



A RIVA-LUTIONARY CHEF

FRENCH NATIONAL
MICKAEL DO VAN RECENTLY
TOOK THE REINS OF THE
PARK LANE'S LEGENDARY
RIVA. ALTHOUGH ONLY 27,
HIS EXPERIENCE COOKING AT
MULTIPLE MICHELIN-STARRED
RESTAURANTS IN PARIS MAKES THIS
AMBITIOUS CUISINIER ONE TO WATCH.

TEXT JASSMYN GOH PHOTOS AA KRESNA

Do Van's dishes are as much about composition and appearance, as they are about taste.



It is often said that the dishes at fine-dining restaurants are like works of art. If food can indeed become art, then Mickael Do Van, the new executive chef at Riva, certainly qualifies as an artist. Just after meeting him, he focused his well-trained eye on a carefully assembled dish that had just left the kitchen. Although it already looked impressive, he grabbed a pair of tweezers to carefully adjust some delicate black truffle slices until he felt the composition of the dish was perfect.

It makes sense that Do Van has such high aesthetic and gustatory standards. Although only 27-years-old, he has already worked in the kitchens of some of Paris' most prestigious two and three Michelin-starred restaurants, working directly under such legendary chefs as Eric Briffard, Jacques Cagna, Bernard Pacaud and Jean-Francois Peige.

Growing up in Paris within a food-loving family, with parents who owned a fine dining restaurant, Do Van says he has been interested in cooking since he was young. He says that, by the age of 16, he was already seriously contemplating a career in cuisine. When asked why, he simply laughed and said, "I wanted to cook because I like to eat." But, he added more seriously, "It is also because I find this work creative, which is important to me."

His creativity is evident in the dishes he has come up with since arriving in the capital at the start of this year. One of the most remarkable dishes he presented *The*

Peak was centered around an egg that he managed to both soft-boil and deep fry, crumbed in a crispy coating of gingerbread crumbs. Knowing the difficulty most amateur chefs have simply timing a regular soft-boiled egg, dilettantes can only imagine how difficult it would be to deep-fry one while keeping the yolk runny. Do Van knows the exact timing and temperature required to achieve the effect.

But the dish is more than a technical feat. The unusual egg's runny yolk is used as one of the sauces (the other being an earthy black truffle emulsion) for batons of bread, toasted with a foie gras spread, to be dipped into. It is a dish that is simultaneously fun and refined.

Do Van said the dish was inspired by a recent trip to the golf course. The batons represent golf clubs and the egg both the ball and hole. He says many of his dishes are inspired by things he does and sees in his life.

"When I have a good time, I really want to immortalise that moment. When you do something and think, 'Oh that's great,' that is the experience and feeling that I want to capture," he said.

To create those kinds of experiences, Do Van believes only the finest ingredients will suffice. "It is only when you find the best products to realise your idea that you can really start to create."

Do Van said one of his first challenges was learning to source high-quality produce and ingredients that met his lofty standards



“IT IS ONLY WHEN YOU FIND THE BEST PRODUCTS TO REALISE YOUR IDEA THAT YOU CAN REALLY START TO CREATE.”



of quality, but he said he is luckily starting during a good season for black truffles, as well as Bresse pigeon, which he says is a bird that deserves more attention here. Almost all of his dishes we sampled, even his superlative chocolate dessert, contained a generous amount of truffles. It is clear to see that Do Van really wants to spoil his customers.

“If you pay this much for fine food, you expect to receive fine food. That’s why I like using truffles and I put in a sufficient amount,” he said.

Do Van’s dishes are refined, but he is certainly not dogmatic about his cooking. He says ultimately fine-dining is about giving the customer the best experience. For example, when asked what he would do if a customer ordered an expensive tenderloin steak well done (not an uncommon occurrence in Jakarta), he said he would not immediately refuse, although he would attempt to persuade the diner to change their mind.

“It may be the guest’s choice to have it well done, but I’ll encourage them to try it medium rare. And if they do not like it, then I will change it. I want to be trusted for my expertise so I do not want my vision to be imposed upon. I just want everybody to try,” he said.

Do Van is eager to make a name for himself in Jakarta and hopes to be one of the people who helps elevate the city’s fine-dining standards. But he has a loftier goal in mind as well—to become the first chef in Jakarta to earn his restaurant a Michelin star. While it’s a tall order, it is one that this chef seems to have the pedigree and passion to pull off. 🍷