



Tastemaker for World's 50 Best, Cheryl Tiu is bridging cultures together through international fine-dining cuisine.

Cheryl Tiu bridges cultures with the world's best chefs

IN GOOD TIME

by BEA CARMELA | photographs by PAT MATEO

makeup by PATRICK ALCOBER of Make Up For Ever
hair by RUSSELL GONZAGA

International journalist and multimedia professional Cheryl Tiu has become an unstoppable force in digital media, despite her newcomer status to the platform. Named this year's top food influencer in the Philippines by Influence Asia and among the hand-selected tastemakers of the world's 50 best (one of two tastemakers in Asia, in an intimate group of tastemakers that is comprised of approximately 20-plus people), Tiu is one of the most important voices in the food scene in the world—an honor she carries with deep humility.

"I never really considered myself an expert on food," she tells us, when we ask about her win at Influence Asia. "I just really love it, and use it as a tool to communicate, educate and inform—so to have been a recipient of this award was a huge honor." Tiu admits to us that it was even more of a surprise given that she was late to the Instagram game and still struggles to understand the Instagram stories feature. "My background and training has always been in print media," she explains, so she was "both nervous and hesitant" in joining the ranks of digital media professionals.

But her insecurities regarding the digital realm certainly don't show: her approach to digital is friendly and smart, with touches of wit and humor. Her command of language manages to be precise and factual (a nod to her journalist training), while still being accessible, and her articles or blog posts are engaging, with a friendly tone that makes you feel at ease—much like being around Tiu herself. A professional through and through, she navigates through digital platforms expertly, using her unique point-of-view as she approaches food with a traveler's lens combined with journalistic sensibilities, making her experiences both relatable and informative.

When asked about her place in the elite circle of tastemakers with world's 50 best, she tells us that the small community the William Reed publication has created has become a wonderful community of food friends ("It's great!" she gushes). It only makes sense that someone of her impeccable taste and well-traveled background has earned a seat at the coveted tastemakers table, but her grace, charm, and authenticity inspire those who come into contact with her to be filled with joy for her instead of envy. She calls food and travel two of her "most favorite things in the world," and that passion, combined with her insatiable quest for experience and understanding, has paved the path for the young writer to have her own established, recognizable, and respected personal brand.

Tiu began her career in print media, where she started writing professionally at the age of 17 as a youth correspondent for a national

newspaper. She went on to contribute to a teen magazine, work for a women's magazine, and eventually becoming the editor-at-large of a lifestyle-luxury magazine. She maintains a column in the *Philippine Star*, writes for *Forbes USA*, was guest host for CNN Go, a judge for MediaCorps Eat List Star in Singapore, and contributor to *Michelin Singapore* and *Singapore Tatler*. She also authored the first ever *Wallpaper* City Guide* (published by UK-based Phaidon Press) for Manila, which received a nomination for best city in the Wallpaper* Design Awards. Though still a writer who regularly contributes to the *Philippine Star* and *Forbes USA*, she has since shifted her focus to food and travel of course, plus fashion, beauty, and her personal experiences and insights), and its many projects full-time since last year.

One such project under her personal brand is Cross Cultures, an events platform that uses food as a means for exchanging cultures. Tiu tells us, "Food is a basic human necessity—everyone needs to eat. We can't always hop onto a plane to the next destination but we can 'taste' a new cuisine a little more accessibly—it's one of the first insights into a new culture. And through food, you can tell a lot about people by what they eat and how they eat their food." But Cross Cultures is more than just a way for diners to be exposed to and appreciate different cuisine. "For chefs to chefs, they learn not only about each others' cultures but also techniques (and) skills . . . the guest chefs—who have such a large influence—return to their home countries . . . with good memories and experiences (of the Philippines), and some of our ingredients like mangoes, *taba ng talangka*, *bagoong*, Philippine rum . . . things about the Philippines that (are) not readily in the news . . . and share them with their family, friends, and diners."

Tiu regularly travels, and because of the spirit of inquisitiveness has been well embedded into her psyche as a writer, her jetsetting lifestyle is not merely for her own enjoyment (although she certainly gets pleasure from it)—it's research. Since May of this year alone, Tiu has visited the countries of Georgia and Armenia, and the cities of Bilbao and San Sebastian in Spain, telling us that she is out of the country at least twice a month. "(Although lately), I haven't left the country in 1.5 months so I'm not used to it," she says. "When I travel, I meet, I collaborate, I explore. I get to know as much as I can about a culture, its people, and its food," all of which inform her projects and work.

