance, Datin Hamidah reflects on her blessings. She tells me that there isn’t a thing more she could’ve asked from this life, about how it’s truly been an extraordinary journey from the beginning till now.

Datin Hamidah continues to muse on the life she has lived, and midway through, it occurs to me that I should turn my recording back on. But something in me tells me not to. Some conversations—some sentiments—feel as though they come from a place where recording them would somehow intrude upon their purity. I slide my phone away and return to my meal. Yes, aunty—tell me more. I’m listening. 

Dining *In* Orbit

For decades, space food was about survival and not enjoyment. Now, as humans prepare to spend more time off-world, mealtimes are becoming something to look forward to again.

Words: COLIN GOMEZ

Photography: Freeplik, Wikimedia Commons, Peakpx, Ujhire

What a particularly striking shade of red today is—you think to yourself as you sip on your little cappuccino outside your favourite café overlooking the Jezero Crater on Mars. You start to think about what you should have for dinner. Do you go to that taquería that just opened up on the Moon you’ve been hearing good things about? Or maybe you’ll opt for a meal with a view on that shuttle orbiting Earth at 17,500 miles per hour (not that you’d feel it; they’ve done a fantastic job with the suspension). Soon, perhaps even sooner than we think, these scenarios will be less science fiction and more very real dining dilemmas.

Space exploration, you see, has come on in leaps, bounds, and catapults in recent years. The exponential pace at which technology accelerates means that now even the outer reaches of the stratosphere are no longer solely the domain of large-brained men and women in peak physical form who’ve dedicated their lives to mastering a narrow and unforgiving set of skills that leave little



room for a step out of turn, and even less for ordinary people. I mean, we recently sent Katy Perry there, if you needed an example. But I have to say, space did suit her well, didn't it? Perhaps we should leave her there, but I digress. As off-world travel has rapidly progressed, so has food technology alongside it. Take a look at what NASA has its astronauts eating today; it might just be a sign of what dining on the Moon could look like in the time to come.

BACK WHEN SPACE FOOD WAS BARELY FOOD
If you were an astronaut in the early days, let's just say you weren't exactly looking forward to mealtimes. Breakfast would look less



like an enticingly sunny omelette and more like soil-coloured slop squeezed from a metal tube. Dinner would be a dry, compressed, and ambiguously defined cube of “nutrition”. It was practical, sure, but you wouldn’t describe it as appetising.

The Apollo era saw NASA introduce thermostabilised pouches that finally brought some semblance of flavour and variety to proceedings, though your options were still far from what could be called extensive. The priority here was singular; taste was but a faraway consideration, as food was designed to be lightweight, safe, long-lasting, and free of rogue crumbs that could potentially interfere with delicate spacecraft systems.

THE MODERN SPACE PANTRY
Thankfully, we’ve come a long way from the days when you had to double-check your food to make sure you hadn’t reached for a cube of *papier-mâché* instead. Nowadays, astronauts aboard the International Space Station (ISS) tuck into a menu that looks a lot like what we enjoy here on the ground.

Their meals include freeze-dried dishes rehydrated with hot water, thermostabilised mains like stews and curries, as well as plenty of snacks like nuts, dried fruit, and the ever-popular tortillas. Bread, unfortunately, is still banned. They haven’t quite managed to solve the crumb problem just yet.

NASA’s diligent scientists work around the clock to come up with meals that take into careful consideration all elements of nutrition,

flavour, and stability. Meals must be hardy enough to survive for months on end without refrigeration, while still delivering enough calories and vitamins to keep astronauts ticking over during high-stress missions teetering on razor-thin margins.

So human-centric is it now that each astronaut gets to participate in a taste test before liftoff to build their own personal menu. They also get “bonus containers” filled with comfort foods from home, a soothing pick-me-up when those long deployments start to feel like they’re taking their toll.

WHY YOU CAN’T JUST FRY AN EGG IN ORBIT
Now, that’s all well and good. The brave boys and girls venturing to the realms of the interstellar to further our collective understanding of what’s out there certainly deserve not to have their stomachs turn every time they sit down for a meal, but what about actually cooking in space?

See, this is where things get tricky. It turns out that the gravitational conditions we enjoy down here are absolutely imperative to cooking, among other things. In microgravity, you don’t get the luxury of frying pans, boiling pots, or open flames, because matter doesn’t behave up there like it does down here. Liquids bead up and float instead of staying put, and oils don’t pool; they drift instead. The simplest of kitchen tasks, like stirring and pouring, become a catastrophic exercise in mess control. That’s why, instead of a kitchen, astronauts have to depend on warmers, food scissors, and specialised rehydration units to prep their food instead.

Then there's the matter of how taste changes in orbit. You thought the food sucks on a plane? Try 30 times that altitude and see what you think then. It's the reason astronauts tend to crave bolder and spicier flavours; anything to make them feel like they're at least tasting something.

THE NEXT FRONTIER: EATING ON MARS

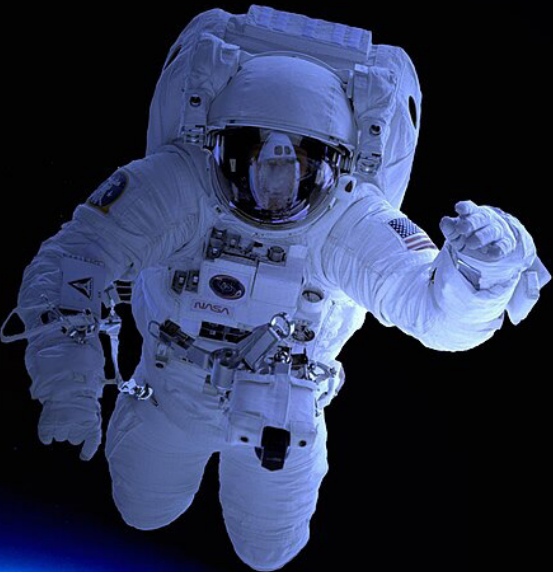
We've done well as a species to get to the Moon, and now the next celestial body in our sights is Mars. This is an undertaking that'll require a lot more than just prepackaged meals; what will be a multi-year journey will necessitate fresh food, renewable supplies, and closed-loop systems where waste can be repurposed.

NASA, of course, is already on it. They're already testing some pretty out-there solutions, including hydroponic and aeroponic plant growth, 3D-printed foods, and even compact greenhouses that could feasibly operate on the surface of Mars someday. It's not as far-fetched as it may seem; the ISS, after all, has already grown lettuce, radishes, and even chilli peppers in orbit, baby steps towards what could one day manifest itself as sustainable space agriculture. What a thought!

A NEW ERA OF OFF-EARTH DINING

So yes, space food has come a long way from meat-flavoured toothpaste to dishes that look a lot like what we eat here on Earth. The next step will be bringing actual cooking to these as-yet scarcely traversable realms. As we push on in our efforts to reach Mars, food will prove to be an indispensable part of the equation that'll sustain us in many different ways beyond just the physical.

For as long as we've existed, we've historically brought our kitchens and cravings along with us wherever we've gone. Now, we're getting ready to set the table further beyond than ever before. 1'



The Rules Of Living Well

Eleven years on, Edwin Wang has grown Signature Market beyond just a nut business—it's now a community-driven wellness brand where purpose, clean ingredients, and people-centric shopping experiences come together.

Words: COLIN GOMEZ



I make my way through the crowd within the familiar confines of Mid Valley Megamall, on the lookout for Signature Market, where Edwin Wang, one-half of its founding team, is expecting me. It's only after a wrong turn or two that my directionally challenged self finally arrives at the store to find Edwin, cup of coffee in hand, engaged in pleasant conversation with the woman behind the counter. I go up to him and introduce myself.

Dressed in a black overshirt layered over a pale blue button-down, relaxed light-wash jeans, and white sneakers, Edwin cuts a slender silhouette. He sports a radiant complexion that belies his years, paired with a soft-spoken demeanour. He asks if I'd like a coffee, and then orders me one from the woman he'd just been talking to. Coffees in hand, Edwin takes me on a tour around the store, and that's how our interview begins. Normally, I sit down with a person when we do these things, but this was a welcome change of pace.

Things are going well, Edwin tells me, with Signature Market having just celebrated its 11th anniversary. Things are going so well, in fact, that I'm told we can expect a few more outlets on the horizon. The business began as an expression of Edwin's belief in wellness, something he had to learn the importance of the hard way.

It all stemmed from his past life spent slaving away at a corporate career that took a punishing toll on his wellbeing. "When I started working in corporate, it was extremely stressful. Corporate is a different animal, it's always about fear. If you don't deliver, you're going to get fired. Then they throw a lot of money at you to incen-

tivise you to work harder. What I did was I got the money, and I spent it on food, just to escape from all the stress and everything," he relates.

