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Q&A In conversation with

WILLIN LOW

The former lawyer is now one of Singapore's top chefs, and the inventor of 'Mod Sin'—Modern Singaporean cuisine. He tells us about his favourite foods and the inspiration behind his unique dishes. Laksa pesto linguini with king prawn, anyone?

How do you see Singapore as a food city?

Singapore has always been a melting pot of different communities and their cuisines. Our Chinese, Indian and Malay foods all borrow wonderful ideas and ingredients from each other. Soy sauce is used in Malay cuisine and sambal chilli is served with Chinese noodles. It's an exciting place to eat, as acclaimed chefs set up restaurants here and add to the scene. As the population becomes more diverse, demand for both local food and flavours from home—wherever that may be—will increase and cross-pollination will take place.

At Wild Rocket, your restaurant, you serve dishes inspired by local street food. How did you decide on this take?

I cook what I call Mod Sin (Modern Singaporean) cuisine, because that is what I am. It all started when I was studying in England and missed Singaporean food. I was not able to buy all the ingredients needed, so I mixed and matched with whatever I got. The result never *looked* like anything from Singapore, but the flavours reminded me of home.

What are the signature dishes at Wild Rocket?

Pomelo salad with a frozen coconut dressing, Iberico char siew, and Singapore noodles. For dessert, the deconstructed strawberry cheesecake and a pandan-infused panna cotta. There is also an omakase counter, where the menu is decided by the chef—the best way for first-timers to enjoy the restaurant.

What's your own favourite dish here?

'Our Chinese, Indian and Malay foods all borrow wonderful ideas and ingredients from each other'

The pomelo salad with coconut dressing and the pandan-infused panna cotta. The salad has been on the menu for a long time, but in the latest version, the dressing is made into ice cream, so the salad stays cold the whole time you are eating it. The panna cotta is made with two ingredients—pandan leaf and gula melaka, or palm sugar—that remind me of my childhood.

There are some Japanese influences in your food and décor. Do you feel

a connection to Japan?

The décor is inspired by Japan and Scandinavia. I spent time in both places while on sabbatical. I've always admired their aesthetics and cuisine. My food has strong Southeast Asian flavours with hints of Japanese tastes.

So travel influences you.

Definitely. I love to explore and seek out new flavours, and travel really helps you to do that. I might eat something really traditional in a foreign country and then, bam! I have a new idea!

**Where do you enjoy eating in Singapore?**

I frequent hawker stalls for street food: Chomp Chomp Food Centre for BBQ stingray, hokkien mee, oyster omelette and char kway teow. You may not find a spot, so go early, around 6pm. East Coast Lagoon Food Village, by the sea, has a huge selection of satays, and great laksa and curry puffs. I rarely eat at other restaurants but I like Toshiyuki for Japanese, Esquina for Spanish, and Candlenut for Peranakan.

What's been your most memorable meal?

I was squatting under the stars by the road with my sous chef in Sarawak, Malaysia, having ice-cold beers and Ramly Burgers—a Malaysian invention of an egg-wrapped beef patty with sweet chilli sauce and mayonnaise. It had all the elements of a good meal—great taste, ambience, company and alcohol!

Has Mod Sin caught on?

Abroad, there have been pop-ups of Mod Sin in supper clubs and food trucks. We hope it becomes a global phenomenon! 🍴