

COOK_inc.

international food magazine



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Table of contents

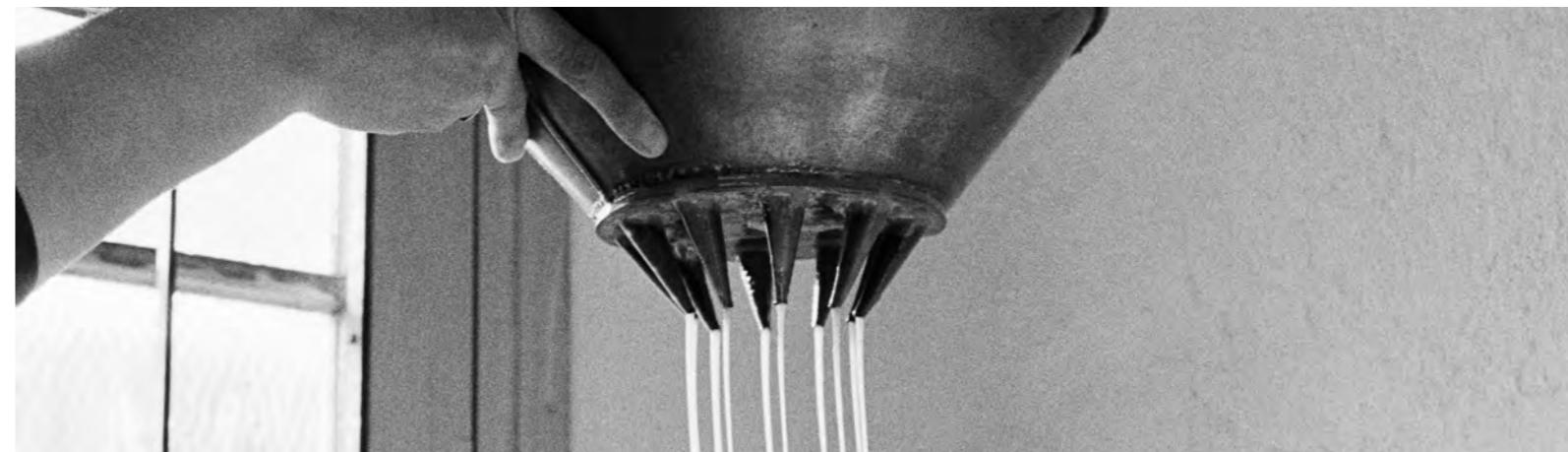
Number 3 - July 2020

Naples
Enzo Coccia
p. 5

Cook_inc.
international food magazine



Lisboa
Em Portugal, os pasteis andam loucos
p. 19



Taipei
Tairroir: Chef Kai Ho
p. 31



Editorial



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Cook_inc. International Magazine

While we haven't been able to meet during this global Covid-19 health emergency, here at Cook_inc. we'd love to share with you some specially chosen articles published in previous editions of the magazine in Italy. So, we are releasing a series of online mini-editions featuring some of these compelling stories of food, people and places. They reflect our deep-felt passion for seeking out fresh and exciting restaurants and dining experiences and sharing them with our readers through a fusion of wonderful writing and eye-catching photography.

The second dispatch will take you on a gastronomic journey stretching from Naples to Lisboa and onto Taipei. With this unique library of virtual magazines, we'd love you to take some time out and enjoy these eclectic culinary stories both in the original language and alongside selected translations into English.

We hope to feed your appetite for beautiful food and destinations that may be out of reach at the moment but can still be savoured in your own home as we all look forward to planning dinner reservations and inspiring travel in the near future.



SULLE MIGLIORI
TAVOLE DEL MONDO





Enzo Coccia

The Neapolitan pizza maker who dared to challenge Naples

WORDS by TANIA MAURI
PHOTOS by ALESSANDRA FARINELLI

Enzo Coccia at Capodimonte Museum

If a capital of the soul existed, halfway between east and west, the five senses and philosophy, between honor and deception, it would have to be here. Via Spaccanapoli cleaves Napoli; a straight, narrow and boisterous road stretch that is slightly longer than a kilometer and divides the enormous agglomeration in two. It is the heart of this Babel of history.

"Il prato in fondo al mare" - The meadow at the bottom of the sea

Stanislao Nievò

A BIT OF HISTORY

Naples envelops and overwhelms you. A crossroads of cultures and influences, of "misery and nobility", Naples is a metropolitan oxymoron with a working-class soul that captivates and conquers because of its strong contradictions. Over the centuries, Naples has been criss-crossed by different people and cultures that have strongly influenced the city. Under the rule of Spanish King Alfonso V of Aragon, it became one of the most important centers of the Renaissance and Humanism and, thanks to Charles of Bourbon, a true capital of the Mediterranean on a par with London, Vienna and Paris in politics, architecture, art and culture. Naples, however, reached its peak in the 1800s as the capital of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, becoming a beacon of innovation in every sector thanks to the well-known Bourbon inventions. At the time, Naples was the third capital in Europe - after London and Paris - to light the streets with 350 gas lamps. It could boast building the first suspension bridges in Italy, installing the first electric telegraph line, opening the first hostel for the poor, inaugurating the first railway line and first station in Italy (the Naples-Portici) and building the first railway tunnel in the world. Other feats included hosting Europe's first opera house (the San Carlo), Europe's first astronomical observatory (in Capodimonte), the first seismological observatory in the world, the first musical conservatories, the first secular universities in Europe (the Federico II) as well as several schools of Arts and Professions, creating the Italy's first pension system (with the Law on Jubilees and Pensions of 3 May 1816) and setting on paper the first socialist charter of the world (San Leucio silk factory). Naples is a city full of life and history, with a glorious past and an uncertain future, nurtured and supported by a people with unlimited resources who, with ingenuity and cunning, are able to adapt to the many adversities and opportunities.

Was it not perhaps a stroke of genius that in 1889, the golden century for the city, inspired pizza maker Raffaele Esposito to show up at the Reggia di Capodimonte with a pizza that paid tribute to the three colors of the Italian flag (red tomato, white mozzarella and green basil) which he called Margherita in honor of Queen Margherita of Savoy, who loved pizza so much? This is what the legend says and fellow citizens jokingly recall "Raffaele, don't get angry, it's nothing! But you should have known better than to bring a pizza Margherita to Queen Margherita di Savoia! Couldn't you have prepared a plate of pasta with some ragù or some pesto, or even a lasagna instead? See what you've done!" (Rafè, nun te piglià collera, è cos'è niente! Però pure tu con 'sta pizza Margherita, alla Regina Margherita di Savoia non





potevi preparare un piatto di pasta, nu ragù, 'na genovese, 'na lasagna. Vedi un po' che cosa hai combinato!") Indeed, it was thanks to the Margherita that pizza was promoted from popular street food to a dish for the wealthier classes. According to philologist Emanuele Rocco, pizza was born much earlier than 1889. He believes that its origins can be traced back to a period between 1796 and 1810 given that in the second volume of *Usi e costumi di Napoli e contorni descritti e dipinti* written by Francesco de Bourcard and published in 1858, the author described the various condiments for pizza including basil and "thin slices of mozzarella" as well as "pomidoro, aglio e olio" (tomato, garlic and oil).

