

hello bali

THE FOOD ISSUE

EXCLUSIVES:
JULIEN ROYER,
LUCA FANTIN &
BALAZS ENZSOL,



MAGNIFICENT 6

SIX STAR CHEFS OPENED UP THEIR SECRETS THAT
PUT BALI ON A CULINARY MAP





A man in a dark suit is sitting on a chair in a dimly lit room with large columns. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. His hands are clasped in his lap. The background is dark with some light coming from windows or openings, creating a dramatic atmosphere.

A DREAM COMES TRUE

Under the magical hands of Chef Kevin Cherkas, Cuca in Jimbaran shows the perfect balance of Indonesian ingredients with Western techniques and just a little bit of Latin flair.

Text: Rizky Adityo / Photo: Andreas Permadi / Styling: AXIOO Bali

Hailing from Canada, Kevin Cherkas is not one to shy away when it comes to creating new flavors on the island. In 2013, he and his wife finally made their long-life dream a reality by opening up Cuca. Located on the leafy side of Jimbaran, and close to the beach too, this casual fine dining establishment was named one of the Top 10 Restaurants in Asia according to TripAdvisor.

Having a passion for cooking since he was a kid, Chef Kevin has been all over the world to sharpen his skills in the kitchen. In Spain, he was lucky to be able to work at Michelin three-star Arzak Restaurant in Sebastian, Michelin three-star El Bulli in Roses, and Michelin two-star La Broche in Madrid. He also left his mark in New York City during his time working with chef extraordinaire Daniel Boulud at his highly regarded Michelin three-star Daniel. Using his experiences working at Michelin starred restaurants, he decided to move the whole family to Asia and shares his passion for food with the rest of us. Read our exclusive interview with chef Kevin Cherkas and understand more the mind behind his creativity.

Hi Chef, what could you tell us about yourself? I was born in Canada and at a young age became obsessed with food, eating, and discovering all and any delicious dishes I could find. This has taken me all over the world to work and continue pursuing my passion for both cooking and consuming.

As an owner and a head-chef at Cuca, how would you perfectly describe Cuca for anybody who hasn't been there? Cuca is a family business run by my wife Virginia as the Business Director and myself who takes care of the kitchen. We get inspired by the world's classic comfort food dishes and re-create those memories for our guests. We serve Tapas, Cocktails and Desserts crafted exclusively from Indonesian ingredients. So, to summarize, expect a casual experience that is totally focused on food.

As someone who is not from Indonesia, why did you choose Bali to open Cuca? Oh wow, where should I start? A huge bounty of amazing produce, beautiful warm friendly people, intriguing culture, and international clientele are just to name a few reasons why.

Cuca is one of the best restaurants in Asia according to TripAdvisor. In your own opinion, what is the secret to run such a successful restaurant? Hard work. Nothing can substitute for always giving 100% to do something special. Customers see the difference immediately when a restaurant has a heart.

Was there anything that you thought you wanted to do before you started cooking? I don't think so. The only job I ever wanted was to cook and staying close to food just seemed to make sense as I love to eat.

How would your team describe you as a chef and as their boss? Hard but fair, pushing everyone to give their very best to become better. In Cuca, we lead by example, not with a pointed finger.

Do you have a signature dish? Or a favorite dish that you enjoy cooking? All of our dishes are signature. We create each of them; we don't have any tapas, cocktails, or desserts taken from anywhere else. Among our customers' favorites

are our BBQ octopus or our Bali Breakfast dessert. People come just to eat these dishes. They will always be a part of our menu and a part of our success.

Which talent you would most like to have that you don't possess? Patience. I am very passionate about everything I do, so patience is not a quality I possess, it is one that admires a lot in others.

Is there a childhood comfort food that you think about? Shepherd's Pie. The kind of old school cooking that really fills your stomach and makes you sleepy. In winter, when you are cold and tired, eating an entire meal with a big spoon is always a comfort.

Do you think there are advantages of having a restaurant in Bali or Indonesia? Every place will have its advantages and disadvantages. In Bali, for example, is a place where everyone is on a holiday so the customers tend to be in a great mood as opposed to a busy city like Jakarta where everyone is in a hurry and want a quick business lunch.

What kinds of ethnic food do you think are underrated right now? I would say Indonesian food is the world's most underrated food. Every city in the world has a Thai restaurant, a Chinese restaurant, a Korean BBQ place, etc. Very rarely you see Indonesian restaurant. The people of Indonesia see their food as normal and nothing special but imported foods like caviar, truffles and foie gras are seen as exotic and amazing. What is very important to understand is the papaya or coconut in the local market in Canada is exotic.

Has there ever been an ingredient that you weren't able to master and have given up on? Until we opened Cuca, it was Octopus. Octopus had defeated me for my entire culinary career. We decided to go to war with the 8-legged terrible tough Mollusk and can gladly proclaim we finally won.

What is the most interesting or fun experience from your time working in restaurants? The people. Normal people do not work in restaurants. It is like the place where the weird and wonderful end up. The

staff of a restaurant makes up a unique demographic of the human population. Thank God for restaurants we now have a home where we belong.

What is your most memorable meal so far? There is a Japanese restaurant in Kuala Lumpur with a master Japanese chef that if you sit at his bar counter will make and serve you sushi that you eat from the palm of his hand. The experience is unforgettable and the sushi is the best I have ever had. What restaurant do you ask? I worry the more popular it gets the less handheld sushi I get so you will have to take a guess.

Where is your go-to restaurant, aside from Cuca, for a perfect date night with the wife? To be totally honest, we really don't go out often and it is never the same place. Date night is always at home with peace and quiet and the food is always good.

Lastly, what would be your "last request" dish? Easy, chipirones en su tinta. It means 'Squid in Its Ink', or slow cooked tender squids in a tomato based white wine and onion gravy. The dish is from Northern Spain and is absolutely brilliant.

