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KITCHEN KINGS

AFTER A COMMUNITY BARBECUE, BOWLS OF CONGEE AND A YEAR OF LIVING WITH A MESSY APARTMENT KITCHEN, NEIGHBOURS ADHIKA MAXI AND NICHOLAS LIN PRESENT THEIR MASTERPIECE: *BACHELOR'S BANQUET*. THEY PUT WORDS INTO ACTION WITH A LUNCHEON TO DEMONSTRATE WHAT 'MAKING FOOD SEXY' REALLY MEANS

WORDS ANDREA AZUREENE HENG PHOTOGRAPHY MATTHEW LEE



Salmon tartare

Looking at the profile pictures on their website, one might ask: 'Can these good-looking chaps really prepare a gourmet meal?' Twenty-four year-old Adhika Maxi (also known as Max) and 25 year-old Nicholas Lin look like they belong in the pages of *GQ*, but the answer to the question is a resounding yes — and they cook well, too.

Their story began in New York City, where Singaporean Nick was studying. The neighbours first met at a community rooftop barbecue. 'Max and a mutual friend, Hiten, were talking about duck fat and I couldn't help but introduce myself,' says Nick, a self-professed foodie. The following day, they continued their culinary conversation over congee, cementing plans to produce a book on cooking for bachelors like themselves. Nick — a (home) kitchen veteran who started cooking from young — had long formed the idea for a cookbook. 'My parents regularly entertained and later on, I did the same with my friends.' With his passion for food ignited, he went on to pursue an advanced culinary programme with the French Culinary Institute in New York and thereafter, worked as a marketing consultant for restaurants in the Big Apple.

Indonesian-Chinese Max got curious about food while observing his grandmother in her kitchen when he was a child. His interior designer father had wanted him to follow in his footsteps but Max pursued his dream of becoming a chef instead, studying at the French Culinary Institute after completing his studies in Singapore and Australia. Stints at Restaurant Asiate at the Mandarin Oriental New York and Maze by Gordon Ramsay soon followed, after which Max



Raw oyster with pickled shimeji

grabbed the golden opportunity to work at the two Michelin-starred Gordon Ramsay under the direction of Josh Emmett.

Max and Nick are as synchronous in personality as they are in the kitchen, their individual strengths bouncing off one another. Preparing a feast of a luncheon for a group of seven friends who had lent their support for *Bachelor's Banquet*, the boys were as cool as the cantaloupes they'd cubed for their melon and goat's cheese canapé — one of the many easy-to-follow yet creatively-presented dishes featured in their recipe book. The volume features 80 recipes spread over 213 pages and includes visual guides on basic preparation techniques. For the uninitiated, they also have terms such as 'brunoise' and 'chiffonade' elaborated in a clear and concise manner.

The book is a pretty sleek project but the duo knows that just good looks

alone will not take them the whole nine yards — the recipes have to work and the dishes have to taste good too. 'We want to show bachelors and other people who are intimidated by the thought of cooking gourmet meals that all it takes are simple methods and simple flavours,' says Nick.

Hosting a laid-back Saturday lunch was the perfect way to thank those who had helped make the \$30,000 dream a reality. After canapés of salmon tartare, oysters with pickled shimeji and melon and goat's cheese, guests were treated to corn soup, marinara pasta, panna cotta and a 'garden'-themed pound cake dessert. 'We wanted our guests to sample different dishes in bite sizes because there's nothing worse than a heavy lunch. More importantly, we wanted to drive home the point of *Bachelor's Banquet* that the dishes not only look good in pictures but taste great too!' Max concludes.



Corn soup



White marinara black pasta

RAW OYSTERS WITH PICKLED SHIMEJI

Paired with pickled shimeji mushrooms and served with a lemon vinaigrette, this dish is creamy, tangy and crunchy all at once. Serves 4 to 8.

- 3 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 Tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp lemon rind
- A pinch of salt
- 1 cluster of shimeji mushrooms, stems removed
- 1 Tbsp white wine vinegar
- 8 live oysters, shucked
- Edible flowers, for garnish
- Microgreens, for garnish
- Scallions, sliced in a bias cut
- Rock salt, for garnish
- Additional olive oil (optional)

1. To make lemon vinaigrette, combine olive oil, lemon juice, lemon rind and a pinch of salt in a bowl. Mix well and set aside.
2. In a bowl, place shimeji mushrooms in the

lemon vinaigrette and vinegar. Set aside for 20 minutes.

3. Place oysters on a serving plate. Carefully garnish with the marinated shimeji mushrooms, edible flowers, microgreens, scallions and a sprinkle of rock salt.
4. Drizzle with additional olive oil if desired and serve.

CORN SOUP

The use of corn foam and truffle oil for the finishing touch adds a dash of decadence to this otherwise humble soup. Serves 2.