But this is history. Pizza actually has very ancient and different origins. The ancient Egyptians were the first to discover yeast, by pure chance, thanks to the impure pasta that would swell up and began cooking it in cone ovens. The ancient Greeks and Romans, instead, used to knead the dough into a kind of focaccia, which were used as dishes and seasoned with salt, herbs, garlic and onion. It is only in the 1500s that one encounters, for the first time, the word pizza in the Neapolitan dialect. The word indicated a soft focaccia with oil and salt, as the poet and essayist Benedetto Di Falco states in his description of the ancient places of Naples; and it is then that we find the first recipe for the Mastunicola, which was made with lard, cheese, basil and pepper. Later, the pizza with chickpeas and a spread of fish scrap became extremely popular. It is only with the discovery of the New World that the exotic red berries, commonly called pomidoro, arrived and then in the mid-eighteenth century made their way into the first recipe recorded by Vincenzo Corrado in his *Il cuoco galante* where he used to describe the eating habits in the city of Naples.

We can therefore say that, although pizza (even if it would be more correct to speak of flat bread) was born in the Mediterranean basin and is the result of different identities and influences, the Neapolitans have loved, appreciated and made it their own as no other people of the time. Pizza as an intrinsically democratic food that is able to feed hungry mouths and is readily available, that is cooked in the wood-burning ovens of the houses doubling as shops and that is sold outdoors or along the streets and alleys of the city. It was often the job of the scugnizzi (young rascals) to carry the stove where the pizzas remained hot on their heads and then deliver them to customers at home or on the street whilst hawking and peddling their goods. Street food par excellence, pizza was cheap and nutritious for the poorest but was also food of the nobility, who enriched it with the finest ingredients, as highlighted by Alexandre Dumas in his *Le Corricolo* where he describes pizza as "the gastronomic thermometer of the market and of society". During the winters in Naples, pizza was the only food for humble people and was flavored with oil, lard, tallow, cheese, tomatoes, or salted anchovies. After the Second World War and following the economic crisis in the South that lead to massive emigration, pizza breaks out of its geographical boundaries and conquers the world with its charm and deliciousness. It becomes a synonym of the city of Naples and Sofia Loren, a Neapolitan through and through, stars as its famous testimonial in the film directed by Vittorio De Sica *The Gold of Naples* in 1954. Just outside of her home, Sofia fries calzoni stuffed with salami, cicoli and ricotta in a huge pan full of oil, exactly as tradition dictates.

This precious historical film footage, however, bears witness to a time and a way of life that no longer exists. With the economic boom, even pizza changed. It tried to keep up with the changing times, becoming a business. Pizzerie – pizza parlors – opened as specialized premises. Perhaps too many and certainly progressively larger, pizzerias offered an increasingly wide range of choice where anyone felt authorized to become a pizza maker. And when something loses its soul, it often turns into something completely different, which from being good and healthy becomes unhealthy and harmful. Even today, however, Neapolitans take their pizza very seriously. The Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana (True Neapolitan Pizza Association) was founded in 1984 and claims that there are only two types, the Marinara (tomato, oregano, garlic, extra virgin olive oil and basil) and the Margherita. Furthermore, the Association has established very stringent rules that must be followed when making an authentic Neapolitan pizza: it must be cooked in a wood oven at a temperature of 485°C for no more than 60-90 seconds; its base must be spread out exclusively by hand and must measure no more than 35 cm in diameter with a thickness of 0.4 cm in the central part and with an allowed tolerance of plus or minus 10%.

Pizza with French cheese and mozzarella di Bufala



From left to right: Gourmet Pizza, Pizza with cod fish, mozzarella di bufala and dry tomatoes, Procida Pizza, a slice of Pizza Gourmet

ENZO COCCIA

With the beginning of the new millennium, however, pizza reclaimed its role and a select number of forward-looking pizza makers started asking themselves questions about doughs, leavening, ingredients, cooking techniques and on how to transform a pizza maker from an improviser into a professional who analyzes chemical and physical processes linking water, flour and yeast, who studies new combinations of ingredients, who experiments with innovative dough and alternative cooking methods.

Enzo Coccia is among the Maestros of Neapolitan pizza and is recognized as such by his colleagues. Coccia was born kneading dough but possesses great critical spirit and a general, historical and scientific culture that is not limited to the world of pizza. So much so, that Enzo Coccia is one of the first to question and reinterpret the role of the pizza maker, adapting his vision and then dramatically changing his dough and ingredients. For this reason, we have chosen him as our guide during our journey into the world of pizza.

As a kid, Enzo starts helping his father Antonio in the family pizzeria located in the working class neighborhood of Duchesca, near the central train station; and here, he learns the secrets of fried pizza from Nonna Fortuna. Enzo has passion and drive, he studies and works, he travels and observes. Soon, something clicks in his mind and Enzo feels he is ready for a change. The neighborhood where he was born and raised cannot offer him great opportunities to develop, nor is it an ideal place to raise children. Coccia therefore decides to make the first significant change and leaves the historic center of Naples to open his pizzeria in the well-to-do neighborhood of the Vomero, far from the alleys where the ancient pizzerias are located. Additionally, he does not call it pizzeria, but chooses to use the original spelling, pizzAria La Notizia (The News), a name that is inspired by Orson Welles' masterpiece Citizen Kane where the protagonist states that "if the title is large, the news immediately becomes important" (thus, if the pizza is great, La Notizia immediately becomes important...).

Coccia is well known, people are curious, and the pizzeria works. Without arrogance and with great determination, he starts reflecting more deeply and scientifically on how pizza is made, "Pizza is the embodiment of Neapolitan culinary tradition. If to the vast majority of people, it may seem to be a trivial product - a disc of leavened dough, garnished to taste according to the pizza maker's inspiration and baked in a wood oven for a very short time - in reality, pizza is something much more complex. Flour, water, yeast and salt are among the most common ingredients used in the kitchen. However, their nature, their mutual interactions, relationships, and the temporal sequence with which they are mixed, have a crucial influence on the dough and its properties. The weather, the humidity and the way in which the preparation and cooking phases are carried out are mirrored in the aroma, flavor and digestibility of the pizza," Coccia explains. "Making pizza for someone means giving pleasure. It is unconceivable to think of using poor ingredients, such as supermarket leftovers or unsuitable products, such as seed oil. Quality is something you have inside of yourself and that represents you".

Thus, Enzo revolutionizes the way we think about pizza: the dough becomes the protagonist starting from the selection of raw materials, which once combined, create a soft and perfect mass, ready to welcome high-quality ingredients combined with each other. "Using the best ingredients that Campania is the key that brings people to eat my pizza. The time had come to say "Enough!" to mozzarella strands and to start using instead the cream of our ingredients such as dairy products, tomatoes and extra virgin olive oil. My idea was to transform the popular dish that is now known in the most remote corners of the world, into an authentic gastronomic delight". An all-round quality advocate, Enzo was among the editors of the code of conduct regulating the production of Neapolitan pizza and in 2009, fought to have the Neapolitan "queen" certified as a Guaranteed Traditional Specialty recognized by the European Union. "A means to certify our history. A point of departure and not one of arrival. A tool to help us understand what the rules to be followed are when preparing a pizza that complies with the guidelines of the Neapolitan culinary tradition." Coccia adds.

The road undertaken is the right one and so, in 2010, Enzo opens a new pizzeria, just steps away from his first one. Driven by his desire to dare more and more, the new venue offers new flavors and innovative horizons, paving the way for what many have baptized the "gourmet pizzas". Just like Naples, once again Enzo is an overflowing river that sweeps over everything: he suggests new and alternative ingredients such as figs, fresh cod fish, lemons and truffles, to name a few; and replaces beer with wine thanks to what he has learned while attending the AIS sommelier course in Naples, thus creating a new synergy between wine and pizza. A shattering earthquake for the city of Naples and for its more traditional pizzaioli who are disinclined to change. People, however, follow him down this new path and his place is sold out every evening.