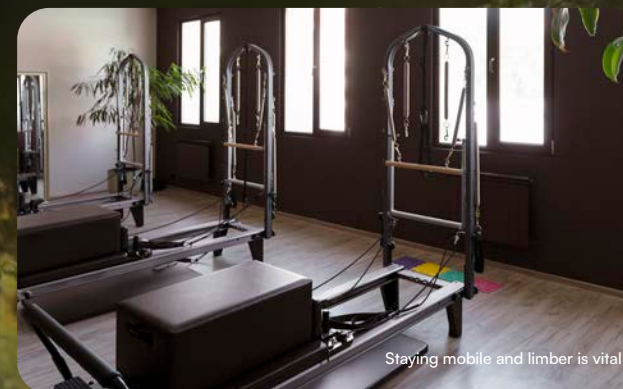
This vicious cycle caused Edwin's weight to balloon, leading to feelings of discontent with how he looked and felt, as well as how he was living his life in general. "Then I actually quit the job, and I was really obese," Edwin reminisces. He decided to turn to nuts to help reverse his physical decline. "I actually relied on nuts. Nuts are great because they fill you up and are natural. Whenever I was hungry, I ate nuts. It helped me lose 20 kg."

And it proved to be from Edwin's affinity for nuts that the business sprang, as he and his co-founder would go on to start a business selling nuts that would eventually evolve into the Signature Market we know today. The bulk of their business still comes from nuts, Edwin says. "On a monthly basis, we roast around 20 to 30 tonnes of nuts. All of this goes to our online shop, and all our outlets. That's our cash cow."

As the company went from strength to strength, Edwin and his partner weren't just content to sit on their laurels, they were visionaries and saw the potential in a rapidly developing landscape. "Instead of just pocketing all the money, or buying a Ferrari and everything, we decided to invest all our profits. We had to create a wellness grocer because Malaysia is upgrading. It's worth investing in a wellness grocer."

Time has proven them right, as this happened to be the ninth store that we were standing in. I ask Edwin what the impetus was to expand on physical stores in such aggressive fashion when the core of their business was all online. It's all about the experience, he tells me. He observes that it was COVID-19 that played a major role in people gravitating towards more experiential shopping. "It was post-pandemic, and no one wanted to shop online anymore because they were so fed up with it, because they were forced to shop online exclusively during COVID-19. So post-pandemic we actually pivoted to open more stalls."

Edwin reckons that with the way things are heading, this realignment in consumer perspectives is here to stay. "We are transitioning to a creative economy where people want experiences. They want an experience like, hey, how do you make me feel? Instead of just, I come in to get my product, and that's it. So the packaging and the experience are very important. That's why we have a drinks bar in this outlet—so you can shop, and then after you spend a certain amount, you'll get a free drink. It completes the whole experience instead of just buying your stuff and leaving. That's the trend we are looking at, and we think this trend will continue for the next 10 years."



It's all part of a greater shift towards not just health, but something more holistic altogether—wellness. "Health is just a small part of wellness," Edwin notes. "You can see nowadays that everyone's so crazy into pickleball, Pilates, cold plunges, running clubs, and doing Hyrox. So there's a very huge body, mind, and soul kind of integration. Yes, it involves the mindset as well."

It's a salient point that Edwin touches on. The current climate, in terms of optionality when it comes to exercise, has never been better. Gone are the days when exercise meant slogging away at a gym, or monotonously and solitarily dripping buckets on a treadmill in an effort to shed a couple of extra pounds. The city is awash with options, and physical activity has now become a communal endeavour that means you can hang out with your friends, and have a good time while you burn those calories.

Edwin observes that "Now people are no longer saying, what's the best practice? What do you do? I want to follow that. No, now they're more like, okay, I'll keep on trying, and I want to find my alignment, the things that align with me, that speak to me. It's a different kind of mindset right now."



As we walk around the store, we arrive at a vibrantly coloured aisle, stocked with rows of different personal care products. I ask Edwin about them, and he tells me that it's all part of their holistic approach to wellness, and that all of these products are formulated free of any harmful or unnecessary additives. "It's all in-house," he says. "At Signature Market, we have around 700 products. We've used the last 11 years to scout for the best manufacturers, and now work with around 400 to 500 of them around Asia."

As our chat begins to wind down, I ask Edwin, in light of Signature Market's success, what he hopes to achieve for himself in the time to come. For somebody who places such importance on wellness, and strives to abide by its tenets in his day-to-day, what does his dream life look like? Edwin tells me that for him, there's nowhere to go, because he's already arrived. "I'm living it already, and I feel very happy when I can help other people live amazing lives. The whole brand is a representation of that. I'm already living my dream life." signaturemarket.co

Alchemists of Time

From the Vallée de Joux to the Michelin Guide, watchmaking's elite are finding their most authentic expressions through the shared obsession of the culinary arts.

Words: ANANDHI GOPINATH

There is a singular, quiet tension that exists in both a watchmaker's workshop and a Michelin-starred kitchen. It is the obsession with the perfect second—the moment a balance wheel finds its rhythm, or a delicate emulsion reaches its peak. For the modern lifestyle enthusiast, the boundary between these two worlds has dissolved. We no longer just consume; we appreciate the architecture of a movement just as we do the plating of a degustation.

In recent years, the world's most prestigious watch Maisons have moved beyond the racetrack, finding their most authentic partners in the culinary arts. Here are the most significant partnerships currently defining this delicious art of fusion.

SOCIAL RITUAL: BREITLING X THE GLOBAL KITCHEN

CEO Georges Kern, Breitling has redefined the boutique experience by opening Breitling Kitchens in global hubs like Seoul, Geneva, and most recently, Riyadh. These are high-concept culinary destinations designed in the brand's signature industrial-loft aesthetic, blending aviation heritage with a gritty, modern-retro cool that appeals to a style-conscious diner.

In Geneva, the menu is a collaboration with Colombian-French star Chef Juan Arbeláez. Known for his high-energy approach, Arbeláez crafted a menu that mirrors Breitling's air, sea, and land universes, featuring vibrant street-food like the Superocean Salad. Meanwhile, the Seoul flagship in Hannam features Chef Kim Hyeong-kyu, offering an upscale Italian-influenced menu in a space where diners can reserve private rooms themed after specific watch families. The latest addition in Riyadh, helmed by Chef Khaled Alhussaini, fuses these international standards with local Saudi roots. For Breitling, the kitchen is where their casual and inclusive philosophy comes to life—transforming the watch from a static object in a display case into a central part of a living, breathing social ritual.



**ARCHITECT OF TASTE:
AUDEMARS PIGUET X BJÖRN FRANTZÉN**

If there is a chef who embodies the Le Brassus spirit of breaking rules to master them, it is Björn Frantzén. The Swedish maestro behind the three-Michelin-starred Frantzén in Stockholm and Singapore's Zén is more than a brand ambassador; he is a fellow traveller in the quest for technical perfection. Frantzén's cuisine is often described as architectural—a seamless blend of Nordic ingredients and Japanese *kaiseki* philosophy. Much like an Audemars Piguet movement, his dishes are layers of hidden complexity that appear deceptively simple on the surface.

The partnership feels organic because both parties treat their heritage as a springboard rather than a cage. Just as Audemars Piguet's Royal Oak took the traditional luxury watch and reimagined it in stainless steel, Frantzén takes classical French techniques and subverts them with fermented ingredients and open-fire cooking. When you see a Royal Oak Double Balance Wheel Openworked on his wrist in the kitchen, it is a mechanical peer to the high-pressure, high-precision environment of a top-tier kitchen. For Frantzén, the synergy lies in the hand-finish—the realisation that whether it is a hand-polished bevel on a bridge or the precise slice of a scallop, the human touch remains the ultimate luxury.



**CHEMISTRY OF FUSION:
HUBLOT X ANNE-SOPHIE PIC**

Hublot's Art of Fusion philosophy finds its perfect culinary avatar in Anne-Sophie Pic, the most Michelin-decorated female chef in the world. While many brands focus on the aesthetic of the chef, Hublot focuses on the process. Pic is renowned for her signature technique of impregnation, a method of marrying complex aromatic layers into a single ingredient through steeping and smoking. This mirrors Hublot's own obsession with material science, where gold is fused with ceramic to create Magic Gold, or sapphire is tinted into impossible hues.

Pic, who oversees a global empire from Valence to Singapore, views her Big Bang timepiece as a tool of the trade. In the kitchen, where a few seconds can be the difference between a silk-smooth sauce and a broken one, the chronograph is a constant companion. Her collaboration with Hublot highlights a shared daring; she isn't afraid to use 'unloved' ingredients like cabbage or beetroot in a fine-dining context, just as Hublot isn't afraid to pair high-complication movements with rubber straps. This partnership celebrates the modernist side of luxury—where the value isn't just in the gold or the caviar, but in the revolutionary thinking required to transform them into something entirely new.

