

the kind chef

BOYISHLY CHARMING, NATURALLY EXUBERANT, AND WITH HEAPS OF CULINARY TALENT TO BOOT. MEET RAPHAEL GAMON, THE MAESTRO BEHIND RED WHITE & PURE'S SOUL-PLEASING MODERN TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE (TCM) CUISINE

WORDS JOSEPHINE SOH PHOTOGRAPHY RAYMOND TOH

Kitchen horror stories starring irate chefs, flying saucers and broken plates are pretty much the norm these days, so it is rare to come across a chef so quietly composed and serene. Seated across me in the tranquil waterfront environs of Red White & Pure, TCM giant Eu Yan Sang's latest lifestyle venture offering spa-oriented modern cuisine with TCM elements among other wellness programs, Consultant Chef Raphael Gamon exudes the kind of calmness that one might expect from a Buddhist monk.

It comes as no surprise that the youthful 44 year-old American has been a Buddhist since he was 12 and as he proudly reveals, has never yelled at anyone in his kitchen. (His staff happily attests to this.) But ask Raphael about his high-flying career as a travelling private chef, and he is modest. The fact that he has cooked for famous names (kings, queens, politicians and an Oscars' roll-call of superstars) is insignificant to this gentle giant. Instead, he believes that it's his kind personality that has earned him his achievements.

When we asked what jumpstarted his career as a travelling private chef, Raphael recounts a chance encounter that took place about 20 years ago when he was living in southern France. "I stopped by a bakery one day and met a gentleman who seemed upset that it had run out of bread.



Best

**MODERN CUISINE
WITH A TWIST OF
CHINESE HERBS**

Red White & Pure's consultant chef Raphael Gamon

Seeing little problem, I offered to teach him how to bake bread at my residence. He came, we chatted and baked, and that's when I found out he was France's (then) Culture Minister Jacques Lange! That was how I was offered a job at the Palais Royal."

Had he not become a chef, he might have embarked on a career in the healing arts. "My father discovered Buddhism and acupuncture when I was in my teens and gave me a set of acupuncture needles, hoping I would grow up to become an acupuncturist. I was pretty inclined to become one — until I found out that it would involve 13 years of study! To a 12 year-old teen, that thought was absolutely horrifying! (Laughs) Then I decided that I would become a chef — so I could go on a cruise ship and see the world."

It's a dream well fulfilled. Since graduating from culinary school in Switzerland where he was raised, his job has taken him around the globe and now to Singapore, a place he'd not heard of prior to this posting.

"Even though I didn't end up being an acupuncturist, learning about Chinese herbs for this project and fusing them with spa-oriented modern cuisine also gives me control over someone else's wellbeing," he muses. Not unlike bygone eras when chefs were doctors of the palace, we think.

"Food is personal and the happiness of my diners inspires me. As a chef, I have every power to make a difference so if you walk in looking a little sad, I'll cheer you up by adding more colours or spices to your dish. And if people measure me by the food that I put on the table, I end up being a good person and that's important to me."

He quotes famous Roman epicure Apicius: "To make someone happy with a good meal is already 50 percent of the cure that I'm providing." Having tasted his soul-pleasing creations like the beautiful bird's nest ice cream and the very comforting tremella and chanterelle risotto, we can't agree more.

TCM and Chef Raphael — this is one professional union match-made in culinary heaven.



Cordon Bleu chicken

CORDON BLEU CHICKEN

A French-inspired dish, this lighter version by Chef Raphael is filled with eye-nourishing wolfberries, red dates and goat's cheese instead of ham and Swiss cheese, and coated with fresh parsley instead of breadcrumbs. The spicy harissa sauce boosts circulation and replaces the traditional heavy cream-based sauce. Serves 4.

100 g wolfberries, soaked
50 g red dates, soaked
200 g cream cheese
150 g goat's cheese
25 g large spinach leaves
8 chicken breasts
10 g parsley, minced
Salt and pepper

Harissa sauce

50 g store-bought harissa paste
50 ml coconut milk
50 g vegetable stock
25 g brown sugar
20 g red chilli or red capsicum
Small pinch of cloves

1. Preheat oven at 175°C.
2. Puree berries and dates roughly, and whip with the cheeses.
3. Butterfly the chicken, then season with salt and pepper, and fill with cheese mix.
4. Wrap spinach around cheese and roll up each piece of meat tightly. (Secure with toothpick if necessary)
5. Bake the chicken for 10 minutes, then remove from oven and coat well with minced parsley.
6. To prepare the sauce, blend all sauce ingredients and heat for 2 minutes before serving.
7. Drizzle sauce over chicken and serve immediately. **E**