Then, the first attacks begin. The Neapolitan Pizzaioli Association, of which he is a founding member, releases a statement saying that, as a working class product, pizza need not be so complicated and was risking losing its own identity. Nevertheless, Enzo is hard headed and stands by his idea: "Pizza is not the daughter of a second-tier God just like pizza makers are not only a cog in the wheel. The time has come to restore dignity to pizza makers, veritable craftsmen who have an art, and respectability to the leavened dough that must be tasty, light and, above all, highly digestible".

Coccia is unstoppable and stubborn; and is a staunch supporter of the new wind that is also blowing beyond the city of Naples, in particular in Lazio and in Veneto where others are moving on his same wavelength, creating further turmoil among the more incredulous and suspicious puritans. Enzo establishes a consulting and training company, Pizza Consulting, to educate and to teach how to recognize real pizza from false one and from bad imitations. Students come from Japan, Canada, India, Africa and the United States, but also from every part of Italy. Many travel to learn from Enzo the techniques and secrets not so much of a simple recipe but of an ancient art that has been handed down from father to son for centuries.

Coccia also recognizes the economic role pizza has, and has had over the centuries. He acknowledges its function as a mirror of a city like Naples, as the amalgamation of the evolution of a territory, as the identity of a people that has always been influenced by other cultures. "Diversity should not scare us. We should embrace, welcome and enrich our own mapping of the other; weave our own heritage with that of strangers and then, systematically, start again at full speed: speed that is made up of creativity, evolution, reasoning, culture, openness and the desire to do something. Diversity as a melting pot of products and people, behaviors and emotions, which are woven into a continuous dialogue between modernity and tradition, between past and present. The engine of a dynamic process of knowledge and of sharing and respecting quality and territory with at the core the constant desire to find and select the best artisanal creations of our land among the smallest agricultural and productive entities".

Enzo Coccia can be considered the master of a new path, of a new way of interpreting tradition, the creator of a pizza that is in step with the times. Although he wasn't immediately understood by most people, Enzo has been a source of inspiration for those who have decided to explore what lies beyond popular knowledge and for those who wanted to have a more scientific and technical approach towards making pizza. "Little Chemists Grow Up" with Enzo Coccia given that even the current generations of the ancient Neapolitan families have started studying and using quality products, conducting research and selecting, experimenting and sharing experience, following a path that recently has led Unesco to add the art of the Neapolitan pizza maker to its list of "intangible cultural heritage of humanity." An official recognition that Enzo has strongly campaigned for and that he recognizes as being "the cultural function and the enhancement of an individual who is placed at the center of the kitchen. Artisanship is something that belongs to the individual, that evolves, that stems from the heart passing through the hands to reach the head and then go back to the heart. The pizza maker becomes a protagonist thanks to his art, his history and thanks to his ability to manipulate the dough. Pizzaioli have their own way of speaking, of expressing themselves and of communicating. This is an important social recognition for pizza makers".

Passion, technique, study, culture, family, leisure time, books, cinema, theater: these are the cornerstones of Enzo Coccia's life. A man who never stops - he who falters is lost - so much so that after the two PizzAria, Enzo opened 'O sfizio d'a Notizia, a modern venue where one can taste mupstarelle - crispy stuffed sandwiches that pay tribute to the Neapolitan marella (snack) - and fried pizzas paired with Champagne or Prosecco.

Looking towards the future, Enzo has involved his children in his projects. "For whom did I build all of this if not for them, for my children for whom I am trying to secure a dignified future?" In April 2018, Enzo plans to crown his dream of a pizzeria in Sant'Agata sui Due Golfi complete with a vegetable garden, guest bedrooms and a swimming pool.

Pizzaria la Notizia

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www.pizzarialanotizia.com

Pizza with stewed escarole, raisins and cicoli



Enzo Coccia Pizzas

The pioneer of a new way of making Neapolitan pizza, Enzo only uses the highest quality ingredients and devotes special attention to the ripening and leavening processes. During the initial rising, the pizza dough must be thoroughly worked so that it incorporates air thus becoming soft, velvety, light and pliable. Smooth and resistant, the dough already has the first alveolations inside. At room temperature, it takes about 10 to 12 hours - and never more than 14 - for the dough balls to rise. Cooking, in the wood oven, is very quick and the pizza remains crisp and soft at the same time with a medium thickness crust - no place for "canotto" or gargantuan rims in Coccia's kitchen - that is tasty and well cooked.

His Pizza **Marinara** is made with San Marzano tomatoes that are minced by hand and with non-invasive garlic and oregano and his **Margherita** is topped with buffalo mozzarella and pecorino Romano. Both tell the story of excellence and high quality that satisfy the palate and stomach in perfect harmony.

And then a series of crossover pizzas:

The Pizza with stewed escarole, raisin and cicoli

(cicoli are pressed cakes of fatty pork) pays tribute to the Neapolitan beef roll made with raisins, pine nuts and spices. The escarole is stewed and sautéed in a pan with olive oil, Pantelleria capers and Gaeta black olives, which is typical calzone stuffing of the Christmas period eaten at lunch on the 24th of December to remain light or 'a support'. Raisins are added as an homage to the Arab heritage together with the pine nuts and the cicoli, which lose the fat while cooking in the oven and become crunchy.

The Pizza with cod, buffalo mozzarella and semi-dry tomatoes is another of Enzo's specialties. Baccalà (cod) arrived in Naples only in the 16th century and was immediately considered a practical and functional product given it could be stored dry. Coccia uses it in his pizzas in its raw version - soaked, desalted and cut into strips - placing the buffalo mozzarella from Campania and the semi-dry tomatoes at its side, which give a sweetish aftertaste.

In the Pizza with French cheese and buffalo mozzarella

Coccia revisits the concept of the 4 seasons pizza replacing the traditional ingredients with 4 different cheeses (two Italian and two French) together with buffalo sausage. Each wedge is separated both when cooking and out of the oven, and topped with buffalo mozzarella, smoked buffalo provola cheese, blue-veined brie and truffle brie and before being brought to the table with buffalo sausage and rosemary. A very tasty and popular pizza to be enjoyed starting from the more gentle flavor to the strongest one in a growing crescendo of intensity and tastes diluted by the scent of the rosemary.

Pizza Procida

We return to Vincenzo Corrado's treaty of 1781 entitled *Dal cibo pitagorico ovvero erbaceo per uso de' nobili e de' letterati* (Concerning Pythagorean or herbaceous food to be consumed by Nobles and Literates) where he writes about tomatoes cooked on the grill. This is an identity pizza inspired by the fishermen from the island of Procida, who in the summertime cook tomatoes cut into wedges on the grill and then put them on slices of crispy and warm bread with a little olive oil. Here, the white pizza dough disc replaces the bread and the tomatoes are cooked with the oven off. Once the pizza base is cooked, the smoked tomatoes, smoked scamorza from Agerola dei Monti Lattari and a mix of parsley, garlic, oregano and basil are added with a splash of olive oil - a simple and delicious pizza that tastes like summer.

Pizza Gourmet

Finally a Pizza Gourmet, not for all but very interesting made with a buffalo mozzarella base at the beginning of the cooking, fresh tuna added halfway through and dried algae, raw ginger, hot peppers and flaxseed mixed with tuna at the end.

