

TV'S CUISINEROS

TOP CHEF'S Dale Talde on Pinoy Cuisine 'It's the next big thing'

by MOMAR VISAYA
AJPress

Part of me thinks it's [Filipino cuisine] the next big thing that's gonna catch," Dale Talde, one of the more famous and colorful contestants on the recently-concluded Bravo reality show *Top Chef* told the Asian Journal in an exclusive interview Monday, June 23.

"It is the original fusion food, you can't get more original fusion than that, with the Spanish, Chinese, Malay and the native influences. We just need to put it out there," he said. Talde will now forever be known as that chef who introduced *halo-halo* to mainstream America via the popular show. He is proud of who he is and what his gastronomical influences are. If he had his way, he'd be putting more Filipino food to the forefront.

"I have seen people who do not have any idea what the Philippines is or where it is located. I think it is a very misunderstood culture and it's a shame," Talde said, and he is hoping that through food, he will be able to showcase what Filipino culture is all about.

It is Dale's dream to open a small and cozy restaurant that will serve some of his favorite comfort food. He considers anything that his mom makes, specially her *pancit*, *pancit molo* and *batchoy* as his comfort food. "I love *batchoy*, it's my favorite thing. When I open my restaurant, I want to open a very simple *batchoy* and barbecue place, something simple and really good," he quipped.

Dale's mom hails from Iloilo while his dad is from Negros Occidental. The last time he visited the Philippines was 19 years ago, when his grandfather died. He has been planning to visit and he hopes he can do it in the next couple of years.

He was born in Chicago and was brought back to the Philippines where he was raised for a couple of years until his parents could financially get on their feet. Growing up, he moved back with his family and was raised in a suburb just outside Chicago.

The following are excerpts of the interview:

Asian Journal: How did you get into 'Top Chef'?

My ex-girlfriend and I are big fans of the show. She really pushed me to do it. A lot of the guys I used to work with in my old kitchen at Morimoto said I was a bit dramatic and a bit high-strung and they thought that I would be perfect for the show.

AJ: What happened after the show? What are your plans?

I went right back to work at Buddakan. I have things on the line. I would like to do some more TV work so I came up with a concept for a show with a friend of mine and we're pitching it to some people. I have a screenplay that I am trying to write based on the restaurant experiences I've had. We're doing the *Top Chef* tour and I am also doing a demo for the CIA (Culinary Institute of America). I want to travel and continue the learning process.

AJ: How old were you when you realized you were into cooking?

I was probably 9 or 10. I grew up in a Filipino household and my mom used to do all the cooking. She always made dinner and that's what we ate. One night, I didn't feel like eating what my mom cooked and I wanted pancakes with apple on it. My mom was like, 'No you can't have pancakes and apples because I've made dinner already. If you want that, then you make it.' I was, 'Okay, then I'll make it.' At that moment, I realized that it was something I liked to do.

AJ: You prepared and served halo-halo on the show.

I grew up eating *halo-halo* so I knew it as a Filipino dessert. My aunt owned a grocery store where you can buy prepared food in Chicago. She had an ice shaver and she used to make *halo-halo* and when we had block parties, she would prepare *halo-halo* and she'd offer it to the neighbors. I knew going into the show that I had to do a dessert and this was my one dessert.

AJ: What is your favorite Filipino dish to cook?

This may sound absolutely ridiculous but I don't cook Filipino food as well as I know I should, and this may sound ridiculous. I can make *kare-kare* and it's good. I love to make and eat *kare-kare*.

AJ: How about non-Filipino dish?

This is so bad. I don't cook at home. It's my job to cook at the restaurant and I cook 12 hours a day so when I come home, I eat. When I do cook, especially when I cook for my loved ones, I go for the simple ones: barbecue and pasta.

I am getting older so I am watching what I eat. I try to eat a little healthier.

Everything's so plentiful here, compared back home. There, you only eat what's available. Here, everything's available to the point where there's excess and it's not healthy for you. If you want to eat *lechon kawali* four times a day, you can, but it's not good for you.

AJ: What kind of food do you love eating?

Noodle soups like the Filipino *batchoy*, Vietnamese *pho* and ramen are my favorite comfort and hang-over food. I love that type of eating: you pop in, you get a bowl and eat. It's fastfood but it's really, really good.

