

Publication: Vulcan Post Online

Date: 19 March 2025

Headline: How this Singaporean's passion project for his girlfriend grew into a full-fledged pie café

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They say that love is sweet, and this is especially true for Elijah Tan and Limin Wong.

The couple first met while at church in 2012 and found joy in visiting cafes together. But their bond only grew closer years later, because of one sweet treat: a Nutella tart that Elijah baked to satisfy Limin's cravings.

Little did they know that that very tart would be the start of a side project that they would embark on together, which has now grown into a full-fledged pie brand, Elijah Pies—the brand is not only popular on Instagram but also a hit among tourists.

How one pie started it all

As a child, Elijah was no stranger to the culinary world, having fond memories of helping out at his grandmother's "cai fan" stall and following his mother's influence as a great cook.

Even as a university student, where he studied business operations and analytics at the Singapore Management University (SMU), he decided to take an internship at F&B company Les Amis Group, working in an operations role at their pizza brand, Peperoni.

It was also during this time that Limin craved a chocolate tart, and being the sweet partner that he is, Elijah decided to try making it for her, leading him to start experimenting with different recipes at home.

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Ultimately, this led him to create a Nutella tart that not only earned the approval of family and peers but also marked the start of Elijah Pies.

The business slowly grew traction through word of mouth, and they soon started receiving orders from strangers after starting their Instagram page. This spurred Elijah to step up and rent a licensed shared kitchen to fulfil these orders, although he was still a student at that time.

When what started as a passion project for my girlfriend turned into a possible business venture, I had more serious considerations on startup costs, like rental, equipment, packaging and logistics.

The journey of building the business from scratch was a mix of excitement and uncertainty, and I had to be disciplined in planning my time to ensure I manage my studies well and fulfill orders on time.

Elijah Tan, co-founder of Elijah Pies

After graduating from university, Elijah officially registered the business in 2016 and began renting his own central kitchen.

While they remain tight-lipped about their financial figures, Limin noted that the revenue that they had earned at that point was “just enough” for Elijah to focus on growing the brand full-time.

A turning point in uncertain times

On the other hand, Limin came from a background in branding and marketing, where she worked at luxury retail brands such as Chanel and Dior for almost a decade. Despite her

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busy schedule, she always supported Elijah in running Elijah Pies in her spare time, from conceptualising social marketing launches and replying to customer enquiries to helping him in the kitchen.

However, in 2021, Limin made the decision to leave her corporate career and join Elijah Pies full-time, as the business reached a turning point during the COVID-19 pandemic. During COVID-19, we decided to provide free islandwide delivery as our way of giving back to our customers. The response was overwhelming, especially during the 'circuit breaker' [period] when we were confined to our homes and [the] interest in delivery for "comfort food" soared.

Limin Wong, co-founder of Elijah Pies.

The increase in demand has not only allowed the company to expand its product offerings, but also given it a chance to branch out its revenue streams, retailing to cafes and restaurants and offering baking workshops.



However, one might wonder, as recipes are sacred to many businesses, is the couple concerned about potential copycats? To Elijah and Limin, it's all part of their plan to retain loyal customers.

"In addition to providing a personal, hands-on experience for our customers, we also wanted to be transparent about the quality ingredients we use and the baking techniques in our pies to give them confidence in purchasing from us in future," explained Elijah.

Opening their first physical shop

Elijah Pies has since grown to be a popular online bakery. According to Elijah, their Instagram following was around 5,000 in 2019, but at the time of writing, it has grown to over

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72,000. Their popularity has also allowed them to open their first dine-in concept in 2023 at Tanjong Pagar. But why did it take them eight years?



According to the couple, they wanted to take a more “cautious and calculated approach” to opening a physical location. They took time to hire and train service staff, build a menu and commit to a rental space that is “reasonably priced” and could reach their target market, which took a year of scouting.

However, the road to opening their dine-in concept was not a piece of cake.

Elijah shared that the business encountered a contractor who provided “shoddy workmanship” and eventually abandoned the project halfway—which cost a two-month delay in opening their cafe.

“We’ve read about renovation nightmares in Singapore, but we never imagined being victims ourselves,” lamented Limin. Despite the stressful situation, the couple decided to take the reins in the renovations, all while preparing the cafe for opening and juggling day-to-day operations.

They persevered, and Elijah Pies successfully opened their cafe in May 2023.

More to go around

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According to Limin, the cafe has served a whopping total of over 50,000 dine-in customers since its opening. Elijah Pies has also established corporate partnerships with high-end brands like Maison Van Cleef & Arpels, Dior and Hugo Boss.

She added that the brand is looking to elevate the overall customer experience with a loyalty programme and personalised events such as an in-store “private dessert omakase.” Elijah also noted that the cafe has also attracted the attention of international customers. “As we have started to acquire customers from Japan and Korea at our cafe, we aim to explore entering foreign markets by starting pop-ups and eventually having a permanent location overseas,” he shared.

However, with the global F&B scene becoming more competitive, what is Elijah Pies's secret recipe for long-term success? Reflecting on their eleven years in business, here's what Elijah and Limin have to say:

ELIJAH & LIMIN'S ADVICE ON

Surviving S'pore's F&B industry


Elijah

"Entrepreneurship in F&B is extremely tough, both physically and mentally. 90% of hard work and sacrifice is done behind the scenes—so before starting a business, carefully consider whether you are willing to pay the price."

"Be receptive to feedback - positive or negative, as every experience will shape you and contribute to your business. Our customers have been our greatest supporters and our harshest critics - their comments have provided insight and guided us in making meaningful changes to how we operate through the years."


Limin

While Elijah Pies' growth journey was not always sweet, the couple behind it remained focused on one goal: ensuring that everyone could enjoy a slice of their pie.