Here is Enzo Coccia's original dough recipe for those who want to make pizza at home with an electric or gas oven. Should you use a wood oven, the cooking phases and the recipe are different.

Ingredients for the dough (4 pizzas)

Water - 1 l
Sea salt - 55 g
Brewer's yeast - 5 g
EVO oil - 2 cl
Sugar - 5 g
Flour - 1.7 - 1.8 kg

Pour a liter of water (at room temperature) into a round large bowl and dissolve the sea salt. Then dilute the brewer's yeast, add the sugar, the olive oil and 30% of the flour (about 550 gr). Start kneading the mix and gradually add the rest of the flour until the desired consistency, called "punto di pasta", is obtained. This operation must last about 20 minutes until a single compact mass is reached. The dough must not be sticky and feel smooth, soft and elastic to the touch. Cover the dough with a damp cloth, leaving it in the same bowl. Allow the dough to rise for 10-12 hours at room temperature.

Remove the dough from the bowl and divide it into 4 sections with a spatula so you can prepare four pizzas in four different pans. Start spreading it out by pressing with your fingertips. Grease the pan and put the dough on it. Allow it to rest for an additional 10 minutes. Turn the oven on until it reaches a temperature of 230°C - 250°C. Garnish the dough according to the recipe you have chosen, bake and cook for about 20 minutes. Remove the pan from the oven and add a little olive oil. Cut and serve the pizza hot.





EM PORTUGAL, OS PASTELEIROS ANDAM LOUCOS

WORDS by ALEXANDRA PRADO COELHO
PHOTOS by PAULO BARATA

Sobremesas mediterrânicas? Estamos a falar de laranja, limão, amêndoas? Não. Estamos a falar de uma nova geração de pasteiteiros que faz coisas como macaron de morcela com grelos e não hesita em usar tomate, pimento assado, alho negro e até choco.

Próximo: **Frutos vermelhos**
Morango, tomate e pimento vermelho. Todos ingredientes de grande qualidade, manuseados o mínimo, para uma sobremesa com sabor fresco e intenso.

"Bacon e especiarias!" Às vezes, garante Carlos Fernandes, a melhor estratégia é mesmo "chegar ao pé da mesa, largar a bomba e vir embora". Largar a bomba, neste caso, significa anunciar os ingredientes que compõem a sobremesa feita por ele e deixar os clientes, geralmente de boca aberta, a tentar lidar com a informação.

Carlos foi, até há pouco tempo, chef pasteleiro no Loco, o restaurante lisboeta de Alexandre Silva, que, com poucas mesas e um menu de degustação ousado, conquistou em pouco tempo uma estrela Michelin. E foi no Loco que Carlos teve a oportunidade de pôr em prática as ideias mais loucas que há já algum tempo lhe passavam pela cabeça.

Vamos voltar um pouco atrás no tempo para o encontrar, alguns anos antes, a estagiar no Martin Berasategui, depois de ter feito o curso de cozinha e pastelaria em Portugal. Nesse dia, em que espreitamos para a cozinha do restaurante do País Basco, em Espanha, vemos Martín a dar ao jovem pasteleiro português espargos para ele pôr numa sobremesa. "Eu olhei para ele", recorda Carlos. "Espargos? Espargos? A sobremesa era um soufflé de chocolate com gelado de caramelo e canela, nunca mais me esqueço. E no momento em que coloquei os espargos, laminados e passados por uma calda de açúcar muito leve, e provei pela primeira vez, foi uma coisa totalmente diferente. Foi esse o momento exato em que me apercebi que há mais numa sobremesa do que aquilo que nós temos pré-concebido." Carlos faz parte de uma nova geração de pasteleiros portugueses que está a agitar as águas e a mudar a forma como olhamos para uma sobremesa, usando produtos que dificilmente imaginávamos. E, formados no mundo da pastelaria tradicional, de base francesa, todos eles tiveram, com espargos ou outra coisa, o seu momento "eureka".

Com Diogo Lopes, hoje chef pasteleiro no Hotel Ritz, em Lisboa e vindo antes do Penha Longa, em Sintra, esse momento aconteceu também durante um estágio, no Fat Duck, de Heston Blumenthal, em Inglaterra. "Existia no Fat Duck uma coisa fantástica que eram os laboratórios de desenvolvimento, em que havia uma equipa multidisciplinar, com engenheiros alimentares, cozinheiros, pasteleiros, food stylists. Percebi que era ali que tomava forma o rigor do desenvolvimento e a criatividade e visão que o Heston Blumenthal queria ver aplicadas no restaurante." Um dia estavam a trabalhar numa sobremesa de Inverno e receberam um carregamento de alho negro. Aos olhos de Diogo parecia o ingrediente mais improvável do mundo. "É um alho fermentado, que parece que está putrefacto, para mim não fazia sentido nenhum usá-lo numa sobremesa. Mas fiquei a observar enquanto eles faziam tudo com aquilo, de espumas a gelados, por ares, que estavam muito em voga na altura. Foi aí que percebi que o produto menos comum é, às vezes, o que traz algo de mais interessante a um prato." A primeira vez que provou foi com a atitude de uma criança "que olha para brócolos e já acha que não vai gostar". Mas depois percebeu que o alho "tem uma complexidade de sabor tão grande, é quase um mix entre o caramelo, o balsâmico, o chocolate".



Curiosamente, o alho negro vai aparecer neste artigo numa das sobremesas de Diogo. Desafiámo-lo, tal como ao Carlos e a Américo dos Santos, chef de pastelaria do Belcanto, Lisboa (o restaurante de José Avillez, duas estrelas Michelin) para fazerem cada um duas sobremesas com produtos portugueses e mediterrânicos. Podiam ter pensado em laranjas, limões, amêndoas, azeite, mas tudo isso seria demaisado fácil. E eles gostam de verdadeiros desafios, por isso o melhor é prepararmo-nos para algumas surpresas.

Antes de Diogo nos revelar como é que usou o alho negro, vamos só fazer um pequeno desvio nesta história para explicar algumas coisas sobre Portugal e o Mediterrâneo. A primeira delas é que Portugal não é banhado pelo Mediterrâneo – tem o Atlântico, embora com características diferentes, tanto na costa ocidental, com águas mais





À direita: *Reinterpretação da Floresta Negra*
Gelado de alho negro, mascarpone de baunilha, ginja e bolota de jivara, coberto com um crocante de bolota e boletos secos
Próximo: Diogo Lopes

frias e agitadas, como a Sul, mais calmo e com temperaturas mais elevadas. No entanto, é um país que segue a dieta mediterrânica, se por isso entendermos que é um consumidor de azeite, vinho, vegetais e frutas, leguminosas, frutos secos e, tradicionalmente (mas não tanto na prática) menos carne e, de preferência, carne de porco, animal do qual aproveitamos tudo, e de que temos duas raças autóctones de grande qualidade (o bísaro e o porco preto alentejano). É relevante saber isto porque o porco também vai aparecer, mais à frente neste texto, numa ou outra sobremesa. Portugal é também, no que diz respeito aos doces, um país com uma extraordinária e muito rica doçaria conventual, que, reza a história, nasceu da criatividade das freiras que tinham excesso de gemas de ovo (usavam as claras para engomar os hábitos e deixá-los firmes) e de açúcar, quando este começou a chegar em grandes quantidades das plantações de cana do Brasil. Desenvolveu-se então, um pouco por todo o país, uma doçaria que é uma verdadeira arte de trabalhar os pontos de açúcar e de criar com dois ou três ingredientes (em muitos doces tradicionais entra também a amêndoas) uma imensa diversidade de sobremesas.

