

Eat *your* Greens

Three chefs show us that eating your vegetables can be appealing as well

By MARELLA RICKETTS

Photography KIERAN PUNAY & FLOYD JHOCSON of STUDIO 100

In the brief month that I attempted to go vegetarian, I was met with a lot of unsupportive reactions. There were those who were confused about my decision (“But meat tastes so good!”), those worried about my protein intake and those who simply couldn’t imagine doing the same, as if vegetables were only meant to be a side dish far, far away from the spotlight.

With the Philippine food scene experiencing a renaissance of sorts, vegetarians and even vegans no longer need to feel marginalized with boring salads and dishes that feel like after-thoughts. From the influx of foreign vegetarian fare, the rise of the organic and raw food revolutions, vegetables are being appreciated for what they are—delicious food that even the most ardent meat-eaters can’t help but like—perhaps even have seconds.

To help educate us (and to show us that vegetables don’t have to be boring), three of Manila’s



most ingenious chefs give us a taste of their best vegetarian appetizer, main dish and dessert.

APPETIZER: MUSHROOMS, KELP AND BARLEY

For Chef Josh Boutwood, who made waves in Madrid Fusion last year and is the executive chef at the Bistro Group, The Test Kitchen is his very own playground. While his six-course tasting menu typically consists of meat dishes, vegetarians or those with certain diets can have menus created upon special request, as long as he is told 48 hours beforehand. “While I’m not trying to promote veganism, I like how people are understanding the strengths of each vegetable. It’s a good way to have a nice, nutrient-filled meal,” he tells us.

Moments later, he presents us with a delicious-looking appetizer which features seasoned shiitake, king oyster and lobster mushrooms and Brussels sprouts, flavored with kelp and mushroom stock. The ingredients were then placed on a bed of toasted barley and garnished with popped sorghum, which gives the dish an interesting texture.

One bite already gives you a balance of everything, which is what Boutwood is all about. “As with most of our dishes—whether they have meat or not—there has to be some sort of balance. For this dish, we have the savory mushrooms, the amazing earthiness of the Brussels sprouts and the sourness from the kelp sauce.”

BALANCING ACT

The appetizer is all about getting the best of everything with each bite

MAIN: BAKED BEETROOT AND CARROTS & PAN-FRIED TOFU AND KIMCHI

Chef Carlos Garcia of The Black Pig was easily one of the first chefs that came to mind when thinking of who could make the plant-based main dish. His restaurant and bar is known for serving a variety of European-inspired dishes, but they have also been featuring a vegetarian menu for at least two years now. This move came naturally to him. “When I was working abroad, I came across vegan menus, so it wasn’t really new to me. I also love cooking and eating vegetables; I find their flavors very interesting to play with.”

Today, he has prepared Baked Beetroot and Carrots, as well as a crowd favorite, Pan-fried Tofu and Kimchi. his first dish is a little complex, but it is a wonderful play of flavor and texture. There is the sweetness of the quinoa and carrot, and the slight spiciness from the horse radish—everything goes together perfectly, even turning those doubtful about vegetables into fans.

For those of you who love Korean cuisine, the second dish will surely win your heart. “I love the kimchi, tofu, the earthy mushrooms. We also ferment our own rice, making it taste almost alcoholic, like sake,” he shares when talking about the dish.



AROUND THE WORLD
Whether Asian or European, there is definitely a veg fix for you



“I FIND THEIR FLAVORS VERY INTERESTING TO PLAY WITH”





of sugar and salt. Upon tasting it, I was delighted—it didn't taste "healthy" at all.

I questioned Aspiras about the vegan items he had on the menu of his restaurant, Le Petit Soufflé, asking whether or not the move was intentional. "We didn't do it on purpose," he starts. "When we were building a menu, we weren't conscious about needing to include vegan dishes. We made things we love—it just so happened that it doesn't include any meat. I think that's how people should look at veganism. Not so much as a diet, but more as something you can eat everyday."

So whether or not you're considering the shift to vegetarianism or full veganism, or if you simply want to cut down your meat, dishes such as these will help open up your eyes to the wonderful flavors and benefits vegetables have to offer. After all, eating healthier isn't synonymous to boring. ■

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STILL LIFE

Don't be fooled by this dessert's creamy texture—everything is dairy-free



DESSERT: PETIT GATEAU

To be honest, I expected to have a brownie or a cupcake placed in front of me when I asked renowned pastry chef Miko Aspiras to create a vegan dessert for us. I couldn't be more wrong. In the only way that he can, he surprises us with his artistry and skill: "I thought of a cake, a tart...in the end, I decided to go with a *petit gateau*, or a personal sized cake."

To be more specific, he prepared a spiced pear *petit gateau* that practically looks like the real thing on the outside, with its expertly painted cocoa shell. On the inside is a mousse made of whipped aquafaba (the water from canned chickpeas) and whipped coconut cream. Inside that is a filling made of sautéed fresh pears with raw sugar and vanilla beans. The entire thing is served on top of a chickpea tart, simply made of chickpea flour, olive oil and a dash