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Headline: One-stop foodie haven

One-stop foodie haven

A new online emporium devotes itself to discovering indie food and kitchenware to help elevate domesticity to an art.

By May Yip

YOU might not need a concrete paperweight in the shape of *png kueh*, or a US\$200 chopping board engraved with a banana and five mangosteens, arranged to resemble our national symbol of five stars and a crescent moon. But a visit to Batch (www.batch.sg) certainly makes you feel like you do. The freshly-launched online gourmet platform is designed to connect food lovers with the products lovingly crafted by independent food makers, chefs and kitchen artisans. You won't find mass-produced supermarket goods here – every item is carefully handpicked for quality and taste by founder Debbie Yong.

"It was while covering the rise of local foodmakers – a growing group of Singaporeans who make preservative-free granola, jams, *sambals*, nut milks and so on, that I saw how many of them struggled to handle their own sales and marketing channels because they have to juggle these on top of their day jobs, on top of making the food," says Ms Yong, who has been covering the food beat for *The Business Times* for the past three years. "It then led me to think: why not gather all these artisanal products at a one-stop shop, like an online store?"



MS YONG

Her online platform also serves as a resource for home cooks and foodies looking for recipes and useful kitchen tips on the latest food trends

29. "They are cooking together more often, growing their own gardens, and buying more things for their kitchens and living spaces – and looking for resources to help them do so."

The site also serves as a resource for home cooks and foodies looking for recipes and ingredient features, with plans to include behind-the-scenes interviews and videos with food makers and chefs – designed with the aim of building a virtual community of foodies of all levels. Ms Yong hopes to tap on her close ties with local chefs and food personalities within the Singapore F&B industry to dispense useful kitchen tips on the latest food trends such as cold-brewing, cooking with Himalayan salt slabs, or barrel-ageing your own cocktails at home. Meanwhile, her childhood friend and civil-servant-turned-stay-home mum Stephanie Lim contributes recipes and home entertaining tips to Batch.

Such a pool of expert suggestions, designed for budding or full-fledged domestic gods and goddesses, helps maximise the mileage of each purchase. The site even includes a range of cookbooks for those hoping to expand their gastronomic repertoire to impress guests at dinner parties. "From my own experience, I know that after splurging on a S\$20 bottle of premium sauce or S\$200 for a handcrafted chopping board, I would want to use them in the best way possible," says Ms Yong. "So we work directly with leading bartenders, chefs and craftsmen to offer recipe suggestions and usage and storage tips for each item."

Want to try the products out the old-fashioned way? Ms Yong is also in discussion with a few partners to launch retail pop-ups for Christmas. In the meantime, here's a peek at the craftsmen behind the thoughtfully designed products.



Gracesmiths

ESTHER Ang's story of making a leap from a successful corporate career to being a first-time entrepreneur is not unique. What stands out, however, is the idea for Gracesmiths, which uses art and design to create everyday lifestyle products inspired by the Christian faith. Rather than a literal interpretation of her beliefs, however, Ms Ang's products are utterly contemporary with a healthy dose of cheek.

"I came up with the creative concepts for most of the products, normally while having showers," reveals Ms Ang, who started her lifestyle product company in 2012 after working in several top Fortune 500 companies.

"For example, the Providence range of cushions available through Batch was inspired by the story of how Jesus multiplied five loaves of bread and two fish to feed multitudes of people. Daily provision resonates easily with peo-



NATURE-INSPIRED

Ms Lee (left) set up Studio Asobi after picking up pottery with her husband a year ago. She works from home, which allows her time to go out into the parks and neighbourhoods to get inspired by nature and people. Below: Her creations laid out to form the shape of Singapore



PASSION FOR CERAMICS

Mr Leow (right) is a third-year student at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts majoring in ceramics. His works (above), which bear a distinctly Japanese aesthetic, have already been shown at the recent 16th International Chawan Exposition, a showcase for ceramic arts



the Providence range of cushions and pouches locally. Seeing how the work has benefited her, she expanded the concept by providing financial support to disadvantaged women in Singapore through sewing work.

She adds: "There's a special authenticity about items made with hands that a commercialised, mass-produced item cannot replicate. I think it's because each item carries with it a piece of the maker's heart and soul."

Zestro Leow

STILL in his third year as a fine art student at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, majoring in ceramics, Zestro Leow has already shown at the recent 16th International Chawan Exposition, an international showcase for ceramic arts.

"I believe clay is not just a medium in art; it is a matter that is constantly changing," says Mr Leow, who is selling some sake sets, vases and plates through Batch. "With excess water, it transforms from solid into slip. Allowing the clay to evaporate its moisture will change its consistency. Within the process of creating a ceramic artwork, understanding the consistency of the clay is the most important issue."

Having first majored in western painting, Mr Leow was introduced to ceramics through an elective course and developed a strong passion for the medium over time. His pieces bear a distinctly Japanese aesthetic, raw and organic at first blush, yet exuding a refined, beautifully conceived vision when held and appreciated.

"Nature has inspired me a lot," says the young ceramist. "Besides the different forms and textures, I look into what is beneath the surface of nature."

Beyond serving as decorative objects or vessels, Mr Leow hopes to communicate his hard work, energy and innermost workings as an artist to an audience. "When people observe my artworks, I want them to appreciate the entire journey of creating an artwork from scratch, and not just the final presentation that is before them," says the driven, down-to-earth student.

"I believe that the audience should appreciate an artwork by studying its concept and craftsmanship. This will enable the audience to look into the process of how an artwork is created, and hence, look forward to more amazing works to be created by the artist."

Studio Asobi

WHAT started as a fun activity to be enjoyed with her husband grew into a full-time career for Lee Huiwen, a home-

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