

ESTD. LONDON 2011

PLUSIXFIVE

六五

A SINGAPOREAN
SUPPER CLUB COOKBOOK



GOZ LEE AND FRIENDS

... Goz & Jason: I love your chwee kueh, your goodness... but most of all I love your BAUS! for the tasty Singaporean awesomeness - delish!

OMG! Wow! Just like Singapore only better! - Lyall

CHWEE KUEH IS THE BOMB ★

cheers to a great national day Pinnet. Yenny



FINALLY THE DAY HAS COME I HAVE TRIED SINGAPOREAN FOOD FOR THE 1ST TIME & I HAVE MET GOZ! GREAT NIGHT!! ☺ See you again soon. MULIA

This is 100% FACT! I want it for breakfast every day!

Oli

Wot he said, (and they said) This meal was FIT!

Thanks for an awesome feed! And @gambituk

Great supper club!! Everything is great! So stuffed, I don't know how to make it home! Thanks for cooking! Elva

Blonde Amazing - Great success (see) - Cewon-dard com 4 so much. Thank Del

Fab - futuristic Ohh & Puk Bally. Yur. B

First Singaporean club experience. Thanks! caz x Mike

Delicious! Thank you! Jummi Kelly

Loved all - really home event garden that far! Mei Ling

OR, HOW TO SUBVERT SINGAPOREAN CULINARY MISCONCEPTIONS, AVERT STIR-FRY CALAMITIES, MAKE YOUR NYONYA GRANDMOTHER WEEP WITH JOY AND OTHER BADASS KITCHEN SKILLS.







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Designed by Shu Han Lee; plusfive identity by SBTG

Photographs on pages ii–iii, 6, 10–11, 12, 15, 17, 20, 176, 188 and 243
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177, 214, 237, 238, 241, 244; Jason Ng p 136; Ken Sum pp vi, 87; Shuwen Tan p 80

These recipes were originally published in slightly different form in the
following places: Rice, as 'In Search of the Perfect Bowl of Rice', in *Crumbs*,
www.crumbsmag.com; Bak Kwa, as 'Bak Kwa – Sticky Smoky Salty-Sweet
Barbecue Meat Jerky', in *Great British Chefs*, www.greatbritishchefs.com;
Mui Choy Kong Bak, as 'Fennel and Preserved Mustard Greens with Slow
Soy Braised Pork Belly' in *Great British Chefs*, www.greatbritishchefs.com;
Chinese Pork Belly Satay, in *The Cork News*

National Library Board, Singapore Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Lee, Goz.
Plusfive : a Singaporean supper club cookbook / Goz Lee and Friends ;
designed by Shu Han Lee. – Singapore : Epigram Books, 2013.
pages cm

ISBN : 978-981-07-5906-3 (paperback)
ISBN : 978-981-07-5907-0 (ebook)

1. Cooking, Singaporean.

TX724-5.S55
641.595957 --dc23 OCN 857379268

First Edition
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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We were supper club virgins and plusixfive took our virginity away from us.

Before our first visit, we had no idea what we were getting ourselves into, or the sheer amount of friends we were about to make...

It was our chef friend James Lowe who first told us about Goz and his supper club. He said, "You should go. They're very cute". Another gourmand friend, who was a frequent attendee, then convinced us to go.

We remember walking from Angel tube station, feeling very uncomfortable about dining at a stranger's home. But when we were about a block away from Goz's flat, we could smell the aromas coming out of the windows, which Goz and his friends had to leave open in order not to suffocate everyone inside. For Sandia, the smells of home cooking instantly brought back memories of comfort from her mother's cooking in the kitchen.

The atmosphere at Goz's dinners resembles that of a college reunion at a friend's house which is just big enough to fit everyone cosily. People arrive pulling bottles out of their bags, brandishing wine, cases of beers, magnum bottles of sake and secret stashes of strange liquors. You always make friends. Even if you don't like making friends, you don't have a choice! There's something about great food and the stories behind the food that make even the strangest strangers become peas in a pod. And its not just any stories that accompany each course, but Goz's extremely animated and Muppet-filled stories. Yes, Muppets are often involved at these dinners.

Then all of a sudden you find yourself surrounded by meticulously hand-crafted, delicious food, bathed in memories of Goz's childhood and those of your tablemates. Tips are shared, ideas are traded and recipes are given. The next thing you know, you're passing the rice down the table to your new-found friends, sharing the last piece of braised pork with the one-time stranger next to you, discussing ideas for your own restaurant, and planning the next time you can return.

On the walk back to Angel tube station, we smile. We smile because our tummies are full of wonderful food. We smile because someone has just shared his home with us. And we smile because we've just been forced to watch an hour of *The Muppets* on YouTube before we were allowed to go home, and we loved it. Plusixfive and its food have made us a lot of friends.

Sandia Chang & James Knappett
Co-owners, Bubbledogs& (London)



Hungry Singaporeans abroad are often driven to do some crazy things.

They make their own bak kwa or barbecued pork, a delicacy most people buy in shops. They turn to mothers, grandmothers, aunts or Google to find the perfect recipe for laksa. They develop repetitive strain injuries while scraping steamed rice flour cakes out of little metal moulds in order to make chwee kueh. These hot, wobbly cakes are then topped with preserved radish cooked, preferably, in lard, and are the sort of snack most sane people eat in hawker centres dotted around the island of Singapore.

Overseas Singaporeans also find themselves skewering beef, mutton, chicken or pork to make satay, another popular hawker snack. They even make their own mooncakes, these crazy, homesick people.

Goz Lee and his gung-ho buddies have gone a step further. They have formed a supper club in London called plusixfive, a reference to the international calling code of Singapore, to share their joy in and passion for the food they grew up eating. By cooking for groups of people they have never met, they have helped to spread the word about the gutsy, pungent, aromatic and just plain delicious food we eat on this tiny island. In their own way, they have put Singaporean food on the world map.

And now, they have collected their recipes in this funny, irreverent book. This is not a solemn tome on the correct way to make classic Singaporean dishes. It is filled with stories, anecdotes and secret recipes they have developed over the years, with contributions from people they have met, cooked for and dined with.

Wherever you are in the world, whether you are Singaporean or not, you might just be inspired enough to get into the kitchen and start banging those pots and pans about, to create meals that people halfway across the world relish every day.

Goz and gang—there is method in their madness.

Tan Hsueh Yun

Food Editor, *The Straits Times*



PROLOGUE

ONE NIGHT IN A SUPPER CLUB COOKBOOK



I suppose I can be described as obstinate, occasionally obsessive and always naive, especially when I latch onto an idea.

So when the mustard seed of a cookbook idea was planted, it slowly became the Moby Dick to my Ahab. One way or another, it just had to be done.