Before organizing any Cross Cultures event, Tiu first asks the question: why? The main focus of any Cross Cultures event is either to educate or to bring a special experience to Manila, she tells us. From there, she taps food professionals that she has befriended, encountered, or heard of in her many



Tiu believes that Filipino food is more than a passing trend, but a cuisine that deserves to be a mainstay.

On Tiu: Necklace by Tribe Dreamweavers from South Cotabato

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travels, and together, they work to create a unique dining experience that is elegant, daring, fun, and above all, delicious. Through it all, she allows the food to convey a story about culture—so that whether the first aim of the event was education or not, an element of learning (often times in the form of discovery) is always present.

Cross Cultures began two years ago, with an Ethiopian pop-up dinner in collaboration with Eat Ethio, an Ethiopian food movement by chef Helina Tesega. Since then, it has organized a Kenyan brunch; brought then-Asia’s number-one restaurant (Gaggan in 2015) to the Philippines for a three-day culinary affair; created a venue for some of our most celebrated local chefs such as Jordy Navarra (Toyo Eatery), Nicco Santos (Hey Handsome), and Chele Gonzalez (Gallery Vask) to work alongside and collaborate with internationally recognized chefs from top restaurants all over the world like Virgilio Martinez (Peru), Hertog Jan (Belgium), and Josean Alija (Nerua-Guggenheim) to name a few; and many other Cross Cultures events that can be revisited on her website.

Last year in July 2016, Tiu hosted the very first Cross Cultures event outside of the country, where she brought Philippine cuisine to Hong Kong in a popular Filipino restaurant at the heart of Kennedy Town, which had its MTR station officially open in December 2014, and since then has burgeoned into a food hangout spot for young, hip food concepts within the small port city. The dinner boasted

Filipino cuisine from the main courses, cocktails, and chocolate desserts, and were created by Filipino chefs, mixologists, and artisans from start to finish. Tiu hopes to continue sharing with other countries and cultures the world-class cuisine that our country has to offer, telling us that her dream project for Cross Cultures would be to take Filipino chefs and produce to New York in order to showcase to one of the most diverse and food-relevant cities in the world what our archipelago has to offer their palates.

International publications like *Vogue*, *Eater*, and *Bloomberg* have declared Filipino food the next big thing. “Finally!” she says, beaming with pride. “It just took us a while to become more cohesive because . . . after being colonized for so long, we Filipinos ourselves didn’t have a proper notion of what a nation is,” she says. “So even the way *adobo* is prepared can go so many ways. And then you’ll have people (Filipinos too!) criticize something as being ‘not authentic.’ Now, thankfully, authenticity has been redefined as something that’s relative to a person’s place, time, upbringing, and heritage. It’s important for us—Filipinos especially—to embrace that. We need to unite in supporting each other instead of criticizing, ‘Oh, but we don’t serve it like that back in the Philippines!’ This is exactly the mentality that puts us in regression.”

Tiu expresses her hope that it will be more than just a passing trend. While she acknowledges that it is wonderful that in the current progressive food landscape,

Filipino food is drawing attention to itself, she believes that our local cuisine has what it takes to become a mainstay in other countries, much like Japanese, Korean, and Thai restaurants. In the meantime, the Philippines itself is going through its own period of food self-discovery. “The world is discovering Filipino food and flavors, but we, on the other hand, who have grown up with this cuisine, are also experimenting and finding out new things . . . we keep discovering and introducing (to Filipino mainstream cuisine) ingredients like *adlai*, *tapuey* rice wine, et cetera,” she says.

“Previously, in a country like the Philippines that has been colonized for over 300 years and by so many people, everything imported was deemed better for so many years,” she goes on. “But now, we prefer to work with local farmers and fishers, unearthing what we have—some of which we didn’t know we had all along.” Local cacao, for example, is one product that she tells us is on the rise, with bean-to-bar chocolate being produced locally and flavored with native flavors. “We just keep on improving and refining what we have (in order) to become—for lack of a better term—‘world class.’”

“There’s loads of interest in Filipino food—and our flavors—and it’s wonderful,” Tiu exclaims. With projects like Cross Cultures, there’s no doubt in our mind that Tiu will be a pivotal force in revealing to the rest of the globe, as she suggests, the Philippines has always been a timeless food gem to begin with. ☺