- 1/2 cup creamed corn
- 1/2 cup corn kernels
- 1 cup chicken stock
- Salt, to taste
- Truffle oil
- Cracked black pepper

1. To make the corn soup, place creamed corn and corn kernels into a large saucepan over high heat. When bubbles break the surface of

the mixture, add 1/2 cup chicken stock.

2. Bring the soup to a simmer and add salt. Use a handheld blender to whisk the mixture or transfer it to a blender and puree. Remove half of the soup and ladle into deep bowls.
3. To make the corn foam, add remaining chicken stock to the remaining soup. Continue to whisk using the handheld blender, this time positioning the blender at an angle to capture air and create foam.
4. Spoon the corn foam over the corn soup and drizzle with truffle oil. Finish with a generous sprinkle of cracked black pepper and serve.

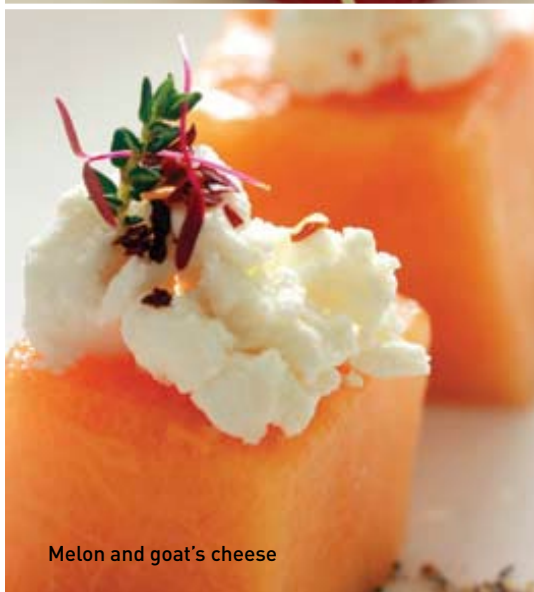
WHITE MARINARA BLACK PASTA

Squid ink adds a unique dimension to pasta and enhances the natural sweetness of the accompanying seafood. Serves 2.

- 3 to 4 L water
- A pinch of salt
- 250 g squid ink pasta
- 3 to 4 Tbsp olive oil



Pound cake 'garden'



Melon and goat's cheese



Panna cotta

- 4 cherry tomatoes, quartered
- 2 tsp fennel, grated
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 4 medium shrimp (tails on)
- 4 scallops, de-shelled
- 1 squid, cut into squares and scored finely in a criss-cross pattern
- 4 clams
- 4 mussels (optional)
- 1/8 cup dry white wine
- 1/8 cup dashi broth
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Fleur de sel
- A handful of fennel leaves
- 1 packet of squid ink

1. In a large pot, bring water to a rapid boil. Season the water with salt and cook pasta to al dente. Drain the pasta, keeping 1/4 cup of the pasta water.
2. Heat olive oil in a large sauté pan over medium heat. Add tomatoes, grated fennel and garlic. Sauté until mildly fragrant.
3. Add the shrimp and cook for 2 minutes.

- Add scallops, squid, clams and mussels (if desired), and sauté for 1 more minute. Pour in the white wine and dashi broth to deglaze the pan. Bring to a light simmer.
4. Add the pasta and pasta water to the pan. Toss to combine. Season with salt and pepper, and remove from heat.
 5. Place the pasta on a plate and arrange the ingredients along the pasta. Drizzle with olive oil and finish with fleur de sel.
 6. Garnish with fennel leaves and additional squid ink. Serve.

PANNA COTTA

While it needs to be prepared well ahead of the party, panna cotta is a simple dessert. The silkiness of the panna cotta works with the strawberries to create a pleasant contrasting blend of textures. Serves 6.

- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 cup milk
- 1/4 cup sugar
- Seeds from 1 vanilla pod (retain the pod)

- 1 1/2 gelatin sheets
- 5 strawberries, diced
- Edible gold flakes (optional)
- Microgreens, for garnish

1. Heat cream, milk, sugar, vanilla seeds and vanilla pod in a saucepan, stirring constantly to make sure it does not overboil.
2. Meanwhile, bloom the gelatine sheets in a bowl of cold water until soft.
3. Add the softened gelatin sheets to the cream mixture. Stir until the gelatine is fully incorporated, then turn off heat. Set aside and allow to cool.
4. Pour the mixture through a sieve into cups or ramekins and refrigerate for a minimum of 3 hours.
5. To serve, dip the base of the cup or ramekin of panna cotta in warm water for 5 to 10 seconds. Place a serving plate over the cup or ramekin and flip over to release the pudding.
6. Garnish with strawberries, gold flakes (if desired), microgreens and serve. **a**