I decided that since this was a cookbook featuring recipes from the plusixfive supper club, it would only be apt for it to be a literary interpretation of a plusixfive dinner.

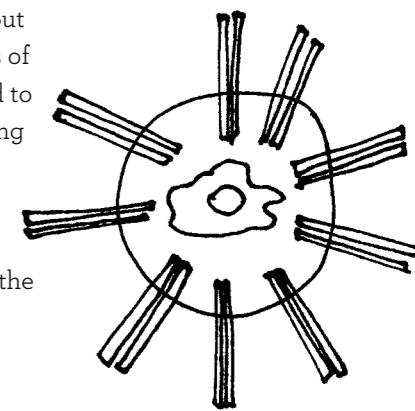
Held every fortnight on a Sunday, every supper club dinner follows roughly the same format. Once all the guests have arrived, drunk a little, comingled and made awkward attempts at introductions to fellow guests, hoping, cross-fingered, that they do not turn out to be serial murderers or worse, serial anti-socialites, we give a short introduction to the meal. Then we launch full-throttle into the dinner service, accompanied by anecdotes and memories, in our regular order of starters, mains and desserts.

Before anyone's inner traditionalist bursts out, waving flags, beating chests and crying out that this is not how Singaporean food is usually served, they should just stop and think about what Singaporean food really is. There isn't one traditional way of serving Singaporean food because the cuisine itself is a disparate amalgamation of at least three major ethnic cuisines: Indian, Malay and Chinese. Also, if you really want to get pedantic here, whenever you go to a hawker centre and sit there waiting for your big main meal to come along, be honest and ask yourself, how many times have you gone over to get a little snack from the popiah stall or the satay uncle? That pre-meal nibble is arguably a starter, no?

But the main reason for this arrangement is that during the gestational periods of plusixfive, I thought long and hard about what I wanted the format of the meal to be. Should it be a full-on, Singaporean Chinese-style meal where plates of food just get piled on the table as and when they are ready? Or should the meal have a formal structure? I had so many dishes in my head and I wanted to be able to showcase as much food as possible without overwhelming our guests. So, taking my cue from the degustation menus of smarter West End restaurants in London's Soho neighbourhood, I decided to serve mini nibbles as starters to whet everyone's appetite, before launching into the main courses and a few small desserts.

Also, everything—save for maybe plated desserts—would be shared. That was something that I insisted on.

Sharing has been my biggest bugbear in English food cultures, where the tendency is for everyone to order their own meal and not to share or try each other's mains.



I want the guests to feel as if they are eating a feast at a friend's crib and not as if they are dining at a restaurant.

Singapore is a nation where meal sharing is almost mandatory. Meals involving more than one person, especially large extended family dinners, always feature an assortment of dishes placed in the centre of the table, and everyone helps themselves. You don't have to choose. You just order everything on the menu.

And so, I wanted my guests to eat like I ate at home and get sharing.

Whilst we try to maintain a consistently high standard of cooking, I have always firmly believed that a plusixfive night should not be defined solely by its food. One of the main aims of the supper club was to share with Londoners what Singaporeans eat and hopefully through that, a little bit of the nostalgia for Singapore that we all share. So with every dish that comes out of the kitchen, we also serve up snatches of our memories of home, mostly from childhood, and how and why we were inspired to cook that particular dish. Although it did not begin as a conscious effort, the stories served as the garnishing on the dish, and sharing stories became an integral part of the plusixfive experience.

As with any other supper club, chances are you'll be seated at a table with a random menagerie of personalities. We've had food critics, journos, train drivers, graphic designers, artists, gallery owners, doctors, bankers, lawyers, hairdressers, photographers and a heck of a lot of chefs come through our doors and share meals, drinks, banter and laughs with one another. You name the profession, we've probably served them. (We have not had millionaire drug lords or hookers yet though—or not that we know of anyway.)

I want the guests to feel as if they are eating a feast at a friend's crib and not as if they are dining at a restaurant. They should feel free to poke their noses into my open-plan kitchen and holler out for seconds; to grab me or any member of my team and grill us on how we made the dish so gawddamn tasty; to leave general dining etiquette at the door and feel unashamed to get elbow deep and messy peeling crab shells, sucking on prawn heads and fighting for the last piece of chwee kueh with a bunch of strangers they've just met. And after the dinner is done and I can finally relax, I want them all to linger, refusing to leave despite the fact that it's a school night. The team and I can then shake off our aprons, throw on some Massive Attack, sit down with the guests and, amidst piles of dirty crockery, share a nice stiff drink or two. Or ten.

And when the room is filled with the raucous nattering, laughter and banter of strangers who have met just hours before, drowning out the '80s synth lines and warbling vocals of The Killers in the background, I know that the night has been one awesomely successful plusixfive night.



Beyond being just a vanilla compendium of essential recipes, this book is also laced—like a dirty bowl of spicy tonkotsu ramen with all the works—with sexy snippets, delicious tales and filthy anecdotes from a few friends and me. I have also managed to bribe arm-twist blackmail persuade a few guests, helpers and others who have in some shape or form crossed paths with plusixfive, to contribute recipes to the book.

So as you read, I hope that with a teeny bit of help from your imagination, you will be transported to a nondescript, quiet little street in Angel, Islington, London, and follow your nose to a noisy little flat where, for one random Sunday evening, a little bit of Singapore is recreated from my wee kitchen.

STARTERS

TODAY'S MENU!

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I once told someone that “achar is a Singaporean take on an Indian pickle” and I guess that sums it up pretty well. Achar is a brilliant example of the meeting of two different food cultures, just like kari ayam and beef rendang. We like to serve it at the supper club as a pre-starter with crackers, and let the spicy, piquant and sweet flavours get everyone’s tastebuds excited for the meal ahead. Giving a recipe for achar is a bit like giving a recipe for a simple salad: everyone has their own likes and dislikes. So be creative and improvise, find your own G-spot, use the same rempah (spice paste) but substitute with whatever vegetables you like (hard, crunchy vegetables usually work better) and whatever is in season.

