



club lounge



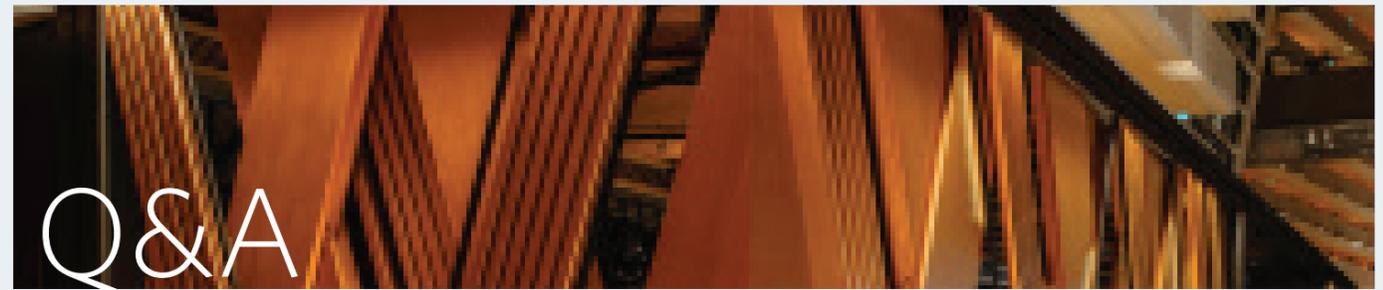
THE GYSPY CHEF

With many chefs opening restaurants worldwide it seems that cooking isn't the only skill needed nowadays. This is certainly true of David Myers, the travelling Californian chef who is making inroads globally.

Managing Editor, Joanne Jeyes spoke to the charismatic chef in his restaurant Adrift in the iconic Marina Bay Sands about how he adapts to doing business from city to city and his personal development as a business man and international chef.



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You have just celebrated one year of Adrift, how has the past year been?

It's been great; such an experience. Whenever you open a restaurant in a new market, to me there are always a unique set of challenges. Doesn't matter if it's Singapore, Tokyo or London - you have to be able to navigate and adapt. That's the beauty of this business, and one of the things that I really enjoy about being an international chef - we are able to open in these new cultural environments.

You like to source local seasonal food. How do you do that in Singapore?

It's obviously difficult here. When I say I use local in Singapore I'm talking about south east Asia. That's the reality. We also bring in products from California. There's a great farmers market right by where I live in LA - it's literally picked by our team on the ground in LA and put on a plane that afternoon, and flown here. We get some really great produce and it feels a little bit like home; and I think our customers really like it. We also import from Japan as some of the produce there is spectacular. But we do try to use some ingredients that are considered local. We get these amazing Indonesian potatoes for example, that we use for seaweed butter potatoes.

You've been quoted as saying your food is NOT fusion. Explain that to me.

I don't even know what fusion is - what is that? Unfortunately in the 80's and 90's fusion blew up in to this out of control, undefinable style of cuisine. It seems a bad word now - for us chefs anyway. I don't look at my food as fusion - I look at it as **my** cuisine. I love Japan, I love Asia in general and I like to bring those styles of ingredients and thoughts in to my cooking. It's also a kind of homage to California - bringing together my love of home with my love of Asia.

Every chef bring influences from their travels, what they're reading or from things that they're interested to their food. That's how they grow.

Originally, at college you took a business course. How did you end up being a chef?

My goal at school was to do international business. I've always been intrigued by other cultures, I wanted to travel, I wanted to do business in other countries. I didn't know what kind of business that was - a lawyer, finance, who knew. I just knew I wanted to do international business. During that time I was cooking for friends, always testing things out. I realised that I wanted to do something that I was really passionate about and that I loved - and that was cooking. So, I thought I'd give it a go.

How did you start out?

I went out in a suit and tie and knocked on the door of the best restaurant in my college town at the time and I got a job. At the time it was only doing salads - but it was at the best restaurant in town. The chef was German and ran a really tough kitchen, absolutely meticulous, but I had a great start there. I learnt how to clean, how to organise, how to flavour. It was tough, I was the youngest there and I had my butt kicked many times, but I found home and I really loved it and never looked back.

It was around then I came upon Charlie Trotter's Cookbook - written by an amazing chef from Chicago. I opened that book and I felt like I'd found home. The food - brilliant and ahead of its time - is still relevant today. Here's a guy whose whole model of cooking was Japanese minimalism, American ingenuity and European technique - was that fusion? After reading it I knew I had to work with Charlie Trotter. So I flew to Chicago, knocked on the door and asked for a job. I wasn't going to leave until they got me job.