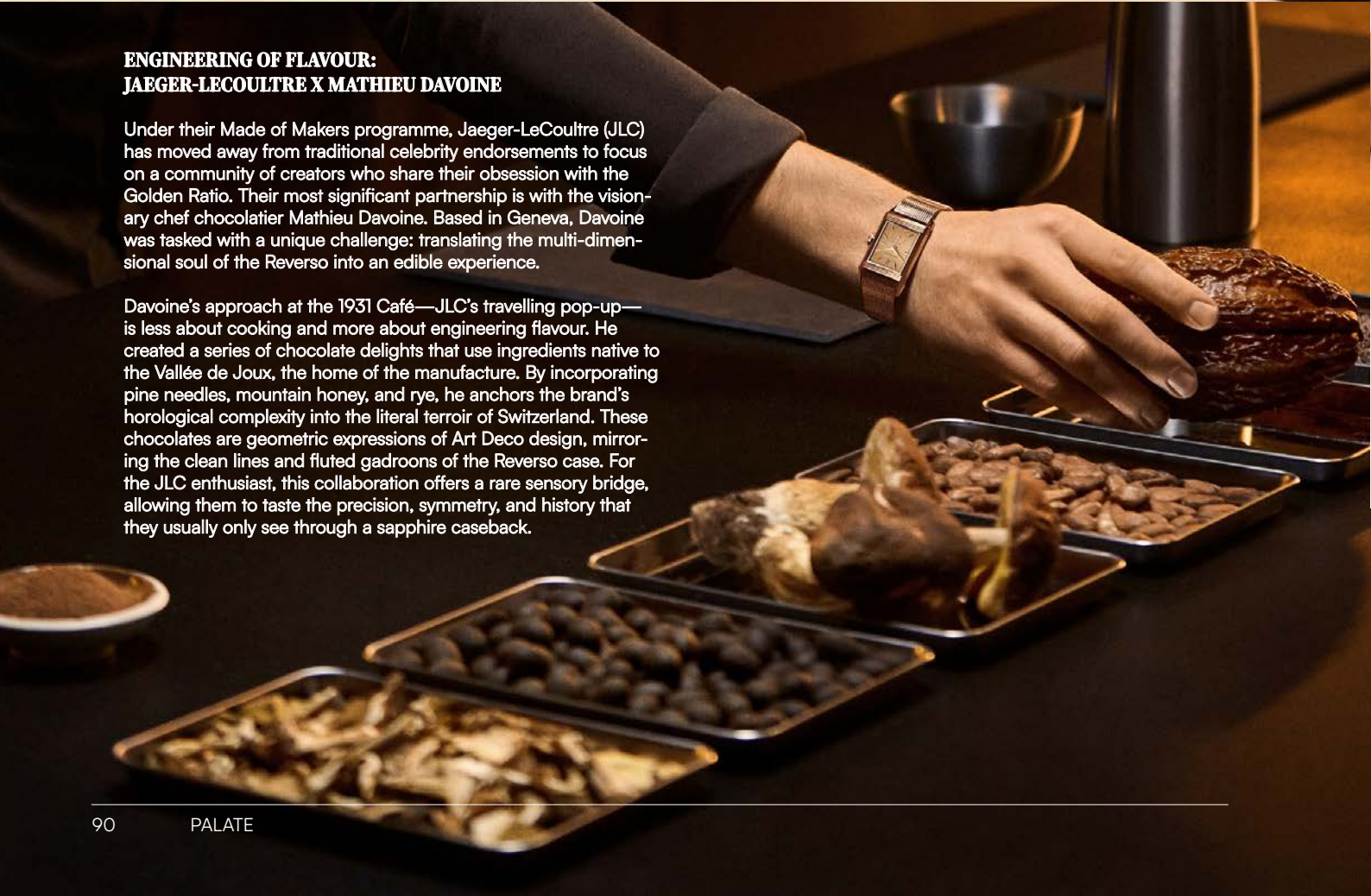




**ENGINEERING OF FLAVOUR:
JAEGER-LECOULTRE X MATHIEU DAVOINE**

Under their Made of Makers programme, Jaeger-LeCoultre (JLC) has moved away from traditional celebrity endorsements to focus on a community of creators who share their obsession with the Golden Ratio. Their most significant partnership is with the visionary chef chocolatier Mathieu Davoine. Based in Geneva, Davoine was tasked with a unique challenge: translating the multi-dimensional soul of the Reverso into an edible experience.

Davoine's approach at the 1931 Café—JLC's travelling pop-up—is less about cooking and more about engineering flavour. He created a series of chocolate delights that use ingredients native to the Vallée de Joux, the home of the manufacture. By incorporating pine needles, mountain honey, and rye, he anchors the brand's horological complexity into the literal terroir of Switzerland. These chocolates are geometric expressions of Art Deco design, mirroring the clean lines and fluted gadroons of the Reverso case. For the JLC enthusiast, this collaboration offers a rare sensory bridge, allowing them to taste the precision, symmetry, and history that they usually only see through a sapphire caseback.



**CUSTODIANS OF HERITAGE:
BLANCPAIN X THE MICHELIN GUIDE**

While many watchmakers have only recently discovered the kitchen, Blancpain has been “the watchmaker of haute cuisine” since 1986. Their relationship with gastronomy is a core identity, rooted in the legendary friendship between the brand and the late Chefs of the Century, Paul Bocuse and Joël Robuchon. Today, that legacy evolves through the newest member of the Blancpain family: French chef Christophe Hay, whose restaurant holds two Michelin stars. Based at his Fleur de Loire establishment in Blois, Hay represents a modern, sustainable ecosystem—a chef who acts as a custodian of his region through his own truffle fields, Wagyu cattle farm, and permaculture gardens.



The connection is deeply personal; Hay first noticed a Blancpain watch in 2005 on the wrist of Bocuse himself during their collaboration. Now, Hay sets the tempo of his own kitchen to the rhythm of the Villeret Quantième Complet. This choice is symbolic: the Villeret is Blancpain's most classical expression, featuring the signature moon phase face that mirrors the patience and cyclical nature of Hay's ethical gastronomy. Beyond individual Friends of the Brand, Blancpain remains the most significant institutional link to the industry, serving as the global partner of the Michelin Guide since 2020. **P**

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Soy Far, Soy Good

From the good people of Outside comes a confident rethink of a local kitchen staple. NOBO Soy steps into a category steeped in nostalgia with a cleaner, more considered proposition for today's drinker. Using non-GMO Canadian soybeans and a double-extraction process, it delivers a notably higher protein content with less sugar and a smoother, less "beany" finish. No oils, no gums, no fillers—just a delicious beverage that lets soy do what it does best, but better.

Words: TENGKU ZAI

Grilled Cheese Done Right

A childhood comfort food turned kitchen craft project, here's how I make a grilled cheese worth repeating.

Words: COLIN GOMEZ

A grilled cheese sandwich is a simple dish that happens to be quite close to my heart. As a culinarily challenged teenager (and now adult), it was one of the first things I learned how to make without having to suffer while I ate it. It was also a small comfort I'd inadvertently introduced to my grandmother, who, upon asking for a bite of one I'd just made, tasted it for the first time well into her seventh decade.



She chewed on that first bite, contemplatively, before asking if I could make her one as well. We spent many an evening thereafter munching on grilled cheeses in silence, and those remain some of my fondest memories of her. Over the years, I've stepped up my grilled cheese game because when you're a one-trick pony, you'd better make damn sure you do that trick well. And so, today I'm going to share with you my tips on how to make the perfect and most indulgent grilled cheese.

First things first, you'll want to pick the right bread. You want a bread that has enough structure so that your sandwich doesn't fall apart, but at the same time be soft enough to bite into and get a mouthful of cheese. Sourdough, brioche, or even just plain old white sandwich bread work well here. Next, you'll want to pick out the cheese you're going to be using. While I won't begrudge you springing for the Kraft singles or what have you, this article's not about that; this article's about kicking things up a notch.

Cheddar is a staple in the grilled cheese game, and for good reason too—it just works. It's got a tonne of flavour (especially the sharper varieties) and does a pretty good job of melting as well. Gouda, especially young Gouda, is another great pick. Slightly sweet and nutty, it's got a creaminess to it when melted and is a cheese that imparts a touch of sophistication. Both cheeses also offer varieties that are sharper, for more flavour if you so wish.

If you want to go full gourmet, Gruyère makes for a great option. Rich and delightfully balanced with sweet, salty, and nutty notes, Gruyère melts into layers of cascading velvety goodness, making for a grilled cheese that melts just as easily as your resolve to stop at one. Don't feel the need to just stick to one cheese though

—mixing is highly encouraged and can result in some dazzling combinations. Take mozzarella, for instance; great at melting, but perhaps a touch too mild for your liking? Add a sprinkle of blue cheese to it and, oh boy, now you've got something tasty going.

The third and final component of this wonderfully unfussy dish is the fat you fry it with. Softened butter is tried and true; and my personal go-to. But what many might not know is that mayonnaise can work just as well, or even better, depending on what you're looking for. Mayo is easier to spread right out of the fridge, making it a good option if you're hungry and need to eat now. It's also got a higher smoke point, which means more room to brown your bread while you wait for the cheese to melt. While you don't really end up tasting the mayo itself, it does impart a subtle tang to proceedings, which is something to take into consideration. What mayo also helps with is the crispiness of your sandwich.