ACHAR

Spicy Peranakan Vegetable Pickles

MAKES ABOUT 4 JARS

1 medium cucumber, deseeded and cut into thin, matchstick-length batons

2 medium carrots, cut into thin, matchstick-length batons

5 tbsp coarse sea salt

Half a white cabbage, cut into thin, matchstick-length strips

15 long beans, cut into matchstick-length pieces

1 pineapple, cut into bite-sized pieces

2 tbsp vegetable oil

100 g white sesame seeds, plus additional for garnishing; toasted (see page 43)

100 g raw peanuts, plus additional for garnishing; toasted (see page 43) and crushed

200 ml rice wine vinegar

2 tbsp fish sauce

Zest and juice from 4 limes

6 tbsp sugar

REMPAH (SPICE PASTE)

10 shallots

6 cloves garlic

12 fresh red chillies

2 candlenuts or macadamia nuts

1 (2.5-cm) piece galangal

2 tbsp belacan (dried shrimp paste), toasted (see page 43)

2 tsp ground turmeric

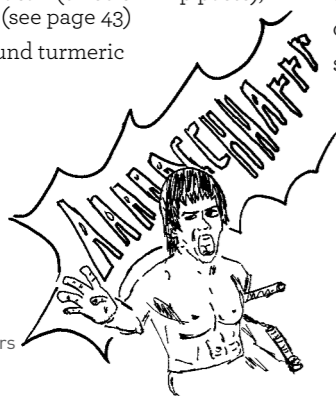
Toss the cucumber and carrots evenly in a bowl with the coarse sea salt. Let sit in the fridge, uncovered, for an hour, to extract as much moisture as possible. Rinse and drain. Dry the cucumber and carrots, cabbage, long beans and pineapple with a tea towel as much as possible—the drier, the better. Some people dry them in the sun or in a warm oven, but I really am not that fussed.

Blend all the ingredients for the rempah in a food processor or pound with a mortar and pestle until a smooth paste is formed. Heat the oil in a wok and fry the rempah over medium heat. The rempah will start off watery, but be patient and slowly fry it as you want the paste to be dry and the flavours to intensify. Turn off the heat when the oil separates and the rempah becomes intensely fragrant, about 30 minutes.

Add the cucumber and carrots, cabbage, long beans and pineapple to the wok and ensure everything is evenly coated with the rempah. Stir over low heat for about 5 minutes and then remove the wok from the heat.

Gently mix the fried vegetables, sesame seeds, peanuts, rice wine vinegar, fish sauce, lime zest, lime juice and sugar in a bowl. Season with salt to taste. If you prefer your achar more face-scrunchingly sour, add more lime juice and vinegar. If you prefer yours more sweet, add more sugar.

To store, pour into sterilised glass jars, ensuring that the vegetables are fully submerged in pickle juice. Let sit in the fridge overnight for all the sweet, spicy and sour flavours to intimately commingle. Sprinkle on more sesame seeds and peanuts before serving. Achar will keep, refrigerated, for about 10 days.



THE GREAT



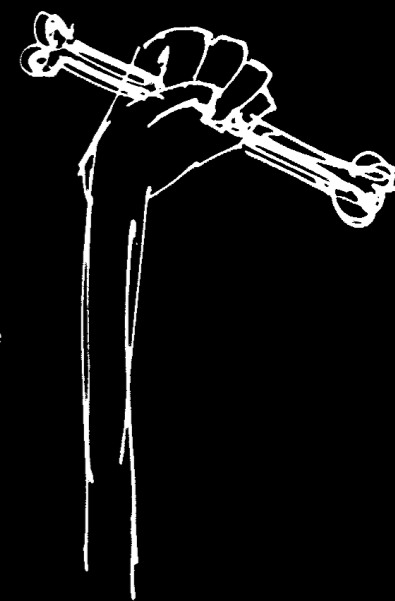
BKTI CHALLENGE

Literally translated as the utterly unappetising ‘meat bone tea’, bak kut teh is made by simmering pork bones with herbs and spices for hours or days on end and is often served with steamed rice and you char kway (fried doughsticks). No other dish in the history of Singapore and Malaysia’s culinary rivalry rallies citizens into flag-waving patriots as much as this one. The Singaporean version is conventionally a clear, peppery broth, while the Malaysian version is a dark, herbal broth—but both are fiercely defended to the death by their respective countrymen.

In the summer of 2012, Jason very innocently tweeted about how awesome he thought his Singaporean bak kut teh dinner had been. This snowballed into a heated, all-out debate littered with trash talk between us and a bunch of Malaysians, led by Yolanda Augustin of Wild Serai supper club. To settle this once and for all, a date was set for the grudge match to end all grudge matches. The Great Bak Kut Teh Challenge was staged under the guise of raising money for our pet charity, Action Against Hunger, but each of us knew that there was way more at stake. Punters had to vote for their favourite version and, if they wanted to, make donations to Action Against Hunger according to the one they preferred.

The result? Well, I am thoroughly pleased to say that after all that bubble-bubble-toil-and-trouble that went into my cauldron of bak kut teh, Singapore not only raised the most money, but won the People’s Choice Award as well! If some government official is reading this, *ahem* I would not say no to a mention at the next National Day Rally.

So what was my secret? Well, the version I’ve been cooking all these years isn’t really the true-blue Singaporean version (gasp!), nor is it the Malaysian version either. It’s very rich, fiercely peppery and garlicky, but at the same time subtly herbal and very dark. The key ingredient is serious shedloads of garlic. Enough, say, to make Dracula or your date wince at the sheer thought—which also means, this is probably not date food.



I am almost embarrassed to include a recipe for bak kut teh as it is so simple. If you use pre-packaged herb mixes, which are readily found in any Chinese supermarkets selling Southeast Asian ingredients, the recipe basically involves boiling the stock for an inordinately long time. You just need to make sure the stock does not dry up. That's it. Remember the story about finding your own G-spot where I encourage experimentation? This dish is probably the best place to start. The long boiling process is an open invitation for you to taste and tweak the stock. Use the recipe as a guide and then freestyle it as you go along.

BAK KUT TEH

Our Riff on the Classic Herbal Pork Rib Broth

FEEDS 6-8

JASON'S HERB MIX

2 tbsp white peppercorns
2 tbsp fennel seeds
4 star anise
12 whole cloves
2 sticks cinnamon
8 pieces dang shen
(Chilean bellflower root)
12 pieces dang gui (Chinese angelica)
20 pieces yu zhu
(Solomon's seal rhizome)
25 gou qi zi (goji berry)

1.5 kg pork spare ribs
3.3 litres water, plus additional
for blanching
1 kg large pork bones
8 heads of garlic, no need to skin
4 heaped tbsp white peppercorns
(preferably Sarawak peppercorns)
5 tbsp light soya sauce
5 tbsp dark soya sauce
Ground white pepper (optional)
Handful of fresh coriander leaves
(cilantro), to garnish
You char kway (fried doughsticks),
to serve
Dried red chillies, soaked in
lukewarm water for 1 hour and
thinly sliced, to serve
Thick dark soya sauce, to serve

To assemble the herb mix, place all the herbs and spices in a large infuser ball, or gather inside a muslin cloth and tie the ends with a string to secure. Set aside. Roughly crush the white peppercorns with the flat of a heavy cleaver or with a mortar and pestle. Place in another large infuser ball or muslin cloth with the ends tied. This prevents the bits of peppercorn from floating about so your guests won't accidentally bite into them.