Mas é longe desse universo que estamos nesta nossa história – apesar de um dos doces tradicionais portugueses mais famosos, o Pudim Abade de Priscos, já quebrar fronteiras ao usar toucinho de porco para tornar ainda mais aveludada uma sobremesa de ovos e açúcar. “Eu não faço doçaria tradicional”, diz Carlos. “Tenho um enorme respeito por ela, mas sei que não a domino e portanto o meu caminho não é esse. Prefiro não me meter nos sítios onde sei que não consigo dar o meu melhor.”

O receituário português continua, no entanto, a ser uma fonte de inspiração, sobretudo para Américo, no Belcanto. Mas não da forma que seria de esperar. Américo veio do Norte de Portugal, onde estudou e teve as primeiras experiências profissionais. No início, conta, “como qualquer pasteleiro, refugiava-me muito no chocolate”. Foi no Paparico (no Porto), por onde passou antes do Belcanto, que começou a alargar os horizontes quanto a ingredientes. Mas o grande salto aconteceu no Belcanto. Não foi fácil, confessa. Estava ainda a lidar com dificuldades de integração quando José Avillez lhe perguntou se queria fazer um estágio no El Celler de Can Roca, na Catalunha. Foi uma prova de confiança. Hoje, sente a equipa do Belcanto como uma família e, enquanto pasteleiro, nenhum ingrediente o assusta. Veja-se o caso do mais recente sucesso da carta (e que Américo trouxe também para este artigo). Chama-se Choco porque é uma brincadeira com o choco do mar e com a palavra chocolate. “Este prato nasceu de um convite para participarmos na Feira do Chocolate, em Lisboa. Quando pensámos no choco, disse ao chef ‘pode ser que sim, pode ser que não, se não experimentarmos não sabemos.’” Trabalharam a ideia e o resultado é um gelado de tinta de choco, inspirado nos choquinhos à pé descalço, especialidade do restaurante Ribamar de Sesimbra, malagueta, algas para dar salinidade, incluindo musgo da Irlanda, e coentros, que são uma das ervas aromáticas mais utilizadas na cozinha do Sul de Portugal. “Fomos juntando as peças até atingir-

mos um equilíbrio. No início, o sabor a peixe estava demasiado forte. O açúcar entra no gelado e nas pedras de coentros que são feitas a partir de uma mousse, sabores que a salinidade do prato vai equilibrar. No final, limão, o toque cítrico para dar frescura.”

Noutra carta tinham já apresentado uma ideia bastante louca, também inspirada num prato tradicional português salgado. “Fizemos um macaron de morcela [um enchido] com grelos”, recorda. “Baseamo-nos muito no receituário português e fazemos muita pesquisa”, conta Américo. “Estávamos aí à tarde à conversa, a ver livros de receitas, e aparece uma receita do sangue doce de Valpaços que me despertou a curiosidade. Levava sangue e amêndoas e era servido na tarde da matança do porco, tépido, com uma calda de açúcar e canela. Pensámos: por que não fazer um macaron de morcela?”. A partir do momento em que a ideia nasce, é começar a testar. “Chegámos a experimentar só com o sangue mas não ficava tão bem e então fomos buscar aquele toque do fumo do assado da morcela, que fica ligeiramente adocicado pela caramelização da pele. Recordo-me também de andar a apanhar, em casa com a minha mãe, as flores dos grelos, que dão um pouco de acidez. Fizemos uma emulsão com óleo de colza e as flores dos grelos ainda fechadas, que continuam com pólen, e esse sabor veio equilibrar o doce.”

O que está a acontecer nos últimos anos nas cozinhas de alguns restaurantes de topo é uma diluição das fronteiras entre a cozinha e a pastelaria, afirma Diogo Lopes, que fez a formação para cozinheiro





Sobre: *Mara des Bois*, tributo ao morango Diogo Lopes
Tomate grelhado com tomilho-limão, mara des bois em molho balsâmico, ganache de manjericão e sorbet de morango e yuzu.



e só no final estudou pastelaria – “para poder dizer que tenho as bases”. Acontece que acabou por se apaixonar pela pastelaria e nunca mais olhou para trás. “A partir do momento em que dominamos as bases, que são as da cozinha francesa e são rígidas, podemos fazer adaptações e as nossas próprias versões. O rigor é sempre o ponto de partida, é o que nos permite criar um granizado estabilizado, um sorbet que não derreta assim que chega à mesa, um creme que não está quebrado. Tudo o que vem depois, parte de estudo, de experimentação, de mil e uma coisas. Hoje em dia não há limites.”

As sobremesas vêm geralmente no fim da refeição, mas num menu de degustação não tem que ser sempre assim. Elas podem ser “momentos” que surgem aqui e ali. As fronteiras esbatem-se. “Há toda uma introdução de elementos de cozinha em pastelaria e vice-versa, já temos os sponge cakes que são usados na cozinha, as telhas crocantes que se usavam na pastelaria e fizeram essa transição. Há cada vez maior colaboração entre as equipas de cozinha e as de pastelaria.”

Voltamos então ao alho negro, que Diogo está a trabalhar numa das suas sobremesas. “É uma reinterpretação da Floresta Negra, com bolota, alho negro, vamos usar boletos para dar a sensação do solo, chocolate e ginja.” Gosta de sobremesas monocromáticas, mas o tema aqui não é a cor e sim o produto. Está entusiasmado com a utilização da bolota, por exemplo. Usada para a alimentação dos porcos, é um produto mal-almado e visto como pobre, mas que começa a ser reabilitado. “É uma coisa típica portuguesa. Se for diferente e fizer sentido, é o ideal.”

Carlos no Loco impôs a si mesmo uma limitação que o obrigou a ser mais criativo: não usava chocolate (só, e a pedido de muitas pessoas, nos petit fours servidos com o café). De resto, tudo, ou quase. “Começo geralmente por um desafio. Vais criar alguma coisa com o produto X. Pode ser, por exemplo, espargos brancos – e com esses, por exemplo, demorou quatro anos, mas cheguei lá.” Procurou combinações que fizessem sentido com os espargos brancos e pensou em café e cardamomo e, a seguir, leite. “Depois fui visualizar o empratamento e as texturas. Não queremos o amargo dos espargos, queremos a suavidade, não queremos que o café e o cardamomo se sobreponham. É procurar os equilíbrios.” Noutro exemplo, usou ameixas rainha cláudia, caril indiano amarelo e alho negro. “Exigia técnicas de cozinha, porque eu fazia uma espécie de caldo de carne

mas utilizando os caroços das ameixas e, em vez dos aromáticos típicos, usava caril, alho negro, lima keffir e citronela e deixava reduzir.” Esta redução vai concentrar os açúcares. “No final, nota-se a parte salgada, um toque doce, outro tostado, é um produto muito complexo a nível de sabores e aromas, e o doce está lá apesar de não ser óbvio.” Num restaurante fine dining, com um menu extenso, não acha que faça sentido “acabar com uma sobremesa muito doce e pesada”. “Se na Idade Média se usava imenso açúcar para conservar as coisas, hoje o açúcar tornou-se um factor importante a nível social e económico e acaba por se abusar um bocadinho da sua utilização”.

