

GOURMET & TRAVEL

Kausmo: come for the food, stay for the stories

The new, sustainability-focused restaurant from the Les Amis Group is championing “aesthetically filtered” produce to highlight the problem of food waste.

by Weets Goh / JULY 18, 2019



Something important is brewing at Kausmo. Not the numerous jars of kombucha or pickles lining its walls — but a nascent, collection of ideas and beliefs that hopefully gestalts into a movement.

It's early, and the restaurant is still operating on a loose collection of concepts (some more novel than others) that all point towards sustainability, but it's also a restaurant that — at the risk of hyperbole — embodies the voice of a generation: Millennials'. While sustainability is hardly a new idea, Kausmo also brings together that Millennial penchant for experiences, crafts, kombucha, and roots-searching.

Working with your mates

The restaurant is a two-woman show, with co-founders and old friends Lisa Tang and Kuah Chew Shian taking care of all things kitchen and floor-related. A third friend, Robin Thang, does the business' marketing and digital communications.

The 24-year-old Tang does all of the cooking, having seen experience in places including Pollen, Jaan, Les Amis, and farm-to-table restaurant Primo in Maine. Meanwhile, Kuah, 26, serves as the restaurant manager, taking care of everything front-of-house related.



Backed by the Les Amis Group, the open kitchen and single-table setup of Kausmo brings to mind many a private dining — so popular these days — enterprise. Each night, the ladies take on two seatings, with a maximum of 16 diners doing their *carte blanche*. It's ostensibly "fine dining", although the format might be a necessity too as the entire restaurant is run by literally two people, and the structure makes service much more manageable.

Mindful eating

There's another, more important for the multi-course, fixed seating dinners though. As you work through the courses, Kausmo's different ideas are made clear. Both Kuah and Tang take cues during the meal to explain how each dish comes to be, and you realise that there is a clear, mindful intent at every level of the experience: from the produce, to the locally-sewn coasters for your drinks, to the small cutlery stands that the team hand-makes from upcycled wood.

Even the tableware is from Legle Gaia, a sustainability-driven offshoot of the French fine ceramics brand. Legle Gaia uses recycled glaze and small decals printed with ink waste to give new life to ceramics that have random imperfections due to the firing process — giving the restaurant a thread of *wabi-sabi* that runs through both the food and its adjacents.

For example: the restaurant largely works with "aesthetically-filtered" produce that's deemed too ugly, too misshapen, or just generally unfit to be sold by distributors. Brussel sprouts and radishes that aren't pretty enough to go to retail stores — but still taste the same as their "perfect" counterparts — go into a dish roasted, and served alongside rosemary-scented almonds and lemons preserved in salt.

If it all sounds a little sanctimonious and too much of an intellectual exercise — it's not. The whole experience is backed by solid cooking and fun, engaging hosts. Kuah and Tang both eager and effervescent, sharing the story and thought process behind each dish in detail.

Food stories

There is kumpung chicken brodo (an intense, Italian-style broth) that they prepare with chooks that are too small to be sold in supermarkets. The same meat also goes into the accompanying tortellini, together with roasted tomatoes which they prepare from overstocked fruits.

Locavorism also features in the menu. The first thing to come out of the kitchen is crusty, tender homemade sourdough served with butter fortified with botoko, or rukam masam, a tart, astringent fruit commonly found growing along the roads in Singapore — although Kausmo's are grown by a local, organic farm that also supplies them with wild pepper leaves.

While most of the food is strongly European at its core, Tang — who's Teochew — ends on a very personal flourish with the savoury courses: fish congee with wild-caught golden trevally. Prepared with fish bone stock and brown rice grown in Myanmar by Singaporeans (there's another story here involving agricultural scientists), the massively comforting bowl is topped with fried shallots and herbs dressed in brine-preserved plums that are usually found on Teochew steamed fish.

The ideas come in quick succession: one month in and they've already implemented some kind of mini fruit market, selling extra produce and their own sauces and brews out of the restaurant during lunch hours.

In an industry where burnouts are common, where restaurants are constantly plagued by lease and manpower issues, where servers mumble off a rehearsed script for the 10th time in the night, Kausmo is a welcome breath of fresh air — here's hoping it stays that way.

Kausmo is currently only open for dinner; although the restaurant also hosts a pop-up fruit market where you can also buy homemade sauces and kombucha. Happening every Wed afternoon.

1 Scotts Rd, #03-07 Shaw Centre. Tel: 8126-8538

TAGS: [FINE DINING](#) [KAUSMO](#) [LES AMIS](#) [SUSTAINABILITY](#)

SHARE THIS ON