To make the broth, wash the pork ribs and dump them into a large colander. Pour a large kettle of boiling water over the ribs, blanching them lightly. Bring 3.3 litres of water to a boil in your largest stockpot over high heat. When it has reached a rolling boil, chuck in the pork bones, garlic, white peppercorns, light and dark soya sauce, and herb mix. Boil hard for an hour, skimming any foamy gunk that collects on the surface. After an hour, add the pork ribs and continue boiling.

Now comes the long and arduous wait, because a good, rich stock comes to those who wait. I keep it on a rolling boil for about 3 hours before turning the heat down to low and leaving it to gently simmer overnight. Replenish the stock with water as necessary so the pork ribs and bones are always covered.

Turn off the heat and remove all the garlic heads from the stock. Squeeze whatever mush is left in the garlic skins into the stock, which should now resemble a very rich broth. Season with more light and dark soya sauce according to taste. You can also add more ground white pepper if you want it more peppery.

To serve, garnish with coriander leaves. Cut some sticks of you char kway into 2.5-cm pieces, and serve with sliced red chillies drizzled with thick dark soya sauce for dipping.



TIPS: Add dried or fresh shiitake mushrooms and tau pok (a type of bean curd) to the stock if you want more stuff to nibble on. They absorb the broth very well and explode with flavour when bitten into. Twenty minutes before serving, chuck them into the broth, turn up the heat and let it come to a rolling boil. Remove from the heat after 20 minutes.

Pre-packaged herb mixes are perfectly acceptable. Try to find those which are not pre-ground and don't contain MSG. To determine how many packets you'll need, follow the instructions on the packet but double the packet-to-water ratio stated, adjusting for the 3.3 litres of water required here.

Every time I serve chwee kueh, there's always someone who screws up their face and goes, "Eww! Preserved turnip?! On what? A gooey rice cake?!" But their look of disgust turns to euphoria and surprise when they bite into the pillowy soft, semi-translucent rice cakes and crunch on the preserved turnip (chai poh), getting a savoury, oily hit and a whiff of subtle garlickiness. Chwee kueh is an awesome starter and very easy to make. I think of it as a way to rev everyone's taste buds up a notch and set the tempo for the evening's menu. I also like to serve it the way hawkers do in Singapore: on crummy brown paper to soak up all the oil and with little toothpicks that are completely ergonomically inappropriate for the task. If you can't be bothered to make the rice cakes, you can eat the topping with bread, rice or your choice of carbs.

CHWEE KUEH

Steamed Rice Cakes with a Lardy Preserved Turnip Topping

**MAKES 25 CAKES
WITH A TRADITIONAL MOULD**

RICE CAKES

250 g rice flour
60 g tapioca flour
510 ml water, room temperature
2 tbsp vegetable oil
2 tsp fine sea salt
510 ml water, boiling

TOPPING

200 g preserved turnip (chai poh),
soaked in warm water for 10 minutes
and finely chopped
300 g lard (page 44) or vegetable oil
1 tbsp sesame oil
1 head garlic, finely chopped
10 dried red chillies, soaked in lukewarm
water for 1 hour and finely chopped
3 tsp white sesame seeds
2 tsp light soya sauce
2 tsp dark soya sauce
2 tsp fish sauce
1 tbsp light brown sugar
1 tbsp sambal tumis belacan (page 118)
1 tsp Sriracha chilli sauce
2 tsp Maggi or Lingham's sweet
chilli sauce

To make the rice cakes, mix the rice flour, tapioca flour, room-temperature water, vegetable oil and salt in a bowl, stirring well to ensure there are no lumpy bits. Use a sieve to strain any lumps if necessary.

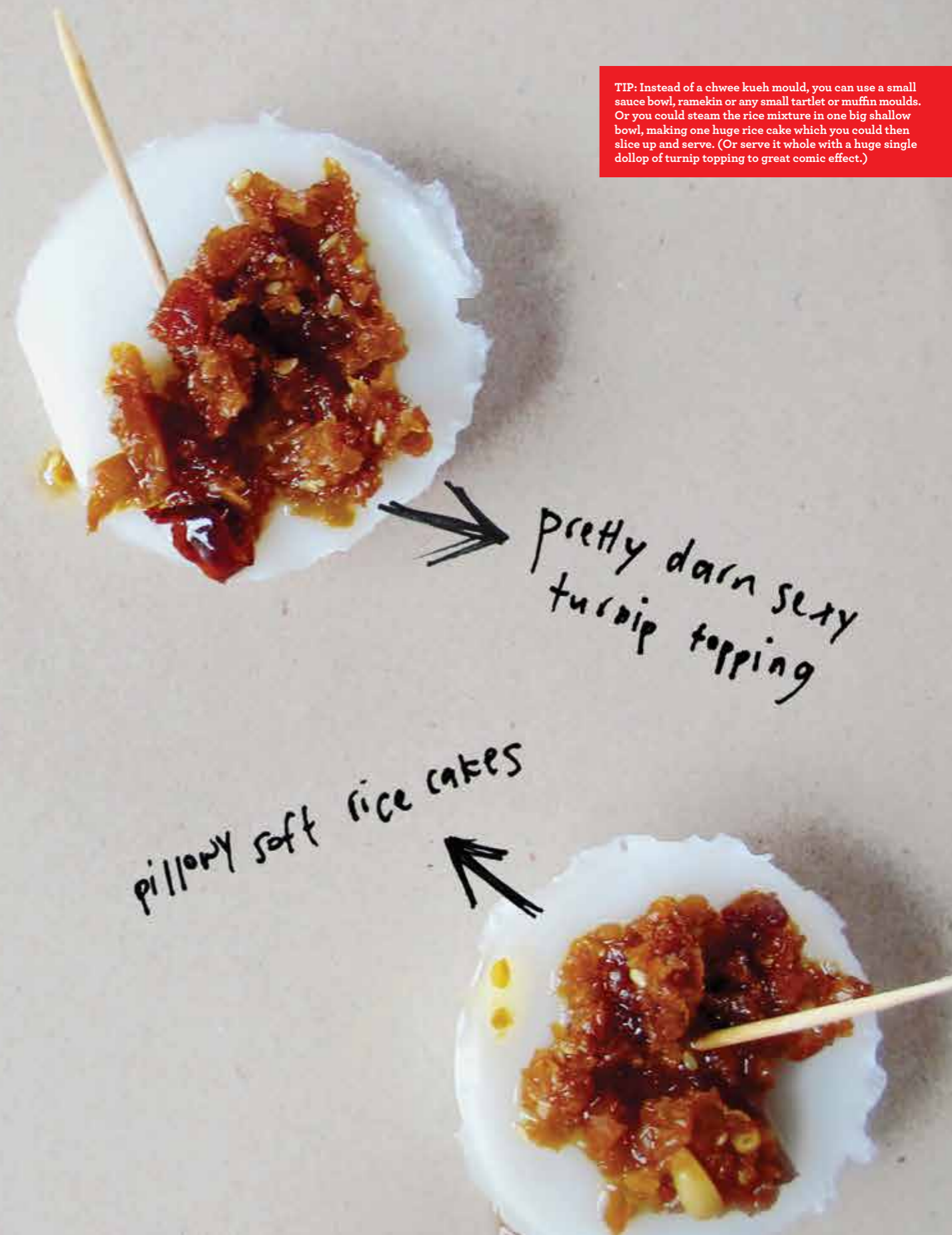
Transfer the mixture to a pot. Add the boiling water and simmer over low heat, stirring constantly. The mixture will thicken very quickly so don't take your eyes off it. You want to achieve the consistency of thick runny honey, a wet gluey paste or smooth oat porridge. If you think it's getting too thick and gloopy, err on the side of caution and remove the pot from the heat immediately.

