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KITCHEN RESCUE

Philippine kitchens from far and near

By Reggie Aspiras
Inquirer
Last updated 02:26am (Mla time) 01/11/2007

OVER the years, Pinoy talent has taken center stage in practically every part of the globe.

It is no surprise. We are, after all, Jacks and Jills of many trades. Fortunately, many have opted to be masters in their fields of choice.

Such is the case with Amy Besa and chef Romy Dorotan, owners of the famed Cendrillon Restaurant in Soho, Manhattan. To them we owe the graceful entry of Philippine cuisine to the land of the free.

Together, the duo worked to take Asian cuisine to new heights, particularly ours, by sticking to the age-old fundamentals and principles of Pinoy classic food preparation.

Where many have abandoned ship to westernize Pinoy food, Dorotan and Besa have fought to stay afloat by sticking to tradition. By doing so they have honored our cuisine.

Fortunately for us, in spite of their success, they have remained true to their roots and to their heritage and have authored "Memories of Philippine Kitchens—Stories & Recipes From Far and Near."

I love the feel of a good book, especially when it is penned in a manner that allows me to be a part of it all. Browsing through the pages of this one takes me to places far and near. The title is so apt.

The essays let you take a trip back in time. I could actually imagine myself present in the kitchen. When I close my eyes, I can even envision myself in a patadyong. It is nostalgic, it is deja vu, it is beautiful!

While the essays are undoubtedly wonderful, they alone cannot lay claim to the book's genius. The photos are exceptional, too, thanks to yet another master—Neal Oshima! So vibrant are the pictures that they seem to jump out of the pages. Every single ingredient, though raw, seems to scream "eat me," way before it gets added to a dish.

The recipes cannot be overlooked. So meticulously written, each recipe is accompanied by its history and how it came to be.

The book covers subjects and recipes of gustatory significance from Aparri to Jolo; from the Spanish era to the present; from adobo to sinigang, to Zambales mangoes, to kakanin. It features culinary clans and demigods of Pinoy cuisine.

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AMY Besa and chef Romy Dorotan, owners of the famed Cendrillon Restaurant in Soho, Manhattan. INQUIRER Photo

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It would be a shame to be Filipino and not own a copy of this. It is, to me, the culinary "Noli Me Tangere."

To Amy and Romy, "Philippine Kitchens—Stories & Recipes from Far and Near" is a legacy in the making. For all that you share, your love of country, your love of food, all that you are to our culture and our heritage, maraming salamat! You have done us so, so proud!

Here's a taste of Cendrillon and of "Philippine Kitchens." Ukoy is the most popular item on their menu. Rice flour gives theirs an added crisp. They suggest serving this with achara.

Ukoy
• Banana leaf, cleaned, cut to 4x4-in squares. Brush one side lightly with oil.

Ingredients

Batter:
3/4 c rice flour
1/3 c all-purpose flour
1/2 tsp baking powder
1/4 tsp salt
1 large egg

Filling:
1 c each julienned Napa cabbage, carrots, snow peas, leeks (white parts only)
1 1/2 c bean sprouts
1 c chopped, peeled and de-veined shrimp
2 tsp fish sauce
1/2 tsp freshly ground black pepper
1-2 tbsp all-purpose flour
Canola oil, for frying
Rice vinegar with sliced garlic and chopped chilis to taste, for serving

Procedure:

Batter:
• Sift flours, baking powder, salt.
• In bowl, beat egg with 3/4 c water.
• Stir in dry ingredients to form a thick but smooth batter. Refrigerate 30 minutes-1 hour.
• Fill wok with Canola oil and heat.

Filling:
• Combine ingredients in a bowl.
• Stir batter and pour just enough into the filling to coat the ingredients.
• Put 1/3 cup of the filling on the oiled side of each banana leaf square.
• Fry until fritter is set—1 minute; lift from oil, remove banana leaf.
• Continue frying for another minute until the fritter is lightly browned. Flip and brown the other side until crisp, 1 1/2-2 minutes.
• Drain on paper towel-lined baking sheet.
• Serve hot with the vinegar dipping sauce.

To reserve books in advance, call Queenie Cosay of A Different Bookstore, 0915-6597853.

Erratum

Remember Kape ni Juan? The coffee caterers that use 100-percent homegrown Pinoy beans? Silly of me to identify him as Patrick Uy. The name of the man behind the brilliant idea is Patrick Joson. Hayayay! So, so sorry Patrick! For his services, call 0917-5277141.

My class schedules are out. Call 9289296, 9273008, 7221691.

E-mail raspiras@inquirer.com.ph

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