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Since Louisa Lim won Asia's Best Pastry Chef 2023, she has had the opportunity to share her desserts beyond Odette and Singapore.

IMAGES: LOUISA LIM, INSTAGRAM/@LOUISA_LIMWZ

The first time Louisa Lim set eyes on a beautifully decorated cake replete with cutesy figurines, she was so enamoured that she signed up for cake decorating classes.

Before long, she'd attained every cake decorating certificate available yet didn't know how to bake a cake. So, she did the logical thing and accelerated her courses at Singapore Management University where she was studying sociology so she could enrol at Le Cordon Bleu Paris to learn pastry.

In the nine years since, Louisa's career has skyrocketed from vaunted pastry kitchens in Paris to that of Singapore's top restaurant Odette where she has been pastry chef for the past five years. In 2023, she was named Asia's Best Pastry Chef at the Asia's 50 Best Restaurants Awards, and her life has been a whirlwind of living out her wildest dreams since.

We caught up with this dynamic 32-year-old to find out what gets a rise out of her.

What sparked your interest in pastry?

During my university days, I stumbled upon a fondant cake. You know, those cutesy kinds of cakes with sugar decorations? I was kind of looking for a hobby since I had time to kill and I thought, okay, I want to learn. So I took classes and things got pretty serious because I wanted to learn all the decorative aspects of fondant, like rolling icing, making all those figurines, flowers, and all that stuff.

When I was done with everything, I realised I knew how to do all the decorative aspects, but I didn't know how to bake a cake! I mean, I could follow recipes, but I didn't really know how to bake a nice cake to go with the fondant decoration, which was a bit of a pity. That's when I told my mom that I wanted to learn pastry. For real, not just for fun.

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I did some research and next thing I knew, I accelerated all my courses in university. Once I finished, I flew to Le Cordon Bleu in Paris to learn pastry and I've not looked back since.

How did you end up staying in Paris?

All graduates from Le Cordon Bleu Paris get the opportunity to do an internship. Back then, everything was super new to me. I didn't know anything. I didn't understand what it was to work in a restaurant. I figured I'd just go with the flow. So I signed up for the internship and got into Hexagone-Histoires. It was two restaurants under the same roof. Hexagone had one Michelin star and Histoires had two.

That first year was hard. I didn't speak French. I did French courses in Singapore but when I got to France, it was like a slap in the face because everyone spoke... slang. I learnt textbook French and didn't understand anything anyone said. It was my first job and I was working from 8 am to 11.30 am, with a break in between. I mean, that's restaurant life, but I wasn't prepared then.

After two months, I flew home to Singapore thinking maybe I didn't want this.

Why did you return to Paris?

My mom is super loving and super supportive of everything I do. And the fact that she said yes to sending me to Paris just because I was interested, I felt like I needed to see this through properly. I was already privileged to be able to learn from all these inspiring people. I was in the city of gastronomy, in the city of opportunity for pastry, you know? I sat in my room at home, jet-lagged and really thought about it: Did I make a mistake?

No surprise, one week later, I flew back to Paris. And continued working at Hexagone-Histoires for two years.

When did you learn that you'd been named Asia's Best Pastry Chef of the Year 2023?

Chef Julien (Royer, of Odette) usually brings a few team members to the awards ceremony. That year, he told me that I'd be going with him to Asia's 50 Best Restaurant Awards. I was like, okay. I didn't think too much about it.

At the event, when they were announcing the award, they started describing the chef's journey and I thought, 'hmmm, this sounds like me, but it can't be'. When they said my name, I was in disbelief! It was an amazing feeling, but I didn't know what to do! I didn't even know I was supposed to stand up! Eventually I did, of course, but I was just... I don't know... I wanted to go hug someone! I hugged Julien and went on stage and I was like, I don't know what to do!

How has your life changed since?

A lot has changed! I've had the opportunity to do many personal events with (French chocolatier) Valrhona. I've been doing quite a few demonstrations in the Middle East. In two weeks, I'm going to Hong Kong to give a demonstration, then to Tokyo.

My dream is to constantly learn from people in the industry and to learn all facets of desserts including things like kueh and wagashi.

How would you describe your style of dessert?

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My personal style is really light, especially after guests have eaten a five or seven-course meal. I want people to feel satiated but not overly full. I've always had a preference for desserts that are light, delicate and feminine.

Usually, I use a lot of seasonal fruits. [My desserts are] not overly sweet or overly creamy but balanced. I focus a lot on the physical aspect of the dessert. It's something I've learnt during my time here at Odette. Chef Julien has ingrained in me that we eat with our eyes first. The first time I heard that, it really stuck and it now follows me when I create a dessert.