To steam the rice cakes, heat your steamer with the moulds inside to warm them up. Spoon the mixture into the moulds and steam for 15–20 minutes. A skewer inserted into the rice cakes should come out clean. Remove the moulds from the steamer and leave the rice cakes to cool inside the moulds. They will keep, covered and refrigerated, for a day or two.

To make the topping, melt the lard in a heavy saucepan over high heat and add the sesame oil. Once the lard is hot, add the garlic and chillies, and fry until fragrant. Add the preserved turnip and fry for 15 minutes over low heat. Once it's super fragrant, add the sesame seeds, light soya sauce, dark soya sauce, fish sauce, sugar, sambal tumis belacan, Sriracha chilli sauce and sweet chilli sauce. Stir for another 5 minutes and remove the saucepan from the heat. Season according to taste.

To serve, remove the rice cakes from the moulds. If they are cold, re-steam or microwave them until they are spanking hot and springy again. Slap the topping generously onto the rice cakes and, if you need more kick, serve with sambal tumis belacan.

TIP: Instead of a chwee kueh mould, you can use a small sauce bowl, ramekin or any small tartlet or muffin moulds. Or you could steam the rice mixture in one big shallow bowl, making one huge rice cake which you could then slice up and serve. (Or serve it whole with a huge single dollop of turnip topping to great comic effect.)



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THE DISH



THAT TURNED A VEGETARIAN

As an impressionable kid, I used to see adverts on TV extolling the virtues of a fatless, saltless, sinless life. Compounded by the fact that I was a pimply youth who was ready to do just about anything to get into a girl's pants, I became a health-conscious nut (yes, believe it or not, this fine young man didn't always look like a tub o' lard), thinking that maybe if I had a six pack, women would fawn over me and feed me wine and grapes off their lithe bodies.

As part of the Adonification process, I used to scrape off all visible pieces of fat from any meat I was eating. One day, my mum cooked her signature pork belly with preserved vegetables. She saw my plate with its little mound of scraped-off blubber, and she looked at me as if she had caught me pants down monkey spanking. So I gingerly spooned pieces of quivering pork belly into my mouth and BAM. That was it.

Pork belly, braised overnight with preserved mustard greens and a small bunch of dried chilli for a little baby kick in the back of the throat. The fat and the meat had taken on all the flavours of the braising liquid and melted in my mouth. It was salty, sweet, garlicky, fatty and spicy all at once—hitting all the basic food yumminess receptors. This marked the beginning of the ruination of my Adonis-like figure. I sure as hell didn't get any love from the girls, but it was definitely the beginning of a long, lusty love affair with pork fat.

At one of our first plusixfive dinners, we served this signature dish of my mum's. We had cooked a special vegetarian meal for a lady who told us beforehand she was vegetarian. At the end of the night, she sheepishly confessed that she just couldn't resist picking at that pork belly. And this was after 20 years of vegetarianism! If that isn't a testimony to the awesomeness of fat, I don't know what is.



You should be able to find mui choy (preserved mustard greens) in your standard Chinatown supermarket. In Southeast Asia, most of the time it comes all semi-dried, wrinkly and speckled generously with salt or sugar, just laying there, uncovered. But in London, it comes vacuum-packed and sealed. If you're lucky, you'll find two versions, salty and sweet. I use the sweet version. If your local Asian supermarket doesn't have it, write to them and your local MP and boycott them with a vengeance. For the pork, go to your local butcher and get good free-range pork belly. That extra bit of cash you pay for happy pig meat is worth every penny. The intense marbling of fat doubles up as a courier of depth and flavour throughout the pork belly when it breaks down after the slow braising.

