

# Flying the flag

**“As Mexicans and Latin Americans,** we must take pride in our cuisine. It is not uncommon for Latin Americans to view European food as haute cuisine, and our own cuisine as second-class food. That shouldn’t be the case. A fine meal need not be caviar and foie gras,” says Enrique Olvera, chef and owner of critically acclaimed restaurant Pujol in Mexico City. True to his convictions, Olvera has seeded Mexican cuisine on the global culinary stage. For the second year running, Pujol has earned its place on San Pellegrino’s list of the World’s 50 Best Restaurants, sharing the spotlight with heavyweights such as René Redzepi’s Noma and Heston Blumenthal’s The Fat Duck. The food at Pujol, while contemporary and experimental by nature, is staunchly grounded by the flavours and ingredients of Mexico’s rich culinary history. Appetite caught up with Olvera at Savour 2012 to uncover his inspirations and find out more about his culinary approach.

**How would you describe your cooking philosophy?**

My cooking philosophy is always evolving. Right now, it is especially about memories and new possibilities coming from those memories. I take all the ingredients — Mexican ingredients — present in my memories and palate, and combine them to form a new experience. While the flavours are very Mexican, the combinations are not. I work with unusual ingredient combinations, and also unusual flavour and technique combinations.

**In terms of unusual ingredient combinations, which dishes on the menu reflect that approach?**

We have a tamale that we create with bone marrow and herbs instead of flour. That’s something very traditional yet new at the same time. Because bone marrow usually gets eaten with chopped garlic and parsley, we pair it with a salsa rich in cilantro and green tomatoes. Then we have a dish that features baby corn with coffee mayonnaise and ant powder. Having corn with mayonnaise in Mexico is very common, but it is usually a large corn slathered with mayonnaise, chilli and lime. Coffee mayonnaise, however, is uncommon and putting ants into that is even less common. We toast the ants, grind it into a powder, and combine that with coffee mayonnaise. It is important for me to consider why certain elements go well together. Even though the dish has an experimental aspect to it, it must make sense. For example, the ants are typically found around coffee plantations, which is why we thought of combining coffee and ants.

**Who or what has had the biggest influence on your cooking?**

My mother. The strongest influence on any human being is their childhood. Your childhood flavours are what dictates your tastes preferences. If your parents didn’t do a good job of feeding you, it’s not impossible for you to appreciate food when you’re older, but it is harder. The flavours from your childhood that you have grown accustomed to are the ones you will keep for the rest of

your life. For example, the flavours I like are some of the most basic elements of Mexican food, like beans, peppers, tortillas — these are the flavours I will always love.

**What anchors your creative process?**

Chaos and perfection. I like both things. In order to be creative, you need to be messy. If you like doing things the same way, it’s hard to be creative. At the same time, if you’re messy, you’ll never get any work done. You need to like perfection, but you also need to let go of perfection. Otherwise, you will never get better. It’s about striking a balance between the two.

**Do you find any similarities between the taste profiles of food from Southeast Asia and Mexico?**

There are lots of similarities between the food from this part of Asia and the food from Mexico, particularly that of Peru. I’m thinking in terms of rich spices, use of acidity and a strong presence of vegetables. There’s always some animal protein in the dish, but present in very small amounts because our cultures are not partial to eating too much meat.

**What would you have for your last meal?**

Quesadillas. They are my favourite things on earth. In most parts of the world, a quesadilla is a flour tortilla stuffed with really bad quality cheese. In Mexico, quesadillas are made with fresh queso, herbs such as epazote, and a freshly made salsa. It is a beautiful thing. @

Celebrated Mexican chef Enrique Olvera is poised to carry Mexican gastronomy into the next frontier