Nem sempre é fácil convencer os clientes disso. No Loco, Carlos sentiu pela primeira vez “uma liberdade criativa muito grande, uma infinitude de possibilidades”. Mas o restaurante apostou numa grande interacção entre a cozinha e a sala e o chef vem frequentemente à mesa explicar ou mesmo finalizar um prato em frente aos clientes. E aí é preciso estar pronto para todo o tipo de reacções. Voltamos ao “bacon e especiarias!” do início do texto. “É um prato com várias camadas, não só de texturas mas de sabor. Primeiro, um merengue de pimenta rosa, doce mas muito aromático, a seguir gelado de bacon e pó de bacon desidratado, que traz um doce fumado e salgado e, no final, um molho cremoso à base de caril vermelho, açúcar de palma e miso. Nessa altura o bacon ficou para trás e tens outra complexidade de sabores. É muito interessante. Se toda a gente percebe? Não, de todo.”

Mas, às vezes, é só uma questão de psicologia. Numa outra sobremesa, de aipo e caril verde, Carlos percebeu que o melhor era mesmo ficar a conversar um pouco com as pessoas. “Explicava que esta era uma sobremesa que gerava reacções contraditórias e que iam experimentar algo de diferente. Dizia que só uma percentagem mínima de pessoas gostava e havia logo muitos que começavam a dizer que gostavam porque queriam fazer parte desse grupo minoritário. A certa altura, eu tinha a sala cheia de pessoas a dizer que gostavam.” Estavam conquistados.

E, para quem – como chegou a acontecer – chorava dizendo que não podia ficar sem chocolate, havia sempre as bolachinhas servidas no final, com o café.

Sobre: Américo Dos Santos
Próximo: Cone de presunto

Gelado com lascas de Pata Negra, num cone salgado de presunto



Choco di Américo Dos Santos

Gelado de tinta de choco, numa cama de azeite e alga crocante, com ganache de casca de batata



Maneggiare l'irrazionale
è la più grande dote di noi Italiani.

- Massimo Bottura -

LAVAZZA
TORINO, ITALIA, 1895

Taïroir Chef Kai Ho

WORDS by CHIHIRO MASUI
PHOTOS by RICHARD HAUGHTON

Ce soir, je suis à Tairroir, un restaurant dans le quartier de Zhongshan à Taïpei, capitale de la République de Chine ou plus simplement Taïwan*. Au 6ème étage d'un immeuble qui abrite également Ryūgin Taïpei, juste à côté de Raw d'André Chiang. Le nom - la contraction de « Taïwan » et « terroir » - sonne comme une blague. Le style du lieu est moderne, métallique, lumineux, feutré, chic. Je suis à 10000 kilomètres de chez moi à Paris, et c'est mon premier voyage à Taïwan. Tout le monde me l'avait dit. «Tu verras, la street food à Taiwan est formidable. Mais la cuisine gastronomique, bof...» Rien n'était plus faux.



* La République Populaire de Chine (Chine continentale) ne reconnaît pas la République de Chine (Taïwan) qu'elle considère comme faisant partie de la RPC. Malgré l'absence de relations diplomatiques, les deux pays entretiennent des rapports économiques et commerciaux étroits.

Chef Kai Ho

Le premier plat

Dehors, l'air tropical est chaud et moite, mais ici, j'aurais presque froid. Le souffle frais de la climatisation condense l'humidité qui coule sur les baies vitrées. Velouté d'orge, truffe noire du Périgord, brioche de feuille de moutarde. Un très jeune serveur discret pose sur l'épaisse nappe immaculée le tout premier goût de la soirée, un velouté accompagné d'un petit feuilleté. Bienvenue en Asie, où la soupe est bue (et non mangée) avant, pendant, après, à toute heure et la plus chaude possible. Réhydrater le corps ; le refroidir ou le réchauffer, selon sa composition. Le liquide est crémeux avec des traits mauves. Je le bois directement dans sa tasse : il est chaud, brûlant, légèrement sucré, doux en saveurs et textures. Une certaine rusticité qui rappelle la bouillie d'avoine, la soupe de pois, la soupe de pain... et la douceur de la patate douce violette, car voilà d'où proviennent ces jolis traits de couleur et de sucrosité. Je me régale d'une gorgée bienfaisante et tourne mon attention vers le feuilleté. Je ne m'attends pas à des miracles car qui dit feuilletage dit beurre, et le beurre, à ma connaissance, n'est jamais bon en Asie.

Mais... Ce feuilleté est merveilleux! Léger, doucement croustillant, il est salé mais doux, avec un umami prononcé. Celui de la feuille de moutarde légèrement fermentée, un condiment chinois qui accompagne le riz nature, souvent utilisé en cuisine, excellent assaisonnement pour qui voudrait apporter un sel complexe et goûteux.

J'avoue que je suis surprise. Très surprise. Ces saveurs ne sont ni tout à fait françaises, ni tout à fait chinoises, mais un savant mélange des deux. Non pas une simple juxtaposition de produits ni un accord de saveurs, mais un surprenant mariage entre deux cultures culinaires fortes. On dit souvent que les deux grandes cuisines du monde sont la française et la chinoise, par leur diversité régionale et climatique, par la richesse des terroirs, et surtout par les méthodes et les techniques pouvant aller du plus simple au plus complexe. Toutes les cuisines du monde sont bonnes, si elles sont bien faites. Peu ont cette technicité historique, codifiée par Escoffier en France et transmise depuis l'antiquité en Chine. Peu sont aussi orgueilleuses et intransigeantes dans leur identité.

Taïpei, capitale de quelle food ?

Lorsque vous vous promenez dans les night market de Taïpei, la street food exude un charme exquis - à tel point que le gouvernement taïwanais en fait une attraction touristique majeure. Des fumées qui montent, violentes, des woks faisant des étincelles sur des grands feux immenses, des odeurs fortes, agressives, sucrées, salées et un goût gras et épice dans l'air vous assaillent. Impossible de résister à l'envie de tout essayer. Raviolis, brioches, soupes, nouilles, grillades... Puis, soudain, lorsque l'on croque un morceau frit, sauté, bouilli, avale la première cuillerée de soupe - quelle déception!

Ce serait mentir que de dire que la street food à Taïpei est mauvaise. Elle est juste insipide, plate, sans âme, mécanisée, le bon goût des os et des arêtes remplacé par celui, omniprésent, du glutamate monosodique. C'est un phénomène que j'ai connu dans les capitales asiatiques, à Bangkok, Beijing, Ho Chi Minh, Hong Kong, où la qualité de la street food est inversement proportionnelle au niveau de vie et de croissance économique. Car qui dit croissance économique dit industrialisation et salaires plus élevés. Taipei aujourd'hui est riche, très riche. Beaucoup trop riche pour que des denrées vendues à trois sous puissent être faites avec des produits cultivés patiemment au gré des saisons et cuisinés par un artisan qui ne dort jamais.

Ne confondons pas street food et cuisine taïwanaise. La grande cuisine taiwanaise se porte très bien, même si elle est totalement méconnue du reste du monde. Car l'île que les Portugais ont nommée Formosa ou la « belle île » renorge de produits magnifiques : légumes limpides, fruits juteux, porc et volailles à faire pâlir d'envie la poularde de Bresse et le porc ibérique. Ajoutez sur un fond de saveurs autochtones, une culture culinaire chinoise bien ancrée avec ses méthodes millénaires de conservation, de préparation, de cuisson, du produit séché ou saumuré - vous obtenez une cuisine de caractère, différente de toutes les cuisines de Chine continentale, raffinée, goûteuse, variée et infiniment joyeuse.