Frying it is pretty straightforward and doesn't warrant much explaining. However, for those of you as ill-equipped in the kitchen as I am, it starts with spreading your choice of fat on your slices of bread and making sure to cover it all the way to the edges. You then heat your non-stick skillet or cast-iron pan over medium-low heat, as putting it too high runs the risk of burning the bread before the cheese melts.

Place your first slice of bread, fat side down, in the pan, and then generously layer your cheese on top of it. Top it off with the second slice after, this time fat side up. Cook it for about three to four minutes, or until it gets a nice golden brown. Then just flip it and gently press down to compress the cheese and have it stick to both sides of the bread.



Cook the other side for another two to four minutes until you get the same shade of golden brown and, voilà, you have yourself the perfect grilled cheese. You can dig in as it is, but if you want to slice it, let it rest for a minute before cutting it diagonally. Giving it some time to rest helps keep the cheese from oozing out immediately after you cut it.

And there you have it—the simplest of meals that, for my money, works at any time of the day. Have it on its own or with a side of hot tomato soup, that all-time classic pairing. And don't just make one while you're at it; make two! And share it with your grandma if you're still lucky enough to have her around. 🍷

Photography: Freepik, Vecteezy

Champagne's Finest Champion

The pairing of caviar and champagne is the stuff of culinary legend. But when Elegant Fine Caviar meets Telmont Champagne, the result is more indulgent.

Words: PATRICK LOH

There's a reason why caviar and champagne have been the darlings of the dining world for centuries. They represent the height of sophistication—one from the depths of cold, pristine waters, the other born of golden vineyards kissed by the French sun. When they meet, decadence is reined in by clarity. The richness of the roe finds its counterpart in the champagne's effervescence, like a duet of salt and sparkle, opulence and restraint.

But while the pairing itself is classic, the latest collaboration between Elegant Fine Caviar and Telmont Champagne gives it a refreshing, modern narrative. One rooted in ethical sourcing, artisanal precision, and a shared respect for nature's finest expressions.

ELEGANCE OF THE SEA

Elegant Fine Caviar isn't just another purveyor of luxury roe. The brand has earned a reputation for redefining caviar appreciation—transforming what was once reserved for the elite into an experience for true connoisseurs. Its philosophy is simple yet profound: quality without compromise.

Sourced from the most reputable sustainable caviar farms, Elegant Fine Caviar offers a range that celebrates the delicate nuance of each species. The pearls are glossy, firm, creamy, and burst with oceanic finesse. From the buttery smoothness of Oscietra, with its subtle nuttiness, to the intense salinity of Siberian Baerii, each tin reveals a story.

For Elegant Fine Caviar, it's not only taste that matters. It's the emotion, the anticipation of opening a tin, the first glint of the pearls, the way they roll across the palate before releasing that briny, silken crescendo.



THE SPIRIT OF TELMONT

Enter Telmont Champagne, a name that’s been turning heads in the world of fine sparkling wines for its distinctive philosophy. Founded in 1912 in Damery, near Épernay, Telmont is an independent house that marries old-world craftsmanship with a deep commitment to sustainability.

Telmont is one of the few champagne houses making bold strides towards a greener future. Its vineyards are gradually converting to organic viticulture, its bottles are made from recycled glass, and even its packaging eschews excess. But make no mistake, none of this comes at the expense of quality.

Each sip of Telmont is an orchestra of refinement which is crisp, mineral-driven, and alive with energy. The Réserve Brut offers bright citrus, toasted brioche, and a hint of hazelnut, making it a beautiful companion to the clean salinity of caviar. For something richer, the Réserve Rosé brings notes of red berries and rose petals, complementing the creamier, more robust roe varieties like Beluga or Kaluga.

The house’s commitment to terroir and time mirrors that of Elegant Fine Caviar. Both understand that true luxury lies not in excess, but in knowing when to let nature lead the way.

A PERFECT PAIRING

So, how does one pair caviar and champagne the right way? The answer lies in harmony. The Réserve Brut from Telmont finds its perfect counterpart in Oscietra Caviar. The Oscietra’s buttery, nutty notes enhance the champagne’s brioche and almond undertones, while its subtle salinity brightens the bubbles’ crisp acidity. The pairing feels effortless—the champagne lifts the caviar, and the caviar softens the champagne’s sharpness, creating an elegant equilibrium throughout the meal.

For a more indulgent experience, pair Siberian Baerii with Telmont Réserve Rosé. The rosé’s fruit-forward profile contrasts beautifully with Baerii’s brinier, more assertive character. Each mouthful plays out like a dialogue—sweet and savoury, light and luscious.

If you’re after something daring, try Beluga Caviar with Telmont Blanc de Blancs. The pure Chardonnay Champagne, with its fine minerality and citrus zest, cuts through Beluga’s buttery richness, amplifying its oceanic depth. It’s a pairing that speaks to seasoned palates—one that celebrates restraint as much as indulgence.

RITUAL OF REFINEMENT

Part of the charm lies in the ritual. The slow twist of the caviar tin, the pop of the champagne cork, the gentle clink of mother-of-

pearl spoons. Serve the caviar chilled, never frozen. Let it sit on the back of your hand for a moment, allowing your body heat to awaken its aroma. Then, take a small spoonful, followed by a sip of champagne. The bubbles cleanse, the caviar lingers.

LUXURY WITH PURPOSE

What makes the Elegant Fine Caviar and Telmont pairing so compelling isn’t merely the taste but the ethos behind it. Both brands stand as modern icons of luxury that honour heritage without losing sight of the future. Elegant Fine Caviar champions traceability and sustainable aquaculture, while Telmont pioneers eco-conscious winemaking in one of France’s most traditional regions. In a world where extravagance often feels fleeting, this partnership brings meaning back to indulgence. It’s proof that refinement and responsibility can, in fact, coexist.

But the end of the day, rememebr that indulgence isn’t just about what’s on the table. It’s about savouring the moment itself. ۞



Indigo On The Plate

Meet the ingredient redefining natural beauty in Malaysian cooking. With its dreamy blue hue and subtle earthiness, bunga telang (butterfly pea flower) is more than colour—it's culture and creativity in full bloom.

Words: PATRICK LOH

It's impossible to miss that electric, sapphire hue that seems to glow even under soft light. The *bunga telang*, or butterfly pea flower, is one of Malaysia's most quietly iconic ingredients, a bloom that looks delicate but colours the culinary landscape with vivid hue. From plates of *nasi kerabu* tinted a royal blue to cobalt beverages that shimmer like twilight, this little flower has turned tradition into an art form and lately, a global fascination.

The butterfly pea (*clitoria ternatea*), native to tropical Asia, is one of those ingredients that hides in plain sight. It creeps along garden fences, climbs wooden poles, and peeks out from village hedges, the kind of plant your grandmother might once have picked without ceremony, its petals tossed into a pot of boiling water. Yet what it yields is nothing short of alchemy: an indigo brew that turns violet with a squeeze of lime, proving that nature is the most poetic chemist of all.



Photography: Freepik, Unsplash



FROM THE KAMPUNG TO THE CAFÉ

In Malaysian kitchens, *bunga telang* isn't a novelty but nostalgia. It's the kind of flower that links memories of rural mornings with the sophistication of today's café culture. Traditionally, its colour was prized more than its flavour. The petals would be steeped to make a natural dye for rice, *kuih*, and desserts, infusing them with an ethereal blue that makes the ordinary instantly extraordinary.

Perhaps the most recognisable use is in *nasi kerabu*, the Kelantanese rice dish where blue rice forms the heart of a vibrant ensemble of fresh herbs, toasted coconut, grilled fish, and spicy sambal. The flower gives the dish its signature hue, but also a certain sense of serenity; a visual calm against the chaos of flavours. Elsewhere, *bunga telang* finds its way into *pulut tai tai*, a glutinous rice cake topped with *kaya*, or *pulut inti*, crowned with grated coconut. It's edible art disguised as comfort food.

But what was once the province of tradition has bloomed into trend. Today, you'll find butterfly pea making appearances in everything from artisanal cocktails to high-end pastries. Mixologists adore it for its pH sensitivity—add acid, and it transforms colour like a magic trick in a glass. A simple syrup steeped with *bunga telang* can turn a gin sour into a mood ring, fading from ocean blue to lilac before your eyes. Pastry chefs, meanwhile, have discovered its gentle tint lends cakes and creams a natural, Instagram-friendly charm.

BEAUTY WITH BENEFITS

Beyond the colour, there's a science to *bunga telangs* appeal. Rich in anthocyanins, the same antioxidant compounds that give blueberries their hue, the flower has been used in traditional medicine across Asia for centuries. Herbalists swear by its calming properties when brewed as a tea, it's said to reduce stress,



improve memory, and promote a sense of balance. Whether or not you buy into the medicinal lore, there's something undeniably soothing about watching its petals unfurl in hot water, releasing that deep, inky blue like a slow exhale.

Its subtle, earthy flavour, a little like green tea with a whisper of grassiness, makes it a versatile partner in both food and drink. In Thailand, it's served chilled with honey and lime as *nam dok anchan*, a refreshing antidote to heat and humidity. In Malaysia, you might find it paired with lemongrass, pandan, or calamansi, balancing its earthiness with brightness and fragrance. Even in haute cuisine, it has found a second act: used in rice dishes at fine dining tables, or even as an edible garnish floating on a flute of champagne.