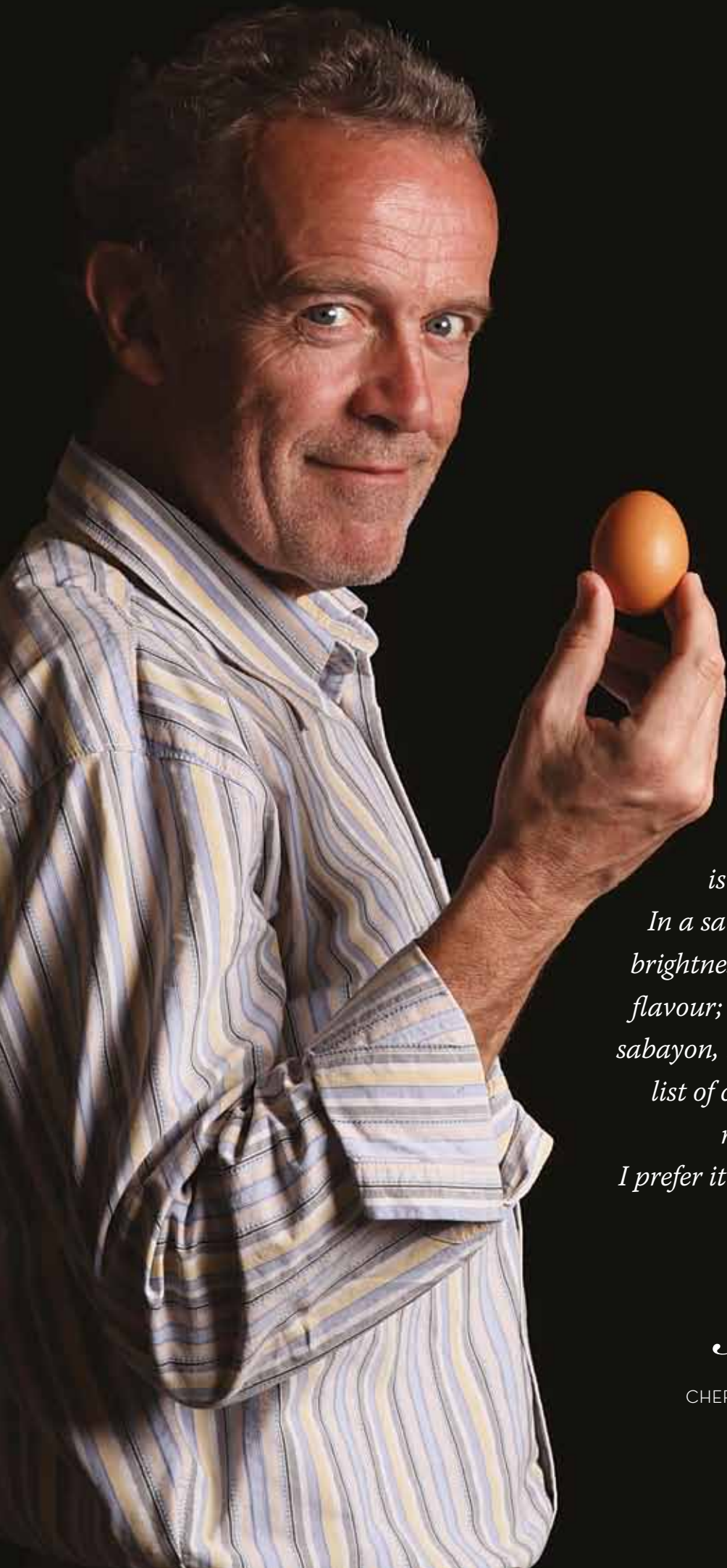
# Haute Shots

AN EXCLUSIVE SHOOT OF OUR FAVOURITE CULINARY MAESTROS  
AT THIS YEAR'S SAVOUR 2012

appetite EXCLUSIVE

Last month, the food and wine festival Savour packed in more Michelin stars per square foot into the festival grounds than we could shake our radar at. When life presents you with a constellation of top chefs, you find reasons to get up close and personal, and that's exactly what we did. If you weren't too busy wining and dining your way through the fair, you might have noticed the little photo studio we erected on the second floor of the F1 Pit Building. The set-up wasn't fancy, in fact, it was quite lo-fi: a black velvet throw, Tiffany chairs, a high table and studio lights. With that, it was time to haul in our victims, who by a happy coincidence were only too grateful to flee the frenzied heat of their kitchens. Our chef-testants didn't know what they were in for. Neither did we. We started off with the idea that we wanted to photograph some chefs, but not as you would usually see them — triumphant in their kitchens, gracefully plating a dish — we wanted none of that. With barely a plan to ground us, it wasn't clear where this was all heading. But when the lights came on and the camera started rolling, the photo shoot unfolded with the verve and momentum of something long delayed.