MUI CHOY KONG BAK

Braised Pork Belly and Preserved Mustard Greens

FEEDS 6-8

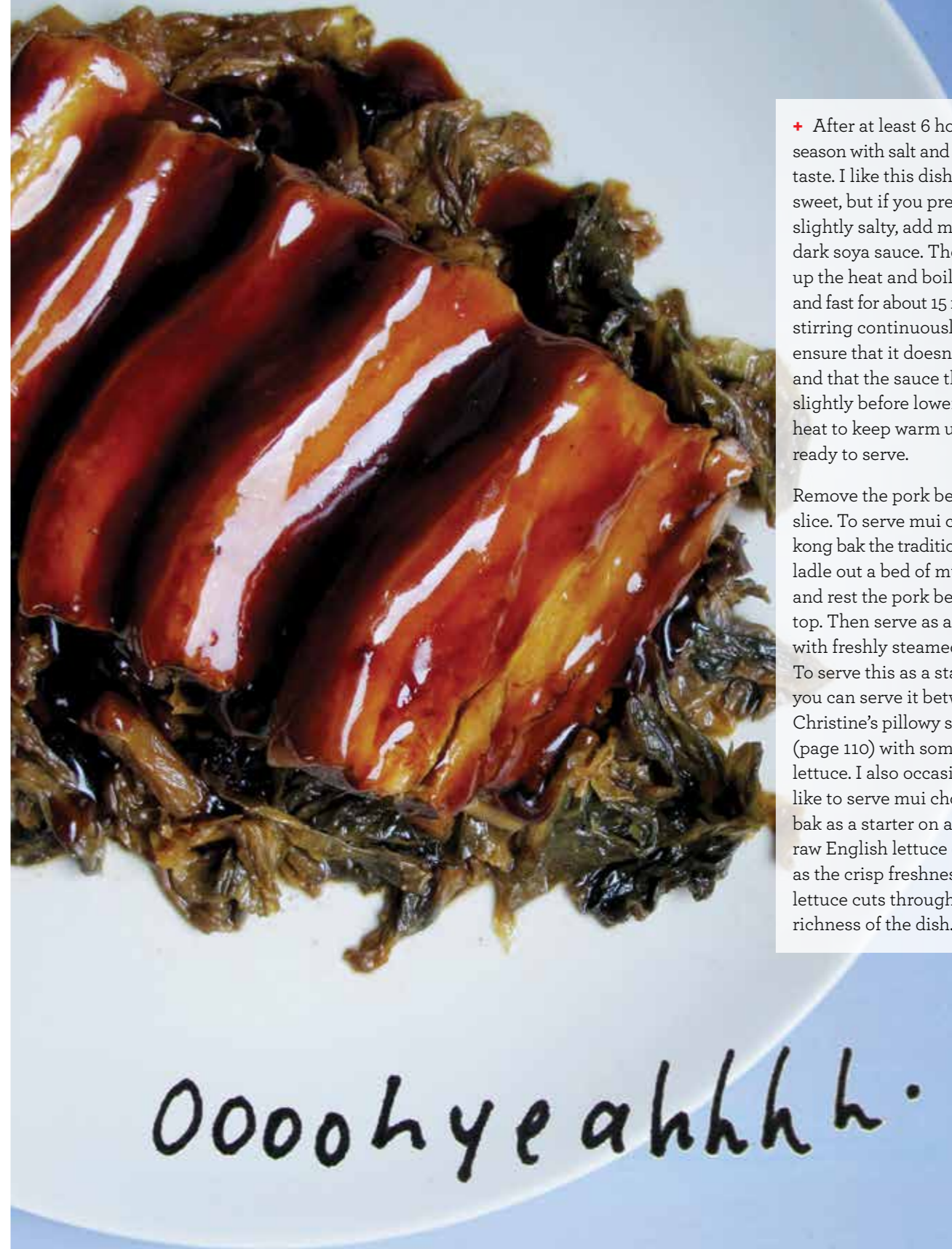
1.5 kg good-quality, free-range, marbled pork belly
3 tbsp five-spice powder
2 tbsp dark soya sauce, plus additional 2 tbsp
4 tbsp brown sugar
1 head garlic, finely chopped; plus additional 2 heads, crushed
1 tsp fish sauce
Vegetable oil, for deep frying
700 g mui choy (preserved mustard greens), preferably the sweet variety
4 tbsp Shaoxing rice wine
400 ml water
1 (2.5-cm) piece ginger
6 dried red chillies, soaked in lukewarm water for 1 hour
4 tbsp runny honey or maltose
1 stick cinnamon
2 tsp ground white pepper
Sea salt
Sugar

The night before serving, with any sharp implement, stab through the skin and the fat of the pork belly, but not the meat. Massage the pork belly all over with the five-spice powder, 2 tablespoons of dark soya sauce, sugar, garlic and fish sauce, really rubbing and getting it in there. Let sit, skin-side up and uncovered, in the fridge overnight for all those flavours to mingle and have a sexy time together.

The morning after, soak the mui choy in a bowl with sufficient water to cover. Let sit for 15 minutes. Replace the water, then let sit for another 15 minutes and repeat once more. Drain and rinse to wash away some of the salt—or else it will be way too salty. Chop into 2.5-cm chunks.

Add oil to a depth of 2.5 cm in a wok and heat. The oil is hot enough when you shove in a dry chopstick, and little air bubbles cling to and stream from it.

Drain the pork belly, reserving the marinating liquid. Be careful as you gently place the pork belly skin-side down in the hot oil—it will splatter and wheeze so use a splatter screen or wear suitable body protection. Deep-fry for about 10–15 minutes or until the skin starts to crackle and the fat starts to render, checking every couple of minutes. Flip the pork belly over so it's skin-side up. Add the reserved marinating liquid, mui choy, rice wine, water, 2 heads of garlic, ginger, chillies, 2 tablespoons dark soya sauce, honey, cinnamon and white pepper. Turn the heat to high and let it come to a boil. Once boiling, scrape off any bits stuck to the bottom of the wok, to ensure you don't lose any flavour. Turn the heat to low and simmer slowly for at least 6 hours, checking every other hour that there is sufficient water in the wok and that it's not burning. +



+ After at least 6 hours, season with salt and sugar to taste. I like this dish slightly sweet, but if you prefer it slightly salty, add more dark soya sauce. Then turn up the heat and boil it hard and fast for about 15 minutes, stirring continuously to ensure that it doesn't burn and that the sauce thickens slightly before lowering the heat to keep warm until ready to serve.

Remove the pork belly and slice. To serve mui choy kong bak the traditional way, ladle out a bed of mui choy and rest the pork belly on top. Then serve as a main with freshly steamed rice. To serve this as a starter, you can serve it between Christine's pillowy soft buns (page 110) with some crisp lettuce. I also occasionally like to serve mui choy kong bak as a starter on a bed of raw English lettuce cups, as the crisp freshness of the lettuce cuts through the richness of the dish.

CHRISTINE

Christine is a part-time actress, model, fashion journalist and full-time sweetheart all rolled up into one waif-like, indie-chic chick. We met through Twitter, when I was openly hunting for a front of house for my supper club after a friend pulled out last minute. I would like to think that she hopped on board thanks to my wit, charm and chiselled cheekbones, but I think it had more to do with the fact that I told her she could have full ownership over all leftovers from the supper club and a chance to meet tonnes of other crazed foodies.

One day, I decided to add kong bak pau to the menu: thick slices of mui choy kong bak sandwiched between soft, pillowy, clam-shaped buns. My mum used to make kong bak pau and we would get our buns frozen from Chinatown. When Christine found out I was about to use frozen buns, she reacted like I was going to commit heinous crimes on baby kittens. So since then, she has been the resident front of house and official bun-maker. The recipe that follows is Christine's grandma's recipe as remembered and adapted by Christine.

CHRISTINE: "The only Singapore supper club in London serving proper badass Singaporean food and dispelling the fiction that is Singapore fried noodles." This bio on Twitter is exactly what plusixfive is about and my first introduction to Goz and his supper club. Without any waitressing skills but a similar passion to show people what real Singaporean food is all about, I gladly helped out as the front of house on one occasion, which led to the next and the next until I soon became part of this big, happy, delicious plusixfamily. Plusixfive is more than just a supper club where we cook and guests eat their fill and leave. It is an experience, a gathering, a celebration of good times, literally.

Our guests have celebrated National Day with us decked in red, tossed yu sheng for the first

time in their lives, revelled in Mid-autumn festival myths (as accurate as our memories serve us), and witnessed us dancing in the kitchen, aprons and all. We also had someone bring his friend over for a birthday meal once! Complete with birthday song with compliments from the team. As plusixfive's front of house, I can guarantee that no one leaves hungry or a stranger. And everyone also learns the truth: that Singapore noodles in all its garish, yellow curry-flavoured monstrosity is nothing but a big, fat lie.