MORE THAN A COLOUR

For all its visual drama, *bunga telang* is not just about aesthetics. It's a flower rooted deeply in culture and memory. In Malay households, planting *bunga telang* is as much about symbolism as sustenance. Its resilience—thriving in sun and rain, blooming faithfully—has long made it a quiet metaphor for persistence and grace. Where once it was a backyard bloom, today it represents a revival of heritage cooking, a return to the authentic and the naturally beautiful.

As the world increasingly turns to clean eating and sustainable ingredients, *bunga telang* stands as a perfect emblem of what Malaysian cooking does best: balancing the sensory with the soulful. It reminds us that nature's palette can be breathtaking without being artificial, that beauty and flavour can coexist with meaning.

THE NEW BLUE

In many ways, *bunga telang* is having a renaissance. Cafés in KL now serve butterfly pea lattes, health brands tout it as a superfood, and even gin distillers have bottled its striking pigment for botanical blends. Yet beneath the trendiness, its heart remains the same—a flower that connects generations, rural and urban, simple and sophisticated.

It's easy to be seduced by the colour, and fair enough, who can resist that hue? But the real magic of *bunga telang* lies in its duality. It's both humble and glamorous, ancient and modern, decorative and functional. It can be a grandmother's kitchen ingredient or a barista's secret weapon. It's the kind of flower that doesn't just tint your food but tells a story that blooms a little brighter each time we remember to look closer. **P**



Pour, Sip, Soothe: Japan's Go-To Comfort Bowl

Brewed together by tea and leftover rice, ochazuke is Japan's go-to comfort bowl. But what's steeping within isn't just that; it's tradition, thriftiness, and heart.

Words: VANESSA L

Ocha' is tea while 'zuke' describes to soak or submerge, thus, *ochazuke*—submerged in tea. This dish came about during Japan's Edo Period, when green tea grew more accessible, and instead of hot water over rice, it's tea as well as *dashi*. The scoop to this classic comfort is leftover rice, and humble as it is, *ochazuke* is a quick quaff to have in the morning or on nights where you're running on empty. Now, time to spill the tea on what *ochazuke* is, and why it's comfort soused in a bowl.

Where The Old Is Made New



Imagine a night already worn thin or a morning that's running late before you are, and you're short on time, energy, and effort to cook. Yet in the haze of a hungry belly and drained mind, the overnight rice sitting in the fridge catches your eye, while the tea bags wave a small hello. Before you know it, the kettle's on, and the rice is left to rest.

The beauty of *ochazuke* is that it works with either hot or cold rice, which the green tea will later warm. Often, you can dust on ingredients like *furikake* (a dried mix of fish, seaweed, salt, sugar, and sesame seeds for a savoury smack) or *nori* (Japanese seaweed shreds) which invites toasty notes to the bowl. On a more heart-healthy mouthful, salmon *ochazuke* includes salmon seasoned with salt and pepper. Think pan-fried protein with warm tea broth over a steaming bed of rice.

A Traditional & Thrifty Bowl That Nourishes



As mentioned earlier, *ochazuke* originated from the Edo Period, and has since been the bowl that soothes as well as satiates every stomach. Held together by rice, tea—customarily, green tea—and hearty leftover toppings, it's a simple bowl, yet no less wholesome.

The nutritional upsides within such simplicity may surprise you; the antioxidants in green tea supports your immune system by defending cell damage, and with its warmth pacifying your rice, in turn, it's a meal that soothes upset stomachs. Some fancy it a soft reset on sniffly days, or a gentle morning-after relief.

Of course, the rice itself is an everyday fuel. Then, with a customary leftover topper like last night's protein which carries essential minerals, you have a balanced bowl. For instance, fish such as salmon resting atop the rice offers extra protein and omega-3 fatty acids for the heart. Sure, it's a traditionally thrifty bowl, but it's still one that feeds the body and soul.

Photography: Instagram / @bichitcoffee, @innerspark.tea, @ukiya_official; Unsplash; Pixabay

Traditional Tea Picks



Sencha

A type of Japanese green tea, *sencha*, would be the typical and traditional tea for *ochazuke*. Besides stemming as Japan’s best known green tea, *sencha* offers toasty, vegetal undertones that complement the rice as well as the toppers without stealing the spotlight. Think of it a gentle ground for the flavours to gather.

In itself, your *ochazuke* can rise differently with the many sorts and styles and grades of *sencha*. Based on the specific style, you might notice a bittersweet touch, or a floral hint here, briny bits there. Milder than *genmaicha* and *hōjicha*, *sencha* is a delicate pour best enjoyed when the tea is brewed with care, not speed.



Genmaicha

Genmaicha is a fresh, relatively grassy green tea bit that’s intensified by the nutty notes of roasted brown rice or barley. Nicknamed ‘popcorn tea’, thanks to its popcorn-like scent; *genmaicha* is often drawn from older tea leaves, which are milder in character. So, if you’re yearning for a bowl that’s soft and slightly sweet, this golden pour is a great option.



Hōjicha

For a more enchanting look and lift, *hōjicha* with its darker temper heightens a simple spoonful like *ochazuke*. Smoky-sweet, contoured by a tarty nip, unlike other Japanese green tea, *hōjicha* is roasted. Therefore, the perfect tea for a midnight munch since it’s light in caffeine and sweet by nature.

Picture a soak rustic in colour, and rich in character: *hōjicha ochazuke*. Likely the one tea tuned to take on heavy sauces such as soy sauce and ponzu. Not to mention, its tan brilliance winking at earthy fixings like mushrooms or regal slices like seared meats—savours which would otherwise outplay more light-bodied teas.



Kukicha

‘Kuki’ is stem, along with ‘cha’ as tea, *kukicha* is known as stem or twig tea. Gingerly separated from the leaves—only a pinch is needed for this tea. *Kukicha* is actually considered the byproduct of creating green teas where the stems and branches are culled.

As such, *kukicha* is a lot lighter on caffeine than those leafy teas. Thanks to its twiggy body, this tea is airy on the palate—creamy makeup with a naturally sweet hum, on top of a grassy nip and nutty notes. *Kukicha* works wonderfully when chilled or cold, and is especially refreshing on sunny days, alongside citrusy accompaniments, too.



Dashi

Indeed, *dashi* is no tea, but a Japanese soup stock. A popular *ochazuke* pour pick nevertheless, *dashi* is beloved for its umami flavour profile; a rich suit against liquid leaf. Think of it as a seasoned soul bearing depths that balance any dish; there’s a reason why *dashi* is a key ingredient in Japanese cuisine. Like Japanese teas, *dashi* steeps in minutes, which is all you’ll need for a *dashi-zuke* to rise.

Still Bananas *For* Bananas

This story's gone a little bananas, but it's with yummy reasons why. Besides bananas being my favourite fruit, there's so much more in the bunch.

Words: VANESSA L

Bananas? Yes. For as long as I've had the fortune—or is it?—to live, my pick of the fruit bunch has swung between this and that. When it comes to fruit, form does meet function as far as bananas go. Sweet, versatile, and nutrient-dense, it's an unshakable favourite. And somewhere along this thought, I've learnt a lot more than I meant to about this cheerful crescent, and I hope it's one that you can indulge in, too.



ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

To me, bananas are decisively a golden ticket to the loo. Though I reckon that can sound a mite concerning, but it's not all about their dietary fibres. Still, there's no rebutting that bananas are the attendant to your gastrointestinal troubles. Peeling back these thoughts, bananas are a rich bunch. Pocketful of vitamin B6 and C, nudging up your iron, building red blood cells, pinches of potassium to keep things ticking smoothly—heart, pressure, and all. Excitingly, the manganese in bananas freshens collagen, casting a protective spell over your skin and cells against oxidative stress.

Fat-free as they are, bananas run on three natural sugars—a sweet simplicity spinning energy that's no fat, no fuss. To peel it simply, it's sugar you can binge on without a single granule in sight. Perhaps why marathon runners and Hyrox athletes get one as soon as they complete their races like a second finisher medal.

Suffice to say, bananas are a rather handy bunch. Just a peel, and it's a snack-on-a-stick. No mess, no sticky fingers—unless you're the sort to pluck and bite on the spot. Thanks to this monkey's delight who comes in its own coat, it's a convenient snack to have while you're on the go. In true banana fashion, apparently it isn't uncommon to polish leather shoes or silver with the peel, either. So, on the day you have a finger with killer boots on, you know what to do.

SWEET A-PEEL

Now, we're all well aware bananas that are still a little green are in truth, edible; yet the starchy, rather stringy bite bit invites little want for anyone to munch. The root of it is that, the lighter the stage they are in, the mealy they perform; it's the darker ones who hold a sweeter touch. It all counts on the sunny arc—starchy one day, sweet the next, on how you wish to utilise it in the kitchen.