Chefs are always a riot to behold. They can fillet a fish with the tenderness of a lover and the next moment, shout down an entire kitchen. Here at Appetite, we spend a lot of time with chefs: learning their histories, deconstructing their philosophies on food and tasting their creations. But there's one thing we've come to realise — whether it's a chef who works with progressive techniques, or one that believes in the art of the fire, they are fiercely passionate about the produce that comes through their kitchen doors. So what better way to photograph them than alongside a produce of their choice? The idea seemed poetic enough. We could wax lyrical on the bucolic, vignette each shot with the coupling of man and terroir, marquee chefs as guardians of fine produce. Then in walked Chef Gunther Hubrechsens with a coconut. By any other means, a Belgian chef and a coconut is a bad bar joke waiting to happen, but believe it or not — Hubrechsens made it sexy, and coconuts will never mean the same again. Things did get out of hand; we saw durians, raw fish and even an entire barrel of cheese roll onto the set. And the result? A collection of photos that encapsulates the universal spirit of what chefs are — spontaneous, inventive, playful wizards whom we can count on to turn the fruits of the earth into a work of art on our plates.



*“For me, the egg  
is a true inspiration, a magician!  
In a sauce, you discover its smoothness and  
brightness of colour; in a bun, its lightness and  
flavour; in a mayonnaise, its texture; and in a  
sabayon, its flexibility. The egg has an impressive  
list of culinary uses and is universal in any  
recipe in the world. Personally,  
I prefer it boiled and enjoyed with toasted bread  
and salted butter.”*

*Alain Passard,*


CHEF AND OWNER OF THREE-MICHELIN-STARRED  
RESTAURANT L'ARPEGE, PARIS

*“I love heirloom tomatoes, especially the beautiful  
coeur de boeuf (or ox-heart tomatoes)  
which are the largest varieties of cultivated tomatoes,  
with some weighing 450g or more. I like the fact that ox-heart tomatoes aren’t grown  
commercially. They are meaty, juicy, relatively low in acidity... and organic!  
Have them simply with a pinch of fleur de sel and drizzled with your favourite olive  
oil... sometimes simplicity is complicated!”*

*Emmanuel Stroobant,*

CHEF AND OWNER OF  
EMMANUEL STROOBANT GROUP, SINGAPORE



A chef in a white uniform is shown from the chest up, with his right arm extended. Several small, bright orange habanero chillies are tucked into the folds of his sleeve. On his forearm, there is a tattoo consisting of several overlapping, horizontal, wavy lines. The background is dark, and the lighting is dramatic, highlighting the chef's uniform and the vibrant color of the chillies.

*“There are a lot of similarities  
between the food from this part of Asia and the food from Mexico,  
especially in the use of spice and acidity.  
These habanero chillies are tiny but so dangerous,  
just like the chilli padis here.”*



*Enrique Olvera,*

EXECUTIVE CHEF OF CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED  
RESTAURANT PUJOL, MEXICO



*Douglas Tay,*  
CHEF DE CUISINE OF OSIA, SINGAPORE

*"I really dislike durians.  
When I was a child,  
my uncle gave me durian to try and  
I couldn't stand the taste.  
I spat it out and brushed my teeth  
till my gums bled!"*





*Julien Royer,*  
CHEF DE CUISINE OF JAAN, SINGAPORE

*"Cantal cheese hails from my hometown and is one of the oldest cheeses in France. Its flavour, somewhat reminiscent of cheddar, is strong, tangy and buttery. I love how it smells of the earth and green pastures. It features in typical Auvergne dishes such as truffade or aligot."*



*"Pasta is synonymous with all the values I hold close to my heart:  
family, fun, passion and tradition.*