À la déception de la street food suivirent quelques tentatives dans des restaurants « tendance » du style de ceux qui sont nommés dans les 50 Best Restaurants in the World. Je m'y suis profondément ennuyée. Peut-être y aurais-je vu un intérêt si je n'habitais pas Paris ? Exactement comme dans les grands hôtels anonymes de la planète, tout est fait pour que le gourmet jet-setter ne se sente pas dépayssé. Les mêmes tables en bois, les mêmes serveurs





Au dessus : «Beef noodles» aux œufs maison, ciboule brûlée, comté et bouillon au bœuf cru
Page de droite: Saint-Jacques de Hokkaido, caviar Oscietre de Taïwan, pomélo, aneth





en tablier, la même ambiance, les mêmes codes. Comme dans un aéroport où une œuvre d'art locale nous accueille pour la forme, il y a un produit phare du terroir noyé dans les écoumes vertes internationales et le vin nature.

Avoir fait 10000 km pour manger une cuisine de rue moins bonne qu'à Paris, une cuisine tendance qui sert du wagyu importé du Japon – produit du terroir qui respecte la nature et la planète, la bonne blague! C'est dans cet état d'esprit que je suis arrivé à Taïroir.

Un chef bien Taïwanais

Chef Kai Ho. De son vrai nom Ho Shun Kai. Mais tout le monde l'appelle Kai. Car il est comme ça, ce chef. Casual et friendly, au tempérament à la fois mesuré et concentré, impulsif et chaud. Originaire de Taichuang, la deuxième ville de Taïwan après la capitale, Taïpei, il se forme d'abord à la cuisine chinoise puis part à l'aventure, travailler aux Etats-Unis. «J'ai été sous-chef dans un restaurant Asie-Latino, à Pittsburgh. Pour moi, c'était l'americian dream. C'est un beau pays, les États-Unis. Comme dans un film». Ensuite, ce sera la Chine. Chef exécutif dans un restaurant de cuisine chinoise contemporaine, à Zhengzhou, dans la province de Henan. «Je n'ai pas vraiment aimé travailler en Chine. À l'époque, dans la province de Henan, ils entreprenaient des chantiers énormes. L'eau et l'air étaient très pollués et il y avait vraiment beaucoup de faux produits. Et je ne comprends pas bien la culture chinoise...».

L'étape décisive de sa vie a été Singapour. C'est là qu'il rencontre la cuisine française. «Avant Guy Savoy, je ne connaissais la cuisine française que dans les livres, la TV et mon ami Google. com». Chez Guy Savoy, il découvre la cuisine française sous le chef Éric Bost. Un an et 10 mois plus tard, il partira travailler chez Jaan avec le chef Julien Royer (aujourd'hui chef-patron chez Odette) où il restera pendant un an et demi. Il considère Julien comme son mentor. Ils font souvent des quatre mains ensemble et sont restés très proches.

«La plus grande différence entre la cuisine chinoise et la cuisine française est la température. Dans la cuisine chinoise, les plats sont servis généralement à 80°C ou plus. Alors que la cuisine française tourne autour de 65-70°C. Cela vient des méthodes de cuisson. Dans la cuisine chinoise, on utilise surtout une forte puissance de feu, avec des grandes flammes sur des durées courtes. Alors que la cuisine française demande une chaleur constante et régulière sur une durée plus longue.»

Kai Ho reviendra à Taïwan en 2015, où six mois après, il deviendra chef d'un nouveau restaurant dont le thème n'est ni la cuisine française, ni la cuisine taïwanaise mais un peu des deux, avec le terroir au milieu. Taïroir.

Du foie et du pain

On associe toujours le riz à la Chine mais on oublie souvent que l'Empire du milieu est aussi le berceau d'une grande pâtisserie – au sens propre, c'est-à-dire le travail de la pâte. Pâte à raviolis, pâte à nouilles, gâteaux sucrés et salés, crêpes et pains à la vapeur, frits, grillés...

Foie gras, litchi séché, kombucha, mantou au charbon. Le mantou est un pain chinois levé, roulé et cuit à la vapeur. Il est aimé partout en Chine, bien qu'il soit originaire du nord. La cuisson à la vapeur lui donne un lustre et un moelleux qu'on ne peut obtenir au four. Au toucher, il est lisse ; au goût, il est délicatement sucré. J'en ai mangé toute ma vie. Enfant, j'aimais enfourir le bout de mon nez et mes lèvres dedans, comme dans le col roulé d'un gros pull Angora ou dans un pain au chocolat encore chaud, et en humer le parfum et la douce tiédeur. Mais je n'aurais jamais imaginé que cela se marierait avec le foie gras. Pourquoi pas après tout puisque c'est une sorte de brioche !

Celui de Kai est terriblement bien fait. La surface brille. La couche de pâte noire par le charbon tranche avec le blanc de la pâte nature. Du bout des lèvres, je le déroule un peu, comme avec un croissant, avant de le croquer à pleines dents. Je pétris cette douce pâte encore tiède dans ma bouche pendant qu'elle colle quelques courts instants au palais... Délicieux.

*Page précédente: Velouté d'orge, truffe noire du Périgord, brioche de feuille de moutarde
Cannoli de jicama et crevettes Mino, grains de lotus, champignons noirs, robiola et granité de kombucha
Poule Sasso de Yun Lin, variations d'arachides, jeune gingembre en pickles, sauce Kung Pao
Foie gras « grillé-poché », radis, bouillon de Tie Guan Yin, riz soufflé*

Le foie gras est mariné au cognac et les litchis séchés, au saké japonais. Les points de gelée sont du kombucha. Quelques points aussi de vinaigre de Xérès, parfumé au gingembre et au poivre brun de Taïwan, une réduction explosive en bouche, avec un piquant presque brutal, qui donne du peps au plat et réveille les sens d'un coup. Foie gras du Canada peut-être mais pour le reste, nous sommes bien au Tropique du Cancer...

Le litchi séché est une friandise locale qui se grignote à toute heure et tout particulièrement avec le thé. Il faut dire que les fruits ici sont tellement bons que cela n'a rien à voir avec les vieux fruits séchés chinois que l'on trouve en Europe.

Le marché de Taïpei

Quelques jours plus tard, Kai m'a emmenée au marché de Taïpei. À l'entrée du marché, il y avait un stand de fruits de la passion. La dame vendait les deux, le rouge et le blanc. Kai lui a demandé d'en couper un rouge et m'a tendu une cuillère en plastique. «Goûte, dit-il, tu verras comme c'est bon». Un peu sceptique, car je n'aime pas l'acidité perçante du fruit de la passion, j'ai trempé le bout des lèvres dans cette viscosité pleine de graines.

Quel délice! Profondément sucré mais si délicatement. Une acidité aigüe mais tellement belle et raffinée. Un goût presque de caramel tant le sucré est concentré, qui se mêle à l'acidité qui s'arrondit progressivement. Une longueur en bouche qui dure et perdure pendant une immensité... Je suis restée sans mot. Jamais de ma vie n'avais-je mangé un fruit aussi bon dans sa complexité.

Le blanc, maintenant. Il est très différent du rouge. La même viscosité, les mêmes graines mais le parfum est plus fauve, les saveurs, plus sauvages. Aussi surprenant que la première fois que l'on croque une truffe qui ne semble ni tout à fait végétal, ni tout à fait animal.

