

# TAN KEN MENG

Having recently joined the family business, the assistant manager of IGB Bhd's hotel division talks about a new offering from Kuala Lumpur's iconic fine dining restaurant Cilantro, growing up in a family of foodies and his idea of a perfect weekend

**Options: Congratulations on launching an exciting new F&B concept. Tell us a little about the new L'Atelier by Cilantro. We believe it is lunch-only for now.**

**Tan Ken Meng:** L'Atelier is the exciting new offering from Cilantro featuring Fine French Bistro cuisine — and, yes, this is a lunch-only affair at the moment. While not differing from the well-known setting of Cilantro, the space and table arrangements have been reimagined to reflect a cosier, more casual atmosphere in which guests may feel at ease, in contrast to the usual fine dining experience. Our intent in introducing L'Atelier was driven by the desire to offer guests a chance to experience a taste of classic comfort French dishes, from onion soup and escargots to Coq Au Vin and Steak Frites — at prices that are friendly and approachable. French dining establishments in Kuala Lumpur are also few and far between, and an even smaller number of them serve French classics in the style that L'Atelier does. From this, we saw an opportunity to see whether there was an appetite for this type of casual cuisine in our part of town.

**So, what will happen to Cilantro's celebrated Friday Lunch?**

This has been asked many times! [Laughs] Fans of Cilantro's Friday Lunch will be happy to hear that they can still enjoy the sets. L'Atelier will be in operation Tuesdays to Thursdays, as well as Saturdays and Sundays, from 11.30am to 2pm.

**Who will be the chef in charge and what are some of the menu items the diner can expect?**

When the idea of L'Atelier came about, [long-standing Cilantro chef] Takashi Kimura was very enthusiastic and excited about the project. His interpretation of the classic dishes is what diners can look forward to, but we are continually tweaking the taste to suit our local palate and preferences. We launched L'Atelier at the start of July and some of our most popular orders are the Duck Confit, Steak Frites and Crepes Suzette. Also on offer are larger pre-order dishes including Whole Roasted Chicken, Fish and Rack of Lamb, ideal for those who come in a bigger group. We plan to also introduce weekly specials based on the seasonal ingredients available.

**What inspired this decision to open Cilantro up more during lunch hours?**

Cilantro's Friday Lunch has been well received by our guests ever since it was first introduced and its popularity has continued to this day. I wanted to inject that same energy and life into our everyday lunchtime fare but in a format different from what people have come to expect from Cilantro. As it has been in operation for more than 20 years, I am aware of and very grateful for the loyal following that Cilantro has built up. I aim to bring a fresh perspective, new ideas and an open mind to the team, especially in the highly competitive and rapidly evolving F&B

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Takashi Kimura

environment of KL, where choices are increasingly abundant. From my conversations with family and friends, as well as my own observations, dining trends, especially among those in the younger generation such as myself, are shifting towards casual-fine dining — establishments that offer great value, quality food and convenience at the expense of some of the formalities and service level of fine dining. L'Atelier is our way of expressing these ideas while adding something new to Cilantro's repertoire.

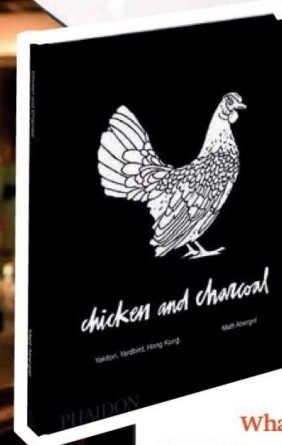
**When did you join the family business?**

In early 2022, just as things were beginning to open up in Malaysia after two long years of Covid-19 restrictions. Growing

up, I witnessed firsthand the dedication, hard work and values that have been the cornerstones of our family's legacy. My decision to join is not just a reflection of my ties but also my deep admiration for the business' mission and potential for growth. While I may lack direct industry experience, I am approaching this opportunity with an open mind, a willingness and commitment to learn from the many skilled individuals in the company.

**You come from a family of famous foodies. What have been your most memorable family meals and why?**

With mum [Low Yat Group executive director Low Su Ming] and dad [IGB group CEO Tan Boon Lee] regularly cooking for us since we were kids, naturally my siblings and I were infected with the same love and passion for food. We all love to cook, and the meals we make as a family are always the best and most fun. This



even affects the places we choose to holiday in, which end up being strongly motivated by food. Some of our best meals so far have been in Italy and Japan, but I'm sure there are many more to come.

**What food-centric books would you recommend?**

Matt Abergel's cookbook *Chicken and Charcoal*, based on Yardbird, his yakitori restaurant in Hong Kong, is one that I enjoyed and still revisit from time to time. The *Modernist Cuisine* series is another good one I like to read when it comes to cooking techniques and in-depth recipes. But most of the time, I get my recipes from YouTube or from watching cooking or food-related shows on Netflix.

**Many chic restaurants now also have their own Spotify playlist. If you could create one for Cilantro, what songs would you pick?**

It's funny you ask that because when I first came in, I was surprised to find we were still using an old MP3 player and stereo system, along with a playlist I'm not sure I want to know the age of! While I don't have any particular songs in mind, I think music should reflect and complement the setting and identity of the restaurant. In the case of Cilantro, this would mean something classical and elegant with a slightly jazzy element to keep things interesting.

**What are you listening to right now?**

A lot of French, as I've been working on putting together the playlist for L'Atelier, which I feel should help to create a lively ambience in the restaurant.

**What do some of your upcoming travel plans look like?**

With the renovations of IGB's hotels in Kota Kinabalu and Ipoh progressing well, I've been travelling back and forth between these locations more frequently. It's a good reason to go try the local food, which I've been thoroughly impressed by so far. When I do find the time, however, I hope to visit Bangkok, Singapore or maybe even Australia to keep up with their vibrant and evolving F&B scenes.

**Describe your idea of a perfect weekend.**

I like to spend my weekends relaxing after a long work week. I recently found myself playing more golf, as it is a good way for me to unwind and catch up with friends and family. A round of golf, a nice meal to follow, and drinks at a bar to top things off. I'd also go to the cinema if any good movies are on or just spend time at home trying out new recipes. ■

— As told to Diana Khoo