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A VILLAGE RICH WITH SOCIO-CULTURE AND HISTORY

CULINARY HERITAGE

LOCAL FLAVORS ELEVATED AT BLANCO PAR MANDIF

THE FINEST OF THEM ALL

THE BEST ON THE ISLAND FOR A ROMANTIC ESCAPE

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A FINE NEW WORLD

UP IN THE HILLS OF UBUD, AMONGST THE LUSH GROUNDS OF THE BLANCO RENAISSANCE MUSEUM, A CULINARY REVOLUTION IS UNDERWAY AT BLANCO PAR MANDIF, A NEW RESTAURANT BY INDONESIA'S AWARD-WINNING CHEF AND RESTAURATEUR OF THE HUGELY SUCCESSFUL TEATRO GASTROTEQUE, MANDIF M. WAROKKA.





I first met Chef Mandif over a year ago when I interviewed him about the opening of his second restaurant, BLANCO par Mandif in Ubud. I left in awe of his passion and respect for Indonesian food as well as his grand ambition to elevate the cuisine of his homeland to a higher level of gastronomic delight. Days after the hushed opening of BLANCO par Mandif in June of 2015, he invited me over for a dinner. Little did I know that I was witnessing an extraordinary culinary renaissance with a signed copy of the menu to take home!

BLANCO par Mandif — the name is inspired by the flamboyant late Spanish artist Antonio Blanco — has boldly served dishes that have never been done by any Indonesian chef or restaurateur. Chef Mandif is an infinitely fascinating man who sees no distinction between life, food and art. While artful Asian-French fusion fare takes center stage at Teatro Gastroteque, Indonesian heritage

haute cuisine reigns the chef's tasting runway at BLANCO. Let's have a taste...

CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Beyond the opulent wooden space, the bustling open kitchen, the sleek eight-seater chef's tasting table and the theatrical culinary inventions, a nostalgic sentiment lingers in the air. The highly conceptualized

degustation menu, ranging from five to 13 courses, caters to sophisticated palates and reads like a delicious trip down Chef Mandif's memory lane across the archipelago.

Digging deep into the roots of Indonesian food for customs and traditions, heart-warming recipes from his childhood are dissected, reconstructed and resurrected through innovative ideas, where classical culinary techniques meet



modern cooking technology and give birth to elegant plating and refined flavors. Boundaries are crossed and palates challenged, and Indonesian cuisine, as we know it, is reborn.

Innovations aside, this is also where Mother Nature meets haute cuisine. Mandif is so in touch with the earth that he insists on only using the finest seasonal produce ethically sourced from local

farmers and quality suppliers – with the exception of a few inevitable imports. Everything is meticulously made from scratch and brought straight from bountiful nature to the kitchen table.

CULINARY HERITAGE

Eko Putro – BLANCO's talented and sassy sommelier-cum-General Manager with a healthy rebellious streak – takes beverage pairing up a notch with his fierce homemade concoctions and aged cocktails

matched perfectly to each dish.

