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NEW-GEN STARS OF THE CULINARY WORLD

How chefs Sun Kim and DeAille Tam are redefining Asian cuisine

AN ENDURING RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Why Cuca restaurant remains Bali's leading dining destination

A GUIDE TO ALTERNATIVE COOKING METHODS

From air frying to pressure cooking, learn how to maximise the nutritional content of your food

ENTERTAINING
Cover Story



BBQ Octopus a la Cuca

BY
EVE
TEDJA

FLAVOUR FORWARD

It's difficult to imagine a better designed restaurant than Cuca. Everything about it is thoughtfully created and curated. The meticulously manicured lawn with swaying palm trees greets the guests as they arrive at the restaurant. Service is always on point, attentive and respectful. Under the well-orchestrated arrangement of chef-owner Kevin Cherkas, each and every dish that comes out from the kitchen is nothing short of perfect. One always feels being well taken care of when one dines at Cuca. Nothing is left to chance.

It also offers plenty of space and different seating options. With stringent health and safety protocols in place, guests can choose to sit indoor at the dining room, book the private dining room, chill out at the lounge garden or watch the kitchen action from the chef's table. In this era of new normal where physical distancing dining is preferable, Cuca successfully gives its guests a safe destination to get together, dine, drink and revel in each other's company.

ON PANDEMIC

Temporarily open on weekends only, the restaurant was closed for eight months and only reopened last December. "We know this situation won't last forever and, like an athlete, if we don't continue to train, we won't be ready whenever we need to race and compete again. So, the plan for now is to take the time to look at everything we do and simply become better," says Cherkas. With the same drive that makes Cuca, well, Cuca, he created several new vibrant dishes.

Since opening its door eight years ago, Cuca remains to be a mainstay of Bali's leading dining destination. *epicure* talks to Kevin Cherkas and Virginia Entizne about its enduring recipe.

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Cuca's dining room



Fish Tartare



Virginia Entizne

The scale-like Fish Tartare, sweet and sour eggplant unagi Sticky Sushi, low fire grilled Beef Bone & Marrow are quickly winning hearts with its flavour-forward approach. The classics – BBQ Octopus, Baked Scallop and the guest's favourite, Bali Breakfast – are still there, waiting for Cuca's loyal international guests to return. Every last Sunday of the month, the restaurant opens to host Cuca's Traveling Brunch. Bringing Indonesia-based chefs who are known for their good food, the sold-outs brunches have seen Italian, French and Japanese chefs serving up flavourful meals from their home countries. In Cuca's all-encompassing attention to details, the restaurant was transformed into Italy, France and Japan for one day.

The powerhouse behind these creative programmes is Virginia Entizne. Running everything from marketing to finance, Entizne's day as a restaurateur is long. As an ex-language school director, her management skill and passion for running a day-to-day business was proven handy when he met Cherkas, moved to Bali and opened Cuca. "We've been together for 13 years. I am afraid there is no line drawn between our business and personal life. We just proudly and gratefully live and breathe Cuca. Both of us are creative, hard-workers and love to think differently. He's competitive while I am organised. He will jump first and I'll be the one who make sure we fall well together," says Entizne.

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ON LOCAL PRODUCE

“At Cuca, we only use what is Indonesian, not a single ingredient is used that does not grow, swim or walk in Indonesia. This allows us to cook with fresh and nutritional produce that becomes the foundation for everything we do,” says Cherkas. He named what he does at Cuca: inventive comfort food. His objection? “We want to gobsmack the guest with flavour.”

Cherkas’ flair can be traced back to his experiences at Daniel, El Bulli and Arzak. Spain certainly left its mark because Cuca’s menu is all about what the Spaniards love best: tapas. The dishes are meant to be grazed and shared, bursting with island-inspired vibrant texture, bursting flavours and contrasting colours.

“The way I see it, there are three ways on how a chef created a dish. First, following the tradition, nothing’s wrong with it but it’s like colouring in

between the lines. Secondly, taking inspiration from cookbooks or another chef’s idea, effective but not original. As for me, I prefer the third way: going through the painstaking process of creating something entirely new, something that nobody can find anywhere else,” explains Cherkas of his method.

ON ENTERTAINING

Having hosted numerous events, Entizne is certainly an expert in throwing a party to remember. Here, she shares one of Cuca’s cocktail recipe, guaranteed to win the guests and turn the feast into a festive mode. “Apart from choosing good food, drink, and setting, I only have one tip: always add an element of surprise or a ‘wow’ factor to an event or a party. It is this element that makes the party memorable and would make the guests smile when they looked back on it,” says Entizne.



Chef Kevin Cherkas



Honey Baked
Pumpkin Salad



Crispy Fried Chicken

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SUN=GRIA

SERVES
2

INGREDIENTS

½ cup red wine
1 tbsp vanilla brandy
⅔ cups soda water
2 tbsp honey
2 tbsp lemon juice

PREP TIME
Overnight

RED WINE MIX

Cut five vanilla pods into several pieces and put them into a bottle of brandy. Keep them at room temperature for one week to infuse.

VANILLA BRANDY

INGREDIENTS

1 cup pineapple juice
1 cup tangerine juice
1 cup watermelon juice
1 cup yellow watermelon juice

ICED FRUIT

METHOD

1. Mix the brandy with red wine, soda, honey and lemon juice.
2. Stir gently so not to remove bubbles from the soda.
3. Juice the fruits individually and strain it to remove the pulps.
4. Freeze the juice in ice cube tray.
5. Place the ice cubes in a tall glass. Put the red wine mix separately.
6. To serve, pour the red wine mix into the glass with ice cubes.

Cuca's take on the classic summer cocktail is refreshing and punchy. As the tropical fruit ice cubes melts, the flavour intensify and it transforms the cocktail, from sparkling red wine into a fruity punch.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF IRA RODRIGUES