CHRISTINE: My grandma's buns are soft, fluffy and moist. Exactly how I love them. I remember sitting on the floor, lined with newspaper, linen towels and plastic sheets, with her when I was a child. And on that very floor was where the magic began. Kueh, tarts, and of course, these buns. We made them together. Or rather, I tried to knead the dough with my little hands and she did everything else. To be honest, it took a while to remember the proportions she used, and I'm still not even entirely sure if I got them right. But every time I make these buns, I remember the times I had with my grandma, the way she used to laugh when I got flour in my hair. The way her gold tooth would sparkle in the sunlight with a chuckle. For me, these buns are what happiness tastes like.

MAN TOU

Steamed Buns for Mui Choy Kong Bak

MAKES ABOUT 20

STARTER DOUGH (MAKES 4 PORTIONS)

50 g all-purpose flour
150 g self-raising flour
½ tsp dry yeast
110 ml water

100 g all-purpose flour
200 g self-raising flour
30 g granulated sugar, or more if you like it sweeter
5 g dry yeast
160 ml whole milk
1 tbsp vegetable oil
1 portion of the starter dough (fully defrosted if stored in the freezer)

To make the starter dough, mix the flours and yeast in a large mixing bowl. Make a well in the middle and slowly add the water in 2 equal batches, stirring after each addition.

Knead until a smooth ball of dough is formed. This batch of starter dough can be split into 4 portions and stored in the freezer until you are ready to make more man tou.

To make the man tou, mix the flours, sugar and yeast thoroughly in a large mixing bowl. Make a well in the middle, and place 1 portion of the starter dough in the well. Slowly add the milk and oil in 4 equal batches, mixing between each batch until a dough is formed.

Knead vigorously, dusting with flour as you go along, until the dough is smooth and does not stick to your hands. Cover with a damp tea towel and leave to proof for 45 minutes at room temperature. The dough should double in size.

On a clean work surface dusted with flour, divide the dough equally into 15–20 spheres roughly the size of a ping pong ball (or whatever size you prefer your man tou to be). Cover with a damp tea towel and leave to proof at room temperature for another 45 minutes.

To shape the man tou, dust your hands and rolling pin with flour. Press each ball with the palm of your hand until it's roughly the size of your palm. Dust flour on the surface and fold it in half so it forms a *D* shape. It should now resemble a flattened clam. After shaping all the pieces of dough, cover them with a damp tea towel and leave to proof for 1 hour. They should rise slightly. Steam each man tou in a bamboo steamer for about 10 minutes. They should all puff up beautifully and look fluffy and pillowy.

TIP: This recipe makes a fair number of man tou buns. But instead of reducing the recipe yield, for convenience the steamed man tou can be frozen and kept for about 3–6 months in the freezer. When you need them, just steam them up again!





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SHU HAN: It's funny how agar has become the cool new toy for chefs when all along, it's been the kind of jelly Singaporean kids have grown up eating. For the uninitiated, agar is a seaweed-derived substance similar to gelatin, but it sets much more easily at room temperature and gives a bouncier bite. This dessert is often made with coloured agar powder according to the most elementary instructions printed on the packet and set in adorable moulds, so as kids, we loved making and eating these simple treats. I like to use plain, unflavoured agar strands and dye the jelly a natural ruby shade with beetroot. This recipe yields a two-layered agar agar: one a firmer clear jelly, and the other more pudding-like with the addition of coconut milk. Agar agar makes a good dessert for picnics because it won't melt away in the sun. Agar 1: jelly 0.

AGAR AGAR

A Jelly Dessert So Good They Named It Twice

MAKES 20-30

28 g agar strands, roughly cut
1 small beetroot, peeled and chopped
1.5 litres water, plus additional
for soaking
2 pandan leaves, tied into a knot
1 cup sugar
Pinch of sea salt
125 ml coconut milk

Soak the agar in a bowl of water for about 30 minutes, or until softened. Drain and squeeze out the excess water. Boil the beetroot in 1.5 litres of water for about 10-15 minutes, or until the water turns deep, dark red. Leave it in longer if you like beetroot.

Add the pandan leaves and agar to the pot and bring to a boil, stirring until the agar has completely melted and there are no lumps. Add the sugar, tasting and adjusting until you're happy with the sweetness. Note that it should be slightly sweeter than you'd normally like it because once refrigerated, it'll taste less sweet.

Remove the pot from the heat. Transfer 375 ml of the agar liquid from the pot to a jug. Add a pinch of salt and stir in the coconut milk (the ratio of agar liquid to coconut milk is 3:1).

Pour the coconut milk mixture into jelly moulds, filling each up to, but not more than, halfway. Alternatively, pour this mixture into a large baking tray with tall sides until it is half full. Transfer the moulds to the fridge, allowing the coconut layer to set until just semi-firm, about 5 minutes, keeping in mind that agar sets really quickly.

Lightly scratch the surface of the semi-set coconut layer with a toothpick so that the next layer can bond to it. Pour the remaining agar liquid on top of the coconut layer up to the brim of the moulds. If it looks like it's starting to thicken and turn lumpy again, just stick the pot back onto the stove to warm it up and stir until it melts again. Refrigerate the moulds until the agar agar is fully set, at least 30 minutes.

To unmould, run a toothpick gently around the edges and flip the moulds over. The agar agar should pop out easily, and in one piece. If you've made them in a tray, cut the agar agar up into your choice of crazy, creative shapes. Refrigerate until ready to serve, preferably cold.

TIP: You can get creative with other colours. To make naturally green agar agar, blend or crush the pandan leaves to obtain the green pandan extract. You can also add fruits such as chopped-up mangoes or fresh raspberries. Wait until the second layer of agar has turned semi-firm (about 3 minutes in the fridge) before adding the fruits, so they stay suspended within the jelly.



Ask a Singaporean of any ethnicity, and chances are this sweet, multi-coloured snack probably featured one way or another in their childhood. Almost everyone I know eats kueh lapis sagu by cautiously peeling off each coloured segment, making sure not to overstretch and tear the thin, sticky layers. Whenever this is served at the supper club, adults break into chortles and giggles when they see the bright, electric colours. Unable to resist, they are reduced to little kids again, throwing etiquette to the wind as they ignore utensils and peel off the layers with their hands. I won't lie, this is the easiest recipe but it is pretty time-consuming. Every layer requires a good 5 minutes or more of steaming before you ladle on the next layer. So if I were you, I would probably slap on my favourite DVD, turn the telly towards the kitchen and make myself relatively comfortable.

KUEH LAPIS SAGU

Multi-coloured Steamed Cake. Or the Snack That Reverses Ageing.

