

SPOTLIGHT

What Does Running A Sustainable

Restaurant Mean?

 Kuah Chew Shian and Lisa Tang champion “ugly food” and sustainable ingredients at their restaurant, Kausmo.

by Hillary Kang

29
Apr 20



Kuah Chew Shian and Lisa Tang run restaurant Kausmo.

An obscene amount of food is wasted in Singapore every day. In fact, 393,000 tonnes — almost 20 percent of what we import every year — doesn't even reach consumers, according to the Singapore

Environment Council.

Many blame supermarkets for throwing out produce that isn't aesthetically pleasing, but Kuah Chew Shian feels otherwise. "It's actually our fault as consumers. When ugly food goes unsold, supermarkets feel the pressure to acquire food that is 'pretty' enough for people to buy."

Kuah, 26, runs Kausmo, a restaurant that focuses on sustainable food, together with her partner Lisa Tang, 24. Much of the menu here is European-inspired but with a distinctly Asian flavour. While Tang does the cooking, Kuah manages the front of house, showing off the "ugly food" used in dishes and regaling guests with stories about the ludicrous volume of food waste here.

While Kausmo's ever-rotating menu changes depending on what's available from importers, one mainstay here is fish congee, which reflects Tang's Teochew heritage as it does the duo's desire to be sustainable.

Traditionally, the dish is served with Indian threadfin, which the World Wide Fund for Nature Singapore has deemed "unsustainable" due to overfishing.

So Tang opts for any fish she can find for the day (usually, golden trevally) and doesn't waste any part of it: bones go into making the stock, the loin and meatier bits of the belly are used for the dish proper while the more gelatinous part of the fish is served as a snack.

Kuah and Tang both speak passionately about why they started

Kausmo — they wanted to live (and eat) more thoughtfully, and hope to impart these same values to their guests.

“There’s a disconnect between Singaporeans and our ingredients,” says Kuah. “Many don’t know the farms, the farmers, or even the amount of effort it takes just to grow one vegetable. That’s why it’s so easy to discard something if it isn’t ideal or perfect.”

YOU’LL WANT TO READ THIS

HOW FINE DINING RESTAURANTS ARE USING UGLY FOOD AND MINIMISING FOOD WASTE

Hence, they make it a point to show guests the raw form of what they’re eating — from oddly-shaped eggplants to comically large brussels sprouts — to highlight how produce isn’t always supposed to be symmetrical and congruous.

“We know we aren’t going to change the world overnight but we want to get the conversation started. Sometimes, it’s devastating to look at the whole scale of the problem,” says Kuah.

“But change isn’t something that can be done by one person. Everyone needs to be aware and play their part. And for Lisa and I, this is how we can best contribute.”

This story first appeared in the April 2020 issue of [A Magazine](#).

IN THIS STORY KAUSMO KUAH CHEW SHIAN LISA TANG