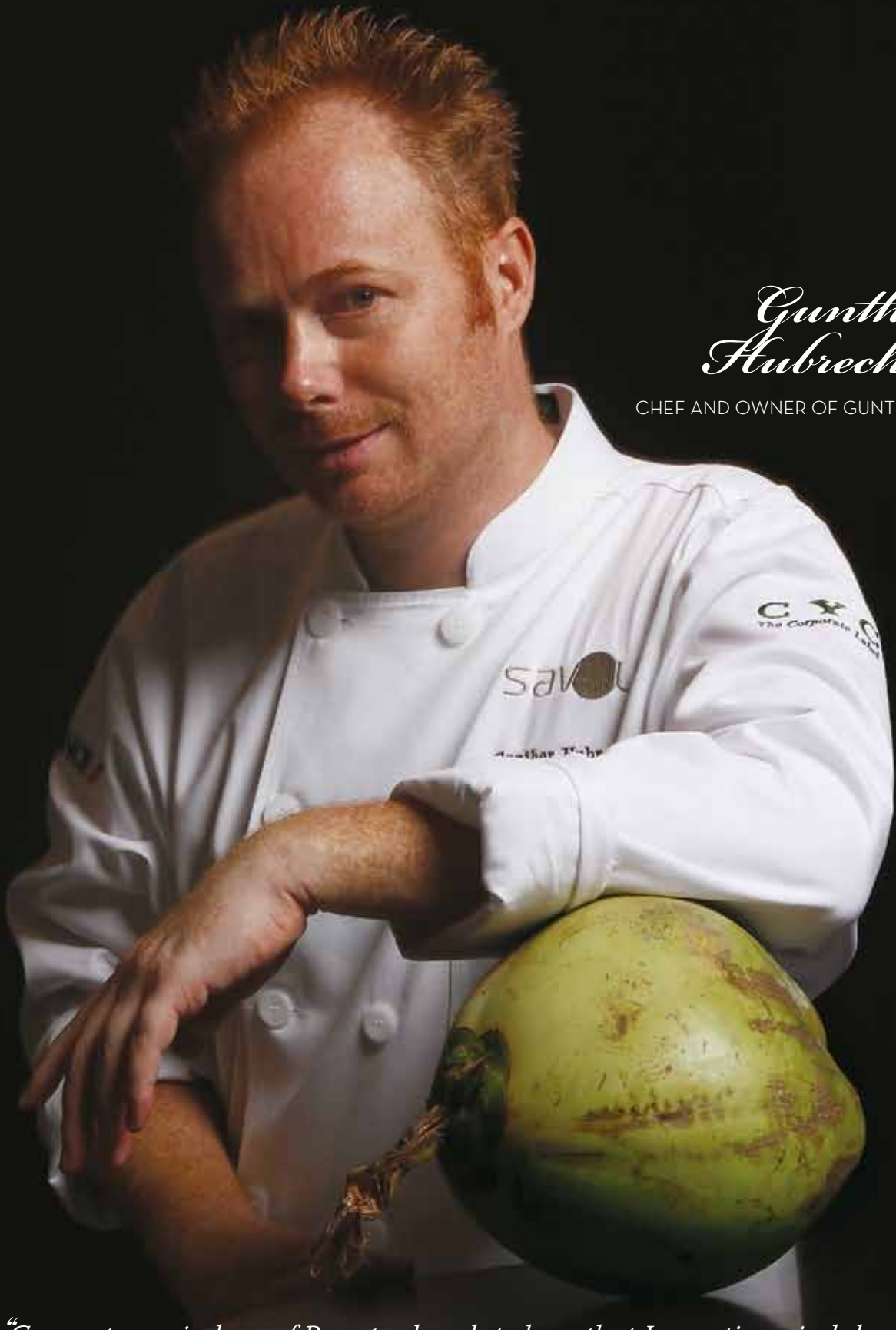
*I especially appreciate how the process of cooking any pasta can involve and  
bond a family — like the sight of a mum preparing the sauce while the little ones  
prepare lasagna sheets!*

*In short, my favourite phrase, "Anything...with pasta!"*



*Roberto Galetti,*

EXECUTIVE CHEF, MANAGING DIRECTOR AND PARTNER OF  
THE GARIBALDI GROUP, SINGAPORE



*Gunther  
Hubrechen,*

CHEF AND OWNER OF GUNTHER'S, SINGAPORE

*“Coconuts remind me of Bounty chocolate bars that I sometimes indulge in.  
Coconuts also remind me of white sandy beaches,  
clear blue skies and calm seas... the perfect getaway!”*

*Alvin Leung,*

CHEF AND OWNER OF TWO-MICHELIN-STARRED  
RESTAURANT BO INNOVATION, HONG KONG

*"I don't get inspired by food to create food.*

*What's important for me is to ask the question:*

*'What If?' What if I change the textures completely or scent it differently?*

*The possibilities for new creations are endless."*