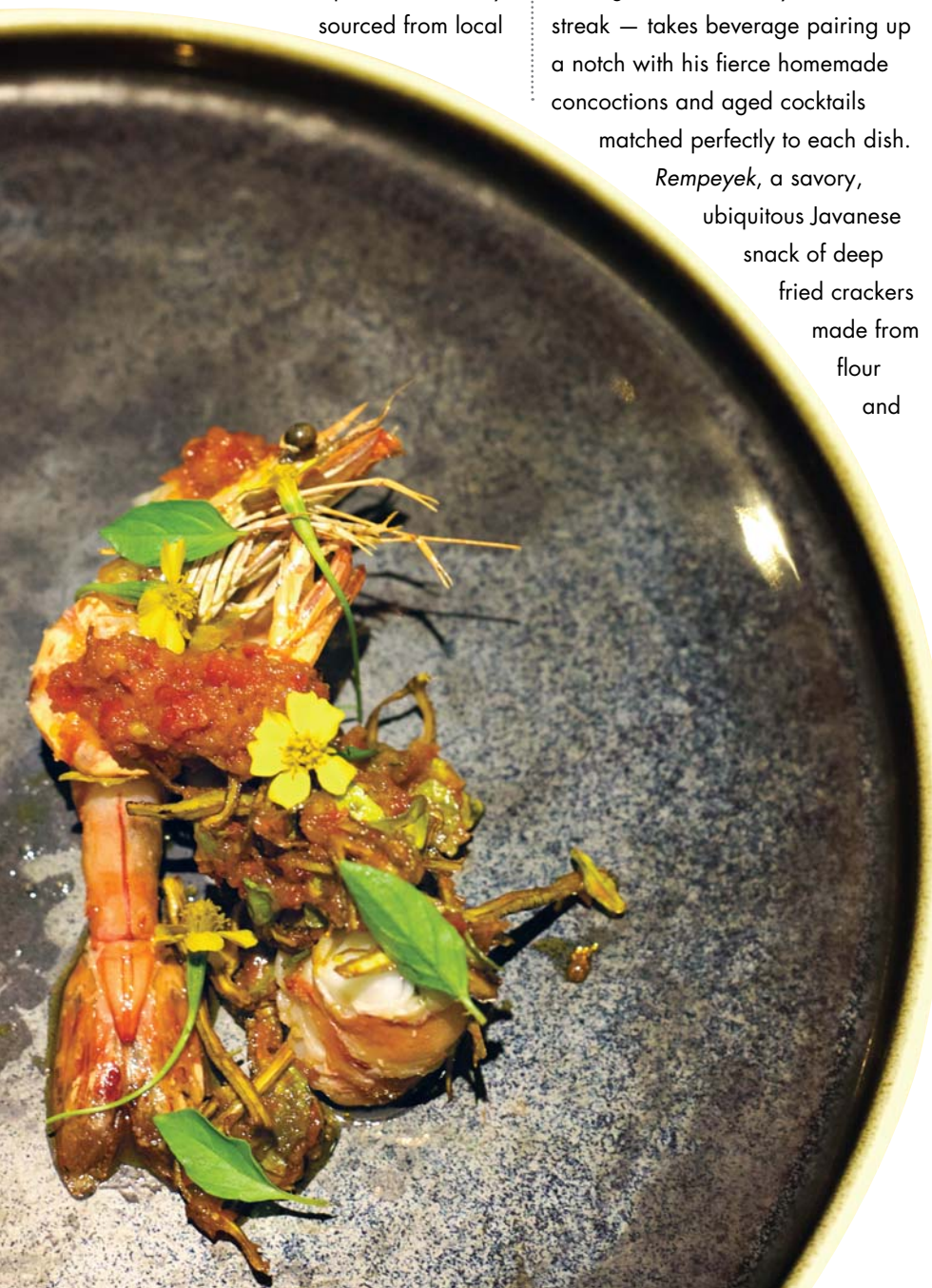
Rempeyek, a savory, ubiquitous Javanese snack of deep fried crackers made from flour and

other ingredients is the opening act at BLANCO, re-imagined as crispy spinach, kale and river eel – bred locally by one of the staff. This dish is gracefully balanced on a curious wire sculpture and served with a side of spicy tomato *sambal*. Accompanied by a citrusy Kintamani cocktail, it makes for a refreshing start to a decadent evening.

Comfort foods are revamped to complex modernist gastronomy, but there is no shyness or compromise on the flavors, textures and tastes. *Rajungan* – a dish of humble origin – is a hearty soup of roasted corn, shredded crabmeat, sweet onions and lime that is beautifully presented in a unique ceramic bowl. I have to say, it is best paired with a cool margarita shaken right in front of you.

The next dish that blows my mind is the *Cakalang*, a famous dish from North Sulawesi that consists of warm *dashi* poured over silky house-made noodles. A sumptuous broth is painstakingly prepared with Japanese style *katsubushi* or skipjack tuna that has gone through a lengthy process of drying, fermenting and smoking. In the hands of Chef Mandif, it is transformed into a delectable delicacy that evokes nostalgia and provokes interest.

Of course, don't forget to try the *Sambal balado*, a tangy staple spicy condiment of West Sumatra. It is the sweet starring sauce of the butter poached tiger prawn, complemented





Sambal Balado (left), the table setting at BLANCO par Mandif (above), and sommelier Eko in action (right bottom)



with crispy and notoriously stinky petai beans – off-putting to some but popular among Indonesians. Eko swears by his signature barrel-aged Negroni to bring out the best in this dish.

Dessert is most certainly not an afterthought at BLANCO. *Cendol*, traditionally a sweet treat of rice flour, palm sugar, coconut milk and green worm-like jelly, is transformed into an exquisite symphony of delicate colorful jackfruit and *pandan* spheres, gourmet *pandan* ice cream, slippery basil seeds soaked in coconut milk foam and fragrant coconut bubbles floating harmoniously in *wedang jahe* – a clever twist on the old ginger tea,

made with a ginger and lemongrass infused palm sugar reduction. Truth to be told, this is the best *cendol* and *wedang jahe* I've ever had in my life.

There is soulfulness and an element of playfulness in Chef Mandif's creations. Alongside his young, equally passionate and patriotic super team, he strives to simply "make people happy" through his culinary articulation and inspire Indonesians to be proud of their cuisine. The BLANCO par Mandif experience is a fine epicurean ride into the future of Indonesian cuisine. This is one man's quest to reclaim national pride through a rich culinary heritage that

has been globally disregarded for too long. His statement is bold, loud and clear. Close your eyes and just go with it. It's about time. ■

By Meliana Salim

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