Still, as the sweetness sets in, oftentimes do people believe that blackened bananas belong in the bin thereafter. For ones that are a little poor-looking, or have started to sport a few ageing spots, they're not spared the same fate either. Displeasing it is to know, since I find those to be particularly yummy to consume.

Did you know? Their botanical classification as most—like myself, have imagined, is not a tree. Curiously enough, the plant is a massive herb, with its so-called trunk wrapped in overlapping leaf sheaths. And speaking in plant logic, a banana is a berry, for it's a fleshy fruit sprung from the ovary of a single flower.

Photography: Unsplash, Pexels

BANANAS AT WORK

Young

Bananas in green are typically best used in savoury dishes or stews rather than having it raw. Textured much like a potato, and high in resistant starch, you can chop up the sunny arc before tossing them into a salted boil. It's a common cooking script in Caribbean and Indian cuisines, to have them paired with veggies, or even slip into a meat's roll. You can also roll banana dices into curries, soups, and stews to lap up spoonfuls bursting with warmth.

If finely sliced then fried, there's a good crunch to young banana chips. Next side up, boil and blend with butter and you have your-self a yummy, mealy mash.



Ripe

Ripe ones are a cake walk—good any way you go about it. Raw and ready, its sweetness plays well with savoury dishes alongside sweet drinks and desserts. Talking banana bread, pudding, and banana smoothie—my top threes! How can I forget about the iconic banana spilt? There's a sunny energy about its yellow shade, perhaps it's how smoothly sweet it can talk, whispering of mornings and of ease.



Old

From a greenie to a gentle crooner in peel and pulp, once they've hit their ripe old age, they slip into their mushy era. Just about everyone turns to this total soffie for a dose of a sugar sigh. Curving up a classic banana bread, it's these blackened ones who still harbour a gentle honeyed hush behind their peel. But the baked goods aren't lined to only that—there's waffles, pancakes, cookies, and cakes to stir about. Plus, the natural sweetness steps in for where sugar is required in the recipe.

To sweeten things further, since I've mentioned banana splits, chuck your old and overripe bananas into the blender to create a lovely churn. Soft serve that's dairy-free and dreamy—or as I like to call it, nice cream! For vegan baked recipes, old bananas make for a perfect binder and moisture source to replace eggs. This might sound oddly a-peel-ling, simply because the idea hasn't rung in my mind, but why couldn't it work in a banana jam? Banana sauces (like ketchup) and syrups are another way you can employ these senior yellow citizens.

FOREVER IN A BUNCH

Whether a finger, a hand, or a whole bunch, bananas are my favourite for countless tasty reasons. They change their coat as if auditioning for a role, moving from green to gold. Once the bright, showy newcomer, now a mature star of the rack. Yes, this story's gone a little bananas, indeed.

It's A Miracle

It looks like a common hedge-row berry and tastes of very little at all. Yet, within this modest West African fruit lies a chemical quirk capable of turning the sensory world upside down.

Words: COLIN GOMEZ



Today, we're casting the spotlight on miracle fruit. Its name itself is enough to stir interest; then throw in its exotic origins from the understorey of the forests of West Africa, and all of a sudden your expectations really start to bubble. But for all its apparent mystique on the face of it, it really is quite an unremarkable-looking berry. And it sure doesn't taste like much, too, so what gives?

Well, the real magic is what happens after you eat the fruit. You see, inside it hides a compound called miraculin, a glycoprotein that binds to the sweetness receptors on the tongue. The berry in and of itself isn't sweet, but what it does is something quite extraordinary. As soon as something enters a mouth bathed in miraculin, the compound changes shape, activating the receptors and sending a "sweet" signal to the brain. What then happens is a temporary rewiring of your taste buds that turns your sense of taste upside down, as you know it.

Take the sourest things you can imagine—lemons, vinegar, and the like—the kinds of things that have you scrunching your face up just thinking about it. Put those in your mouth after chewing on some miracle fruit, and you'll find, to your surprise, these things that once seemed so sharply acidic have become bewilderingly sweet, sometimes to the point of becoming sickly so. It's a neat trick that lasts anywhere between half an hour to two hours.

This astounding effect was first stumbled upon by West Africans centuries ago, who you imagine would've been very much confused when they first discovered it. It was not long before they started putting it to more practical uses at the time, eating the berries to make things like sour palm wine and fermented breads more palatable. It would take until the 18th century before European explorers came across it for the first time, and then until the 1960s before scientists managed to isolate the miraculin itself. Attempts to commercialise it as a low-calorie sweetener followed in the decade after, but regulatory hurdles, in the United States especially, put an end to its potential in that regard.

Photography: Vecteezy

Today, miracle fruit occupies aspirations far less lofty. Largely relegated to the realms of obscurity, it now inhabits a specific dimension between those interested in its culinary applications and those who study the science behind it. Food enthusiasts keen to explore the ways in which it bends the notions of taste host "flavour tripping parties", while some researchers are looking beyond the novelty and exploring miraculin's potential to alleviate taste disorders.

For most of us, though, its charm is rather more straightforward: we just like how it makes things taste like they're not supposed to. It's also a reminder that taste, which we already know to be subjective, could be even more speculative than we thought. It's a pliable, suggestible sensation, and the wider we open our minds to treating it as much, the closer we can get to discovering avenues beyond our wildest expectations. **D**



5 *Easy* Gin Cocktails You Can Make *At* Home

From a classic G&T to the honeyed charm of a Bee's Knees, here are five gin cocktails that anyone can make at home. All you need is a glass, some ice, and a bit of curiosity.

Words: COLIN GOMEZ

Now, if you're a regular, you've read my article on five easy whisky-based cocktails you can make at home (or at least I hope you have), but for those of you who aren't exactly the biggest fans of whisky, here's a sequel featuring gin instead. A spirit kissed by botanicals, gin is a versatile pour that lends itself to any and all.

It's replete with subtle twists and turns that invite you to unravel its mysteries in whichever way you like. Gin might be complex, but spotlighting it in a cocktail doesn't have to be, as these five recipes will attest to. So, ready your glasses, some ice, a spoon, and let's kick things off.

1

Gin & Tonic

Of course, we had to start off an article on gin cocktails with a G&T—could anything else have sufficed? The no-brainer, the banker, the one that's never failed: gin and tonic go together like peanut butter and jelly, Bonnie and Clyde, a pair of Siamese twins. I know a fair few people who don't like the taste of straight-up gin, and I can't imagine many would willingly indulge a glass of tonic water from time to time either, but somehow, when you put the two together, you have a drink that always hits the spot.

INGREDIENTS

50ml gin
125–150ml tonic water
Ice
Optional: lemon or lime slice,
herb sprig (rosemary, mint)

METHOD

1. Fill a tall glass with ice.
2. Pour in your gin.
3. Top with tonic.
4. Give it a gentle stir.
5. Garnish if you feel like impressing yourself.

They say simplicity is the ultimate sophistication, and the gin and tonic certainly embodies that to a tee. Balanced and refreshing, you can switch up the gin too whenever you're looking for something different. A gin and tonic also happens to be one of the few alcoholic beverages that's socially acceptable to drink at practically any time of the day, so that's definitely a plus point.



Photography: Freepik, Unsplash, Pexels, Dries Buytaert

2

Tom Collins



The taller, sunnier cousin to the G&T, the Tom Collins is like summer in a glass. Light, citrusy, and with a touch of sweetness, you can think of the Tom Collins as the adult version of lemonade. And who doesn't like lemonade, right?

INGREDIENTS

50ml gin
25ml lemon juice
15ml sugar syrup (or dissolve 1 tbsp sugar in a splash of warm water)
Soda water
Ice
Optional: lemon wheel or cherry

METHOD

1. In a tall glass, add gin, lemon juice, and your sweetener.
2. Give it a stir to blend.
3. Fill with ice.
4. Top with soda water.
5. Garnish if you want it to look like you've made an effort.

This is a cocktail for those who want something tall, bubbly, and that goes down easy. Yes, we're still talking about drinks here.

3

Negroni

Alright, now we're getting serious. The Negroni, you must understand, is a very big-boy cocktail indeed. Few drinks out there command such legions of self-appointed connoisseurs ready to lecture you about what a "proper" example should taste like. But, belying its complex flavours and dignified stature, it's actually quite a cinch to make.

INGREDIENTS

30ml gin
30ml Campari
30ml sweet vermouth
Ice
Optional: orange peel

METHOD

1. Fill your glass with ice.
2. Pour in the gin, Campari, and vermouth.
3. Stir until chilled.
4. Twist an orange peel over it, if you've got one.

And really, that's about it. If you'd only ever ordered a Negroni and never looked into the making of one, you wouldn't have thought that it'd be this simple. Sure, it looks and tastes like you've read at least three books on mixology, but nobody has to know that, in actuality, all you did was pour three things into a glass and stir.



4

French 75

The French 75, or simply a *soixante-quinze* if you're French (my sympathies), is a cocktail made from gin, lemon juice, sugar, and champagne. But I'll let you in on a little secret: you can swap out the champagne for another sparkling wine if you like, because really, who's going to know? Invented right around World War I, it's said to have gotten its name because drinking it will have you feeling like you just got shelled by the powerful French 75mm field gun. Fair enough.