Je suis allée de découverte en découverte dans cette grotte d'Ali Baba de béton et de métal. Tout me semblait nouveau. Des tomates, pourtant familières, qui avaient une délicieuse saveur sucrée inconnue en Méditerranée. Un maïs blanc que Kai m'a obligée à goûter cru, comme ça, à peine débarrassé de ses poils, juste coupé. Quelle douceur! Quel jus ! Plus addictif que le chocolat, on en mangerait pour toute une vie. Des variétés infinies de champignons, minuscules, énormes, blancs, bruns, noirs, allongés, ratatinés et tout ronds! Si Taïroir a été mon plus beau moment gastronomique de Taïwan, ce marché a été la plus grande expérience touristique de mon séjour. Merci Kai de m'avoir fait découvrir tant de beauté tropicale pour une moitié, subtropicale de l'autre.

Quelques plats signés Kai

- 65°C Silkie Egg, Taro "en Pureé et Kueh", Yilan "Ya shang", crevettes Sakura. Un œuf parfait de poule noire de la race taïwanaise Silkie. Purée de vrai taro, celui que l'on trouve en Asie du Sud-est. Kueh qui signifie « gâteau taïwanais » en chinois et l'Yilan Ya Shang, le « canard que l'on offre », est un canard fumé aux tiges de canne à sucre. «C'est comme le saucisson, le pastrami, le corned beef» dit Kai. En finition, des crevettes sakura du Japon. Elles sont minuscules, très fines, séchées et croquantes.

- Cannoli de jicama et crevettes Mino, grains de lotus, champignons noirs, robiola et granité de kombucha. Le jicama ressemble beaucoup au daikon mais en plus doux, plus tendre. Les crevettes Mino sont pêchées dans ces mers. Quant au Robiola Spalmabile... Je ne sais pas si j'ose vraiment vous dire que le fromage italo-taiwanais est l'un des meilleurs que j'ai goûters dans ma vie.

«Quand j'ai compris que le lait taïwanais n'allait pas pour le fromage français, j'ai voulu apprendre à faire du fromage italien. Mais personne ne pouvait me prendre en Italie alors je suis allée dans une fromagerie au Japon. Après cela, j'ai quand même réussi à aller en Italie, où j'ai fini mon apprentissage» dit Isabella Chen, fondatrice du Man Mano Cheese Lab.

Elle nous a fait goûter de la stracciatella, de la mozzarella, de la burrata... merveilleux. J'avoue que cela m'était très étrange d'être assise là devant un tout petit bout de femme totalement asiatique, qui avait choisi de s'appeler Isabella (beaucoup de Taïwanais adoptent des prénoms étrangers, qui deviennent leur nom d'usage) et qui fait des fromages italiens meilleurs que dans bien d'endroits en Italie...

- Poule Sasso de Yun Lin, variations d'arachides, jeune gingembre en pickles, sauce Kung Pao. «Le Kung Pao est un plat emblématique de Sichuan fait de poulet, arachides, poivre de Sichuan. Le poulet est mariné. Le wok est chauffé et assaisonné. On y fait revenir les arachides à feu très élevé pour rehausser leur parfum. Dans ma version, je cuis le poulet pour que la



65°C Silkie Egg, Taro "en Pureé et Kueh", Yilan "Ya shang", crevettes Sakura



Foie gras, litchi séché, kombucha, mantou au charbon



peau soit bien croustillante, pour rappeler le côté gras et fumé du plat, et je fais une sauce Kung Pao avec les arachides en purée, du jeune gingembre d'été et du jus de volailles. J'en laque le poulet et je finis avec du piment shishito japonais et des pousses de maïs».

- Canard de Pingtung, céleri à l'hibiscus, hoisin de shishito, crêpe plate. «Quand j'avais 10 ans, mon grand-père nous a emmenés manger un canard pékinois à Taipei. Je n'avais jamais mangé quelque chose d'aussi bon. Je m'en souviens encore. Je suis parti du souvenir de ce jour et j'ai infusé la crêpe dans le jus de canard. Puis j'en ai fait ma sauce avec du soja noir et du piment shishito japonais brûlé. J'ai infusé le concombre et le céleri dans l'hibiscus et le plat est fini avec une feuille de pak tsoï frite et une amande sèche infusée dans du lait.»

- Foie gras « grillé-poché », radis, bouillon de Tie Guan Yin, riz soufflé. «Les Asiatiques ne sont pas vraiment des buveurs de café. Le thé aide à digérer le gras. J'ai donc fait une infusion de Tie Guan Yin mais au consommé de volailles au lieu de l'eau. Le foie gras est grillé sur la flamme et le radis, au vinaigre de Xérès» dit Kai.

Lorsque l'on parle du thé chinois en Europe, le plus connu semble être l'infâme thé jasmin servi dans les restaurants chinois bas de gamme, ou le Pu-er passe partout qui est servi dans les palaces d'aujourd'hui. Le Tie Guan Yin ou «déesse de fer de la miséricorde» est un thé raffiné, très complexe, dont il existe des variétés et styles à l'infini. En Chine, il peut être presque vert aux parfums légers et fleuris ; proche d'un thé «anglais» ; ou encore très sombre aux parfums fumés. Il compte parmi les thés les plus onéreux, notamment à Taïwan, où il est généralement torréfié selon la méthode traditionnelle.

Beef noodles

Pourquoi ai-je tant aimé la cuisine de Kai ? On m'avait dit que Taïwan était bon. On m'avait dit que Taïwan cuisinait. On m'avait dit aussi que la gastronomie n'existe pas encore ici...

Kai cuisine. Il incarne une autre génération de chefs, celle qui se construit sur des bases solides, qui n'a pas le côté superficiel de la cuisine tendance avec son obsession de l'environnement et toute chose terreuse. Un fond de cuisine chinoise. Une couche de cuisine française. Un clin d'œil à la cuisine taïwanaise. Une pincée de fromage italien et un piment nippon.

Millefeuille de haricots mungo, crème anglaise de jaune d'œuf salé, bolognaise taïwanaise au porc. Quel libellé étrange, enchanteur et voyageur ! Quand un chef sait cuisiner, réellement, dans sa culture, dans sa vie - on se régale, n'est-ce pas ?

«Demain, je te ferai des beef noodles» m'avait-il dit.

«Mais qu'ont-ils donc de si spécial? Il y en a partout en Asie!»

«Oui mais le beef noodles, pour nous Taïwanais, cela représente quelque chose... C'est notre plat national, comme la baguette en France et les spaghetti en Italie. Et les miennes sont les meilleures ! Je les fais pour le personnel pour qu'ils soient bien nourris, pour bien travailler ! Et ils adorent!»

«Beef noodles» aux œufs maison, ciboule brûlée, comté et bouillon au bœuf cru. Très différent des beef noodles que l'on peut goûter dans tous les bouibouis de Taipei, les beef noodles du chef Kai Ho m'ont profondément ému. Des nouilles de blé aux œufs, faites maison, tous les trois jours. Le bouillon de bonnes parures de bœuf et une mirepoix à la française. La ciboule, presque carbonisée dans l'huile brûlante, à la chinoise. Le bœuf cru tranché à la minute dans le bouillon, coiffé de basilic thaï comme un pho. Du comté, du gras de porc, du sucre, de la sauce soja, du poivre blanc.

Quelle fraîcheur! Quels parfums! Quelles saveurs! Quel bonheur! Tant et tant d'umami...

«À Tainan, au sud de l'île, pour le petit déjeuner, tu as une vraie soupe de bœuf avec un bol de riz pour 100 NTD (3). On se nourrit, on se fait plaisir et on commence la journée. C'est ma culture. C'est moi, tu comprends?»

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