



MOZAIC BY ANNETTE TAN

Unlike most restaurants in Bali, a meal at Mozaic begins in a swish lounge boldly appointed in red, white and black. A drinks menu is gently presented so that you may sip on a glass of exotic libation that features ingredients like screwpine leaf, kaffir lime and torch ginger flower, as you nibble on the restaurant's signature canapé of truffle butter-filled gougeres.

Naturally, Mozaic isn't like other restaurants in Bali, an island more famed for its beaches and temples than for its cuisine. The staff know every dish on the menu intimately, and are quite capable of expounding the virtues of the rosemary braised Gindara fillet that is gently mounded with an aromatic ginger emulsion. They are attentive, polite, warm and knowledgeable — an absolute delight after you've spent time traipsing the island across stores which quite literally jostle for your custom and eateries that pay little attention to service detail.

Yet, this excellent brand of service is merely second fiddle to the real attraction here: the food. Mozaic owner and chef Chris Salans serves four different tasting menus nightly, all of which showcases his unique style of cooking which takes the freshest Indonesian ingredients and incorporates them into contemporary French dishes.

The night I dined there, there was the said rosemary braised gindara fillet served on sautéed wild mushroom in an organic parsley sauce topped with an aromatic ginger emulsion. Certainly the description itself is a mouthful, but what a sublime mouthful

the dish turned out to be. The fish was braised perfectly to firm tenderness, and every flavour contributed its own gentle accent, ultimately bringing together ethereal textures and tastes.

Such is the deftness of Salans' technique, which was honed under the watchful eyes of culinary luminaries such as Thomas Keller, Alain Senderens and David Bouley. Salans' spectacular resume includes a stint as head chef at Keller's Bouchon in Napa Valley, and as chef de cuisine at Bouley's Bakery.

Mozaic is also unlike any other restaurant in Bali because of Salans' dedication to sourcing the freshest and best produce that is available to him. Wagyu beef and oysters are imported from Australia, cepe mushrooms are flown in from France, baby lamb and crayfish are brought in from Java, and there is one full-time employee whose job scope encompasses "knocking on the doors" of Balinese farmers in search of fresh passion fruit. "That's what sets us apart," Salans' told the International Herald Tribune.

Well, that and his inimitable knack for maintaining an exquisite balance of flavours, textures and visual delight in all his unique dishes.

Take the paper-thin slivers of creamy langoustine carpaccio, which Salans' marinates in macadamia oil. He presents this with

a zesty micro herb salad, pepper tuile and caviar that turn out myriad flavours which mingle quietly at first and then hop happily on the palate.

Fresh coral trout is steamed with fresh black truffles to anoint it with a deep warmth and then served on confited baby potatoes, asparagus and onion in a black truffle emulsion. A wedge of roasted Australian quail is served with a crispy-on-the-outside, deliciously unctuous-on-the-inside nugget of duck foie gras atop a bed of silky spiced chestnut puree. A square of pork belly is infused with the depth of cinnamon and served in a star anise and Japanese grapefruit tea broth, its crackling crisped so deftly it snaps with such joy when bitten.

A perfectly pink-inside roasted rack of lamb is served with roasted eggplant puree, fresh milk gelee, toasted and candied spices and a fresh curry leaf infused with demi-glace. There is always so much happening on the plate yet they all work so harmoniously together in the mouth.

The magic doesn't let up at dessert. Where many stellar chefs falter at the sweet courses, Salans still shines. There is an exceptional mangosteen sorbet served with champagne jelly and lavender flower neatly placed inside a scooped out mangosteen shell. I still wonder how long it took for the kitchen to carefully remove the white flesh of the mangosteen from its many pips and how many mangosteens it takes to make a precious spoonful of

the stuff.

A pristine Jivara chocolate mousse holds a delicate treasure of rose flowers and raspberries within; while without, a fresh ginger flower sorbet turns an otherwise ubiquitous dessert into something totally special and unexpected. A piquant kaffir lime lemon tart soufflé is perched on a shallow pool of lemongrass-passion fruit sauce and paired with a chilli-lemongrass sorbet — there's that surprising marriage of Indonesian flavours and French techniques at work again.

For me, it was a meal that underscored the acclaim that Mozaic has garnered since it opened in 2001, including the fifth spot in The Miele Guide. And, as one of the best meals I've had in a long time, it was also the most affordable considering the impeccable quality of the food served. Most of the six-course prix fixe menus cost about 550,000++ rupiah (\$70++), with the Chef's Surprise menu priced at 950,000++ rupiah (\$125++). There is the option of enjoying wine pairings for each course at an additional 500,000++ rupiah (\$65++) or 350,000++ rupiah (\$45) for the premium and regular pairings respectively. With such value to be had, reservations are naturally essentially. **A**

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