So were you aiming high - or got lucky?

No, I don't think I got lucky at all. I wanted to work for the best, I read the book and knew he was the best. I was all about whatever the most challenging experience could be - I wanted the toughest challenge, the hardest experience. I wanted the best, that's all. And that was without

doubt the best experience I had. It was my 'going to Harvard'. After working with Charlie Trotter in Chicago everything was easy. There was nothing that anyone could throw at me that would be harder than that.

I was there about a year and a half before he sent me to France to work. I didn't have a passport, had never been out the country and there I was moving to France - to work in a Michelin 3 star. This was a beautiful place and such a wonderful experience. But easy compared to Chicago.

Now you are a business man and a chef, which side do you err to?

I see myself as both; you have to be able to do both. I enjoy the learning process of business as it doesn't come naturally, whereas cooking comes naturally. I'm constantly learning and reading to educate myself.

A chef nowadays has to do both anyway. In the past you had a general manager, a maitre D, a cook and an owner that ran the business for you. Now, chefs are owners **and** have to know how to run the business.

What have you learned along the way?

I think the biggest and most important thing I learned is that I can't do it all - and I don't need to do it all. I don't need to have the answer to everything - I just need to hire the best people that have the answers to those things. I don't run everything in my group I have people that do certain jobs that are much better at those jobs than I am.

A general manager of a very famous restaurant once told me "do you think Michael Jackson wants to write his contracts? No, he wants to sing. People wanted him to sing." I really took that to heart. He didn't mean don't continue to learn, grow or study the business, just don't make that your focus. If your talent is creating restaurants, creating dishes, then do that. That's not to say people don't evolve



The Lobster Roll is not to be missed.

and things change and move on. For me I'd get bored just doing that, I need to be opening new restaurants internationally - I need new things.

What are the challenges you've faced doing business in different countries?

There's always challenges, business is a challenge. Different cultures have different ways of doing business, for example doing business in Japan – which is one of my favourite places to do business – is unique, and challenging. For a start, there's a language barrier. I can get by but I am not fluent enough to be able to handle negotiation. I also don't have the formality down to do it appropriately. But I really enjoy the process of doing business there because Japan is a hospitality culture – there is never a business deal that's done in an office. You may have nailed out all your terms, but I guarantee when you go out for dinner and drinks afterwards, that's when the real deal comes. It's the only place in the world where a deal can truly be done on a handshake,.

How does Hong Kong differ?

Hong Kong is like New York times a thousand. It's hyper competitive, always moving, changing constantly, non stop. I have to go in to a state of total zen in order to cope with it as it's so intense and in your face. But I appreciate how they get things done and that level of intensity – it helped open a restaurant very quickly for me there. But it is a different environment.

There's always things lost in translation – no matter where you are, could be Singapore, Tokyo, Hong Kong – you always have to be careful, because what you say can be misinterpreted and vice versa.

How do you deal with that?

It's trial and error, taking time, reconfirming. Communication is everything. What I've realised the most whilst doing business in these different markets is that relationships are everything.

For example, the middle east is a culture where you sit down and you talk about everything except business. You have dinner, take your time; it would be rude to go straight in to business. It's about hospitality. They may want your brand, your brand may do good numbers, bring incredible business to them and have a certain appeal, but if they don't like you, I don't think they'll do a deal with you.

It comes down to relationship and having good partners – and trusting your partners to help you realise the the vision you've agreed on, it's always about trying to be a good partner.

Do you always work with local partners?

Yes, always. But the local partner could be a worldwide group that understands how the local market works. I'm interested in doing business with very established and strong partners who have vision and success.

As a brand, how do you ensure consistency globally, in your product, suppliers and team?

It's all about the team. The team that's on the ground and the team that oversees it all. I am heavily involved in that, my finger is on the pulse

of all the restaurants and I cycle through all the restaurants on a monthly basis. I live in LA but I'm here in Singapore for example, two weeks of every month.

How do you cope with the travelling?

I can work well and sleep well on a plane! Actually it's nice down time on a plane, I love it. When I first started opening globally I had to look at myself and really see what I wanted. Was it doable, was it something I could truly handle and could I deal with the sacrifices? But I have plans I want to continue and I enjoy the interational componenet.