MAKES 1 (18 BY 18-CM) BAKING TIN

MIXTURE 1

220 ml water, hot
250 g caster sugar
300 ml coconut milk

MIXTURE 2

170 g rice flour
170 g tapioca flour
30 g glutinous rice flour
325 ml coconut milk
170 ml water, room temperature

A range of food colouring

In a large bowl, combine the ingredients for Mixture 1, stirring until the sugar has melted completely. In a separate bowl, combine the ingredients for Mixture 2. Whisk and strain to ensure there are no lumps. Pour Mixture 1 into Mixture 2 and whisk briskly. You want to achieve a nice, smooth batter.

Divide the mixture according to the number of food colourings you have. Add the food colouring, one drop at a time, until you attain the desired shade. I usually divide the mixture into five equal portions (dark red, light red, dark green, light green and plain white). I use only two colours and add fewer drops of it to get lighter shades, but go crazy if you want acid-tripping, psychedelic rainbow colours.

Grease an 18 by 18-cm baking tin. Place the baking tin in a steamer. Spoon a big ladleful of one of the coloured mixtures into the baking tin. Cover the steamer and let that layer cook and stiffen, about 5 minutes. Check by gently prodding the surface with the back of a teaspoon. If it's still gooey, cover and continue steaming. Once the layer is firm, pour another ladleful of a different coloured mixture and steam. Repeat with each colour until the tray is full or you run out of mixture. Do not be tempted to add the next layer until the previous layer has completely solidified! The more layers you add, the longer it takes. The top layer may take up to 10 minutes to stiffen completely.

Let the kueh lapis sagu cool down to room temperature before refrigerating for at least 2 hours. This allows the kueh lapis sagu to set properly and aids in the unmoulding process. To serve, slice with a clean knife dipped in warm water. Clean the knife before every slice. Then stand back and watch in amusement as kids and adults alike become four-year-olds again.



Traditional min jiang kueh is soft, pillowy and cake-like, while its distant, trendy, flimsy-ass cousin resembles a thin, crispy wafer. No prizes for guessing which one I prefer. There is something heart-warming about walking home from school in 33°C heat, waiting in line in a horribly humid hawker centre, and then sinking one's teeth into a steaming hot, fluffy pancake, inevitably dribbling a shower of crushed peanuts all over oneself and grinning like a happy fool with peanut and sugar crumbs smeared all over one's teeth. To make the aromatic peanut filling, the peanuts are first toasted until they give off a rich, nutty aroma. The addition of the lightly toasted sesame seeds provides a subtle fragrance. It's important to use granulated sugar and not fine caster sugar, as the large sugar crystals will add to the contrasting, and more importantly, satisfying crunch which you are trying to achieve here. This was adapted from a recipe by Jason.

MIN JIANG KUEH

Soft and Fluffy Peanut Pancakes

FEEDS 4-6

FILLING

400 g raw peanuts, toasted (see page 43), skins removed and roughly chopped

150 g granulated sugar

75 g white sesame seeds, toasted (see page 43)

1 tsp sea salt

PANCAKES

600 g all-purpose flour

2 tsp baking soda

2 tsp dry yeast

1 tsp sea salt

300 g granulated sugar

3 large eggs, lightly beaten

850 ml water, lukewarm

Mix all the ingredients for the filling in a large bowl and set aside.

To make the pancake batter, sieve the flour, sugar and baking powder together in a large mixing bowl. Add the eggs and water, then mix thoroughly with a whisk or fork until the batter is smooth. Cover loosely with a damp tea towel or cling film, and let it rest in a dark and warm place (if you are in Singapore, that's any cupboard space) for the yeast and baking soda to get busy and for the batter to double in size. This should take about 1½ hours.

Heat a non-stick frying pan over medium heat. Lightly grease the pan with a little bit of vegetable oil. Pour a big ladleful or about 120 ml of the batter into the frying pan so that it covers the bottom completely. Cover with a lid and cook for 5-6 minutes over medium-low heat, or until little bubbly craters start to form, and the top looks nice and dry and there are no wet splotches. The pancakes should be a light shade of brown.

To be honest, your first pancake is likely to be a failure as you try to get the hang of it and figure out the appropriate amount of heat to apply. Chances are you will get too impatient and try to remove it from the heat too quickly. But don't fret! There is truth in the age-old adage that practice makes perfect!

Gently remove from the pan in one piece and lay flat. Spoon as much filling as you want onto one half of the pancake. I love the filling, so I always generously pile on the peanuty goodness, but 2-3 tablespoons should do it. Fold each pancake in half. Slice into quarters or wedges and serve immediately.



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Sorry, why do I have to write in this book? You guys fucking rock, you don't need me to tell you that. OK, here's my review - awesome, as usual. Can I go back to my beer now? Thanks
Sam xxx

Wow! Mummy I can Coca Cola
Coca! Amazing food, ginger
pork, stuffed - really stuffed!

“THEY HAVE PUT SINGAPOREAN FOOD ON THE WORLD MAP.”

TAN HSUEH YUN, FOOD EDITOR, *THE STRAITS TIMES*



Lamenting the lack of good Singaporean food in London (Singapore fried noodles doesn't count), Goz Lee started the plusixfive supper club out of his one-bedroom flat in Islington, determined to showcase his country's cooking to hungry Londoners. Taking its name from Singapore's international dialling code, plusixfive and its team of chefs have taken the London supper club world by storm, regularly selling out their monthly dinners and counting among their guests celebrity chefs, food critics, bloggers and television stars.

“A gobsmacking, finger-licking, tummy-rubbing culinary outpost carrying the Singapore culinary flag. There should be a plusixfive in every major city of the world.”

WILLIN LOW, chef-owner,
Wild Rocket Group

“I met a lot of interesting people...but Goz stood out. I always knew the Chinese were mad about food, but this passionate guy embraced cooking and eating equally.”

BEN GREENO, head chef,
Momofuku Seiōbo

“Goz's cooking makes your tastebuds excited and your belly distended; you just won't be able to stop eating it. Much like Goz himself, it's sexy stuff.”

LIZZIE MABBOTT, food blogger,
Hollow Legs

AUTHOR GOZ LEE spent most of his childhood in Singapore watching his grandma cook all kinds of Hainanese goodies. In 2011, he started plusixfive, which was an early pioneer of the Southeast Asian supper club movement in London. A full-time lawyer, he is now based in Hong Kong, where he continues to expand plusixfive's ventures abroad.

DESIGNER SHU HAN LEE is a chef for plusixfive and a writer, photographer and illustrator for her popular food blog *Mummy, I Can Cook!* She has been named one of the best British food bloggers by *The Sunday Times* (UK) and has also contributed to foodie publications like *Cereal*, *Great British Chefs*, *Crumbs* and *Flavour*.

ISBN-13: 978-981-07-5906-3



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