INGREDIENTS

30ml gin
15ml lemon juice
1–2 tsp sugar (or 10ml sugar syrup)
Sparkling wine (prosecco, champagne, cava)
Optional: lemon twist

METHOD

1. In a glass, mix gin, lemon, and sugar until dissolved.
2. Add a couple of ice cubes if you want it colder, or skip entirely.
3. Top slowly with sparkling wine.
4. Garnish with lemon if you're feeling fancy.

The keen-eyed among you will have noticed that it's very similar to the aforementioned Tom Collins, but with champagne taking the place of soda instead. That alteration means you'll definitely want to keep careful watch of how many you've had, because it got its name for a reason. Sophisticated, lively, and a great way to use that half-open bottle of prosecco you've been looking for an excuse to finish.

5

Bee's Knees

The Bee's Knees functions as both name and descriptor for this cocktail because it truly is what it says on the tin. This Prohibition-era beverage, by way of three simple ingredients, manages to turn out a drink that is gently sweet and smoothly indulgent. The honey works to soften the edges of the gin, while the lemon adds a sparkling effervescence to proceedings. It's a drink that feels as if somebody taught gin how to give a hug.

INGREDIENTS

50ml gin
20ml lemon juice
15ml honey syrup (or 1 tbsp honey dissolved with warm water)
Ice
Optional: lemon peel

METHOD

1. Combine gin, lemon, and honey in a glass or jar.
2. Stir with ice until cold.
3. Strain into a fresh glass if you want it neat, or just plop out the ice and drink it as is.
4. Garnish with a peel if you have one handy.

When making the Bee's Knees, there are two ways you could go about it. You can either use a London Dry gin for more of a juniper-forward profile, or you go for a more modern gin featuring citrus and florals. This will work to bring out more of the honey and lemon notes in the cocktail. Whichever option you go with, keep track of your pours—this is a cocktail that'll swiftly get you buzzing. Buzzing, of course, because ... honey ... bees ... look, you know what I mean.

Gin For The Win

And there you have it: five cocktails to bring out the best of your gin. Whether you're looking for something bright and sparkly, or something a touch more grown-up, gin can do it all, and that's part of what makes it so great. So the next time you need to whip up some cocktails for the barbecue or just need a stiff drink or three in the privacy of your own home, give these easy and beloved classics a try.

18 Cups of Spring

Think all Chinese green teas taste the same? Think again. China's green teas span a world of aroma, texture, and taste. Here's how to tell them apart.

Words: PATRICK LOH

In the world of tea, China reigns supreme. It's a cradle of ancient tea culture and delicate craftsmanship where every leaf tells a story. Green tea, the country's most celebrated variety (yes, it's not only the Japanese who have good greens), captures the essence of this heritage: freshness, clarity, and simplicity.

But not all green teas are created equal. From misty mountain terraces to sun-dappled valleys, each region imparts its own soul to the cup. Here's your guide to the exquisite spectrum of Chinese green teas from household names to regional treasures.



THE 18 LEGENDARY GREEN TEAS

A good place to start is with the nation's most revered. These 18 green teas represent the heart and soul of China's long-standing tea tradition, a journey through misty mountains, ancient villages, and centuries of craftsmanship. The first 10 are often celebrated as the 'Top 10 Famous Chinese Teas,' prized not only for their exquisite flavour and fragrance, but also for their stories—of emperors' favourites, poetic names, and regional pride steeped into every leaf. Together, they form a tasting map of China's tea heritage, each sip offering a glimpse into the artistry, terroir, and timeless ritual that define the world's oldest tea culture.

1. LONGJING (DRAGON WELL TEA FROM ZHEJIANG)

Longjing, or Dragon Well, is the benchmark against which all Chinese green teas are measured. Hailing from the mist-covered hills around Hangzhou's West Lake, this tea is famed for its flat, jade-green leaves that glisten like polished silk. Its flavour is smooth, nutty, and elegantly vegetal, with a soft chestnut sweetness. Sipped slowly, it offers the serene calm of spring rain.

2. BILUOCHUN (GREEN SNAIL SPRING OF JIANGSU)

Delicate, downy leaves curled into tiny spirals give Biluochun its poetic name, 'Green Snail Spring'. The tea bursts with floral and fruity notes, often likened to apricot blossoms carried on a cool breeze. Its fragrance is light yet arresting, and its liquor glows with a pale jade hue. Fresh, vibrant, and slightly sweet, Biluochun captures the energy of early spring and is a gentle reminder that beauty often comes in the smallest spirals.

3. HUANGSHAN MAOFENG (YELLOW MOUNTAIN FUR PEAK FROM ANHUI)

From the storied slopes of Huangshan comes Maofeng, one of China's most beloved teas. The leaves, covered in fine silvery hairs, brew into a soft golden liquor that whispers of orchids, chestnuts, and mountain air. Each sip feels like inhaling morning mist: light yet layered, floral yet toasty. Huangshan Maofeng embodies balance, like a dance between warmth and freshness, nature and craft, strength and subtlety.

4. TAIPING HOUKUI (MONKEY KING TEA OF ANHUI)

Few teas look as striking as Taiping Houkui. Its long, flat, sword-like leaves stretch gracefully, revealing a lattice of bright green veins. With an aroma reminiscent of orchids and a crisp, honeyed sweetness, this tea feels regal in both form and flavour. It's named 'Monkey King' because of its bold personality and it rewards patience: The more you sip, the more it unfolds: smooth, floral, and quietly powerful, like a melody that refuses to fade.





5. LIU'AN GUAPIAN (MELON SEED TEA FROM ANHUI)

True to its name, Liu'an Guapian's leaves resemble tiny melon seeds: uniform, neat, and deeply green. Unlike most green teas, it's made entirely of leaf and no buds, giving it a rounder, fuller taste. The brew is rich yet refreshing, with a bright vegetal note that softens into a whisper of sweetness. It's the tea equivalent of a perfectly balanced meal that is comforting, harmonious, and endlessly satisfying.

6. XINYANG MAOJIAN (GREEN TIP FROM HENAN)

Xinyang Maojian is a tea of character. Its fine, needle-shaped leaves shimmer with silvery fuzz, releasing a strong, grassy aroma when steeped. The liquor is clear and brisk, carrying notes of chestnut and wild herbs with a lingering, cooling finish. Revered for centuries in central China, Maojian is the green tea that wakes the senses. It's assertive yet refined, like the first burst of sunlight through mountain fog.

7. DUYUN MAOJIAN (DUYUN DOWNY TIPS FROM GUIZHOU)

From the highlands of Guizhou comes Duyun Maojian, a hidden gem among China's green teas. Handpicked from mountain gardens shrouded in mist, it brews into a pale jade cup that's mellow and fragrant, with whispers of flowers and fresh rain. There's a quiet strength to it, the kind of tea that doesn't demand attention but rewards those who stay for the ride. It's mountain serenity, distilled into liquid form.

8. LUSHAN YUNWU (CLOUD AND MIST FROM JIANGXI)

The name 'Cloud and Mist' tells you everything you need to know about this ethereal tea from Mount Lu. Grown where the air is cool and humid, the leaves absorb the gentle sweetness of fog and dew. The result is a soft, sweet brew with a whisper of nuttiness and a lingering floral aftertaste. Lushan Yunwu feels contemplative. It's almost like a cup for poets, dreamers, and those who prefer their tea with a side of stillness.



9. ANJI BAICHA (ANJI WHITE TEA FROM ZHEJIANG)

Don't let the name fool you. Anji Baicha is a green tea with a rare, pale-leafed beauty. Harvested only for a few short weeks each spring, it yields a delicate liquor with grassy, umami-rich notes and a silky mouthfeel. Revered for its high amino acid content, it's soothing yet invigorating. To taste Anji Baicha is to sip on spring itself and enjoy the fleeting, pure, and unforgettable flavour.

10. JINGTING LVXUE (GREEN SNOW OF JINGTING OF ANHUI)

As poetic as its name, 'Green Snow' is soft, fragrant, and full of grace. The leaves are slender and covered in a fine white fuzz that shimmers like frost before melting into a cup of smooth, mellow tea. The flavour is gentle yet enduring, with a sweet aftertaste that seems to echo long after the last sip. Jingting Lvxue is a tea of quiet moments and is best enjoyed when the world slows down and all that's left is the warmth of your cup.

11. EMEI ZHUYEQING (EMEI BAMBOO LEAF GREEN FROM THE HILLS OF SICHUAN)

From the misty slopes of Mount Emei, Zhuyeqing, or also known as 'Bamboo Leaf Green', lives up to its name with slender, jade-hued leaves that shimmer in the light. Clean, crisp, and quietly elegant, this tea captures the essence of early spring in every sip. Its bamboo-like freshness is balanced with a soft, grassy sweetness that lingers long after the cup is empty.

12. WANGJIANG GREEN TIP (FROM SICHUAN)

Bright, brisk, and refreshingly straightforward, Wangjiang Green Tip is the everyday tea of choice for many Sichuan locals. It's not flashy, but its lively aroma and gentle astringency make it wonderfully drinkable from morning till night. Think of it as the green tea equivalent of a favourite linen shirt: simple, comfortable, and always right for the occasion.