I do things for myself to make sure I'm healthy I'm careful with what I eat, I exercise regularly and I try to take time off. It's important to have time to decompress – the plane is a good time to do that.

What is next for you?

I have a new project in Nagoya called Saltwater - that will be my third in Japan. I'm also looking at other key cities. I've got about ten concepts in my head that I want to see realised, so far three have been.

Can you see yourself breaking in to yet to develop countries?

No, for me it's business and it's about key cosmopolitan cities that can sustain a restaurant such as ours. I want to do each one properly in the right way over time.

With the Michelin Guide coming to Singapore, how important is it to you to earn one again (David previously gained a star at Sona in LA)?

It isn't our focus. That wasn't our intention to go for Michelin star. If we earn one - and I think we certainly work hard enough to - that's great. But it's not our focus. I do think it's great for Singapore to have Michelin coming and I think that it cements the fact that Singapore is an incredible culinary and cosmopolitan destination.

Finally, what are you favourite foody spots here in Singapore?

I had a wonderful lunch at Angeleno recently and a fabulous dinner at Burnt Ends; both of these places are great. When I'm craving Japanese there are a couple of good Yakatori places I love to visit. A good friend of mine has opened a sushi restaurant in the Marriot Tang that is remarkable. I also love the hawker stands and will often go to Lau Pau Sat for sate late at night.



Hints of fresh green, warm wood tones and quirky seating arrangements add up to an interesting dining space at Adrift.



Succulent Iberico Pork



Each dish is a treat for the eye.



ADRIFT - MARINA BAY SANDS

Set inside the atrium of the iconic Marina Bay Sands, Adrift manages not to get lost amongst the other 'celebrity' restaurants by maintaining an air of charm, quirkiness and warmth that welcomes diners in. The design of the restaurant reveals David's love of travel, with images of geisha girls next to images of paris and Ang Kor Wat hung in light box frames in the private dining room. A mix of size and style of table in the main dining room all in elegant wood hues work well with fresh green soft furnishings to create a great space.

We sat at the suspended sofa style seats that are hung like swings in front of the huge floor to ceiling windows at the back of the restaurant. Full of light it was the perfect place to sit and relax over lunch. If it's more of a business vibe you need, the large round tables in the middle offer a good option too.

If you really need to impress, or have a conference or larger meeting to host Adrift also

offer the option of a private dining room that can cater for up to 40 guests.

There is the choice of a la carte or a set two or three course lunch - we opted for the three course lunch and were pleasantly surprised at the price at just \$48++ In true Asian style the plates can be shared or taken individually.

To say the food we received was beautiful is like saying MBS in quite tall. Exquisite to look at, every dish – from the pile of rice crackers served with the oh so addictive Yuzu Kosho Aioli to the satisfyingly hearty Pork Tonkotsu sandwich – was presented with justifyingly proud aplomb. The plates, the garnish and the colours all worked together to feed the eyes.

The chefs didn't let David down on taste either (he created the menu but leaves his trusty team to realise his vision) as each dish was delicious. Unusual flavours are brought together – in a non fusion way of course. We loved the warm duck salad with juicy pieces of mango and red chillies combined with the peppery rocket and the just pink inside and crispy on the outside duck.

We were also lucky enough to try the lobster roll – a piece of soft, cake-like-bread-heaven that is not to be missed. And, on recommendation from

David himself, the burger and hand cut fries didn't disappoint either.

Some lovely touches like an unexpected round of Happy Birthday (we were celebrating a 'biggie') and super attentive staff – not in an obtrusive way, but in a just there when you need them way – the whole experience was one I'm keen to repeat.

For a business lunch you will not only impress clients with your choice of unique venue in one of the most obvious places in Singapore, but will also will live up to the highest of foodie expectations. Also a great option for a relaxed dinner whilst travelling in Singapore too.

If Adrift is any indication, we wouldn't hesitate to try out any of David's other restaurants too. These include Saltwater Kitchen and David Myers Café in Tokyo; Another Place in Hong Kong, Saltwater Kitchen in Nagoya, Japan and there is soon to be a new opening in Dubai. Watch this space!

ADRIFT BY DAVID MYERS
10 Bayfront Avenue, Marina Bay Sands, Singapore. 018956. Tel: 6688 5657.
<http://www.marinabaysands.com/restaurants/celebrity-chefs/adrift.html>
<http://www.gypsychef.com>