

DINING | DIGEST

Les Amis Group Taps On Young Culinary Duo In Their Latest Restaurant Kausmo

Words by ANNETTE TAN

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The new restaurant aims to make a difference and sets out to embody how dining spots can turn lip-service sustainability into a tangible business—putting into practice the perfect solution for imperfect produce



VIEW GALLERY

Embracing produce that is deemed over-ripened and oddly-shaped. Using produce and products in their entirety, right down to repurposing scrap fabric from uniforms into coasters. Such are the waste reduction efforts that form the backbone of Kausmo, the bolthole of a restaurant helmed by chef Lisa Tang, 24, and restaurant manager Kuah Chew Shian, 26, with backing from the Les Amis Group. The young duo hopes to showcase how we can all be more mindful about the way we choose and treat the things that we buy, cook with and eat.



ABOVE Kausmo's young but ambitious duo Kuah Chew Shian and Lisa Tang

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To illustrate their point, Kuah places a pair of brown mushrooms on the table. They seem perfectly formed and edible to our untrained eye, but Kuah points out that the frill on the base of one mushroom's cap has separated from its stem. "Retailers only take mushrooms with closed caps," she says. "So, this mushroom would have been relegated to the overstocked pile."

The same goes for micro-cress, a common garnish in restaurants, she tells us as she sets a dish of roasted sprouts on the table. When one cress has the gall to grow a little larger than the others, its destiny is fast-tracked to the rubbish bin.



ABOVE Chipotle-berry glazed Wagyu Chuck tender, vegetable jus and spiced malabar spinach

This is where Kausmo aims to make a difference, though the process is often never as straightforward. Ingredients such as these, shunned from the bright lights and neat shelves of the supermarkets, find their way to Kausmo, but not without cost. The restaurant seats only 16 at dinner, which means wholesalers aren't exactly

clamouring to send them their rejects at a lower cost.

“Sometimes people ask us why our price (\$75++ for a six-course carte blanche menu) is not lower since we use products that retailers can’t sell,” Kuah shares. “But whatever money we save, we end up spending on logistics to bring the produce to our restaurant.”

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ABOVE Wild fish congee, java ginseng and coriander tossed with preserved plum dressing

Bit By Bit

Chef Tang does commendable things with said produce. Oddly sized (not that anyone could tell if not pointed out) root vegetables are grilled in the fat rendered from beef, which will be served in the

main course; brown rice bought from a sustainable farm in Myanmar is parlayed into a wildly tasty wild fish congee that speaks of Tang's Teochew roots. The oft overlooked wagyu rump (a leaner, tougher cut of meat) is marinated in fermented soybean paste, which serves as both flavour enhancer and tenderiser.

It's said that every dish at Kausmo "incorporates thoughtfully sourced ingredients; seafood from small farming communities in the region, secondary cuts of meat which are often overlooked in favour of prime cuts, as well as forgotten native greens and florals".

And it helps that the pair behind this well-meaning endeavour is young. They run the restaurant entirely on their own, and with the spunky energy of youth, somehow find the time to do everything, from source, organise logistics, prep, cook and serve, on top of brewing their own kombucha (pairings cost an additional \$20), making recipe videos for YouTube, and even sanding their own wooden cutlery stands.



ABOVE Local trevally with radishes and grilled cabbage brodo

"Much more operational planning and preservation of produce has to be in place to better utilise our ingredients—a challenge that we willingly welcome," Lisa adds. "In a city known to be able to source almost anything at any time, perhaps it's time to slow down; better appreciate and understand our food sources and produce."

The less energetic among us wonder if this ideal of sustainability makes for a sustainable business. For now, said a Les Amis spokesperson, Kausmo remains a means of communicating the sustainability message through its dining experiences and upcoming events such as workshops and knowledge-sharing sessions to reach a wider audience. As the adage goes, you have to start somewhere.

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