13. NANJING YUHUA TEA (RAIN FLOWER TEA OF JIANGSU)

Named after the legendary Rain Flower Terrace in Nanjing, Yuhua tea unfurls like a soft bloom in warm water, its curled leaves releasing a tender floral fragrance. The taste is delicate, smooth, and faintly sweet, reminiscent of rain-soaked petals. It's a tea that feels like springtime nostalgia in a porcelain cup.

14. QINGCHENG XUEYA (SNOW BUD OF MOUNT QINGCHENG FROM SICHUAN)

High in the sacred mountains of Qingcheng, 'Snow Bud' earns its name from the fine silvery down that coats its young leaves. The infusion is smooth, light, and faintly creamy for sips that evoke stillness and clarity. There's a soft sweetness beneath the calm, making it the perfect companion for quiet mornings or even meditative moments.



15. PUTUO FOCHA (BUDDHA TEA FROM ZHEJIANG)

Cultivated near ancient Buddhist temples on Mount Putuo, this tea is a meditation in a cup. Known as 'Buddha Tea', Focha is prized for its pure, tranquil aroma and its clean, almost spiritual taste. Each leaf is a whisper of the sea breeze and temple incense, steeped in centuries of calm and devotion. Sip it slowly, and it feels like enlightenment through leaves.

16. ZISUN TEA (PURPLE BAMBOO SHOOT TEA FROM ANHUI)

A rare treasure even within China, Zisun Tea's tender leaves carry a faint purple hue that sets it apart from the rest. The brew is smooth and sweet, with a rounded chestnut aroma and a subtle floral lift. There's a quiet luxury in its depth, the kind of tea that feels like silk on the palate and lingers with a faint, honeyed finish. Truly, an artisan's masterpiece in a teacup.

17. ENSHI YULU (JADE DEW FROM HUBEI)

Unlike most Chinese green teas, Enshi Yulu is steamed rather than pan-fired, giving it a brilliant emerald hue and a delicate sweetness more akin to Japanese sencha. The aroma is fresh and oceanic, the taste soft yet vibrant, with a silky mouthfeel that lives up to its name, 'Jade Dew.' A bridge between cultures, it's a reminder that even ancient traditions can find harmony in contrast.

18. YANGXIAN XUEYA (SNOW BUD FROM JIANGSU)

Elegant and mellow, Yangxian Xueya is often called 'spring captured in a cup.' Its young, silvery buds unfurl to release a bright, floral fragrance and a light, buttery sweetness. There's a tender purity to it like the taste of sunlight filtered through mist, of new beginnings and quiet joy. A tea for dreamers, and for those who believe that beauty lies in simplicity.

MODERN REIMAGININGS

Today's tea artisans are pushing boundaries as brewers and enthusiasts are experimenting with roasting techniques, blending traditional leaves with jasmine or osmanthus, and even crafting cold-brew versions to suit the modern palate.

From the classic Dragon Well to the ethereal Anji Baicha, Chinese green tea remains a symbol of balance between nature and nurture, art and simplicity, stillness and awakening.

Every cup of Chinese green tea is a moment steeped in history and a whisper of the land it came from. Whether you prefer the nutty warmth of Longjing, the floral lift of Biluochun, or the refreshing bite of Xinyang Maojian, there's a leaf for every mood and moment. **P**

Zest, Please

Bright, bold, and unapologetically tangy, lemons are the quiet workhorses of the kitchen. Here's how to squeeze every drop of potential from this golden citrus.

Words: PATRICK LOH

Flavour enhancer? Lemons. Acne issues? Lemons. Skin brightening? Lemons. Kitchen stains? Lemons. This wonderfully versatile fruit does far more than add zest to our lives but today, let's focus on what it does best: bringing flavour to the table.

Honestly, there's no ingredient quite as transformative as a lemon. One squeeze and suddenly your sauce sings, your roast feels lighter, and your dessert cuts through sweetness with effortless ease. Lemons don't demand the spotlight, but they simply make everything else shine. Behind every balanced dish or refreshing drink, there's almost always a hint of lemon working quietly in the background. Here's how to make this citrus hero your kitchen's most reliable sidekick.

1. BRIGHTEN, BALANCE, AND BRING IT TO LIFE

A splash of lemon juice can do what salt sometimes can't. It lifts, sharpens, and ties flavours together. A squeeze over grilled seafood, fried chicken, or even a rich pasta instantly refreshes the palate. The acid cuts through fat and salt, restoring balance and adding vibrancy. Don't forget the zest either: microplane some over risotto, creamy burrata, or even fries for a touch of aromatic luxury. The key? Always add lemon right before serving.

2. A BAKER'S SECRET WEAPON

Lemons are the backbone of countless desserts, even when they're not the star. Their acidity balances sweetness, while zest infuses bakes with delicate fragrance. Think lemon curd inside buttery pastries or zest stirred through olive oil cakes. For something refreshing, pair lemon with cream cheese, mascarpone, or yoghurt to cut through richness beautifully. If you're feeling adventurous, candied lemon peel makes for a dazzling and delicious garnish.

3. FROM MARINADES TO MAGIC

When it comes to cooking, lemons don't just season. The citric acid tenderises proteins, making it perfect for marinades and ceviche. Combine lemon juice with olive oil, garlic, and herbs for an instant Mediterranean marinade, or use preserved lemon to add a deep, savoury tang to roasted meats and stews.

The trick is balance: too much acid can 'cook' your proteins before you want it to, so always add lemon towards the end for that bright, clean finish chefs love.

4. STAR OF THE BAR

In the world of cocktails and mocktails, lemons are liquid gold. Their juice lies at the heart of classic beverages like the Whiskey Sour, Tom Collins, and French 75, each relying on that perfect sweet-tart equilibrium. Freshly squeezed lemon juice brings vibrancy to any drink, while a twist of zest releases aromatic oils that elevate your cocktail from basic to bar-worthy. For a non-alcoholic twist, mix lemon with herbs like basil or thyme and top with soda water. You can also make chemistry magic by infusing it to a drink with *bunga telang* for osme colour-changing theatrics.

5. PRESERVE THE SUNSHINE

If you haven't tried preserved lemons, you're missing out on one of the culinary world's greatest hidden treasures. Common in North African and Middle Eastern cuisines, preserved lemons are packed in salt and their own juice until they turn soft, mellow, and intensely savoury. They add a unique umami-citrus punch to everything from couscous and roast chicken to pasta and salads. It's the one ingredient that'll make a dish taste like it's been perfected by someone's grandmother. 

Photography: Freepik



Men Who Cook: Li Tim Koh's Pucuk Pegaga Salad

The skincare co-founder and aesthete shares a favourite salad recipe—rooted in superfoods and crafted for beauty from within.

Words: TENGKU ZAI

Ingredients:

Pucuk pegaga (Centella Asiatica), chopped fresh
Kangkung, blanched
Garlic
Onions
Red chillies
Gula Melaka (palm sugar)
Desiccated coconut

Method:

Blend the garlic, onions, chillies, and *gula* Melaka into a coarse paste. Cook this mixture gently with desiccated coconut, allowing it to turn toasty and aromatic, the sweetness deepening as it caramelises. Once ready, toss through the blanched *kangkung* and fresh *pegaga*, ensuring everything is evenly coated.

What you get is a salad with character—herbaceous, grounded, and unapologetically Southeast Asian.

When he's not formulating skincare powered by Southeast Asian botanicals, Li Tim Koh brings the same considered philosophy into his kitchen. As co-founder of Paloma, his work has always centred on the potency of plants—adaptogens, herbs, and time-honoured ingredients drawn from the region, especially Malaysia. It's a sensibility that translates seamlessly to the plate.

Naturally shy, he's not one to seek the spotlight—but on camera, he surprises us. There is an ease to the way he moves, instinctive and unforced, as though the act of cooking simply takes over. Perfectionism and exacting sensibilities aside, what he ultimately delivers is a dish that's disarmingly simple: a beautiful, delicious salad. Even those on set who typically sidestep their greens found themselves going back for more.

For 'Men Who Cook', he presents a Pucuk Pegaga Salad—something of a study in contrast. Half-fresh, half-cooked, it balances the brightness of raw herbs with the depth of a gently toasted paste. At its core is *pegaga* (Centella asiatica), long revered across Southeast Asia for its restorative qualities, paired with *kangkung* (water spinach) for body and bite. The result feels both elemental and intentional—ultimately rooted in tradition, much like Paloma.

Notes Worth Keeping

Good whisky doesn't rush—and neither do the relationships worth keeping. From The House of Suntory, the Hibiki Premium Gift Edition carries that same sense of patience into a limited edition release that's intentional and refined in equal measure. Encased in traditional Japanese motifs that speak to seasonality and continuity, the presentation mirrors what's within—a blend that opens with notes of oak, honey, and soft spice. Think of this pour as a gesture, not just a gift.

Words: TENGKU ZAI



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