AJ: If you had your way, how are you going to make Filipino cuisine more acceptable to the mainstream palate?

It's not trying to make the food what it's not. Let's be perfectly honest. A lot of the food that we make is not pretty. You can pretty it up by putting it on a beautiful bowl but for me it's about keeping things simple and doing them perfectly. Like *batchoy*. Not a lot of people know about it, even first-generation Filipino Americans.

If I can take *batchoy* and make it perfect and turn one of those fast-foody places into something that's hip and cool as the place to be, and serve San Miguel beer, barbecue on a stick, *siopao* and *batchoy*.

Let's be more creative. *Pan de sal* sandwiches. We eat *pan de sal* by itself. It's reinventing something that Filipinos are used to eating and now will be marketed to a wider market. Let's start with something small like this, and *siopao* and *batchoy*.

AJ: Your message to fans and viewers who supported you this season.

To my Filipino fans, *salamat*. I hope I did you guys proud. I hope I put someone out there, specially to us first generation Americans who do not have someone in the media that they can look at. Growing up, I didn't have that. I did not have someone to look at and say that person is like me or looks like me. I am not saying that I am a role model, I am not. Hopefully, some people saw that and felt, 'I can relate to that dude. I can relate to his frustrations. I see what he is going through'. Thank you. We are doing it, Filipinos, we are putting it out there.

For my non-Filipino supporters: thanks for everything. Look out for me man, it's going to be a big year. It's going to be a good year. AJ



Dale Talde Photo courtesy of Bravo TV

THE BOILING POINT

Louross in

Hell's Kitchen

by JOSEPH PIMENTEL
AJPress



Louross Edralin / Myspace.com photo

There's an old saying, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen."

FilAm Hotel Chef Louross Edralin couldn't stand the heat of the foul-mouthed, fiery renowned Chef Gordon Ramsey. The 24-year-old Ritz Carlton Las Vegas chef Edralin, more commonly known as "Louross," was ousted by the host for undercooking meat in one of the episodes of this season's Fox *Hell's Kitchen* reality TV show contest.

"Louross was never short on energy, he was just short... on cooking ability," said Ramsey after ordering the 5'11", mohawk-rocking Louross to hang up his jacket wardrobe. He was the ninth contestant to be booted off the show.

The Bodog gaming site, however, had him as a slim favorite to win the show. A few weeks after being expelled, Louross was back in his own kitchen at the Ritz Carlton Galileo lobby lounge, still wondering how things went wrong.

"I was representing Filipinos," said Louross to the Asian Journal. "Filipinos can cook. You know, the show is an individual competition... but we were supposed to work as a team, as a family. I'm Filipino and you know, Filipinos work together. I tried to bring that [team concept] way to the [men's] team. I was telling, Matty, Craig, and Jason, the people I was rooming with, to all work together."

Louross told his team that "Ramsey is already giving us the blueprint to win, but some people were working for themselves. When you win, you're going to win as a team. I got tired of telling them. When I got kicked off, everyone was being fake and doing their own thing."

Ironically, most of the people that Louross mentioned were booted off the show earlier than him. Without a strong ally, Louross was left to fend for himself when it came down to decision time.

He's not angry that he fell so soon. He's not angry that Petrozza (that episode's winner from the men's team) chose him to be on Chef Ramsey's chopping block on episode 9.

"My true colors were showing," he said. "I'm a team-oriented guy. When it comes down to cooking, I know I'm a good chef. Unfortunately, I messed up on some of my steaks. Petrozza had to make a decision. He chose me to eliminate the threat."

Back at the Ritz Carlton, Louross is disappointed but glad he represented well in the show.

"I held my weight down," he said. "No one can understand what we went through. We were mentally gone."

Going Through Hell

Louross decided to enter *Hell's Kitchen* after being an avid fan. There would be days he would sit in his couch yelling at the TV, screaming at the top of his lungs whenever a chef contestant made a bonehead mistake.

"I need[ed] to be on that show," he said. "Some people want the challenge, some want to do it for fun. I went there to win it. I was a die-hard fan."

"There were never any Filipinos on that show," Louross observed. He wanted to change that. He felt he had the right qualifications.

Originally from the Eagle Rock area in Los Angeles, Louross started his chef career inside his mother's

kitchen.

A caterer herself, Louross' mom guided then 14-year-old Louross to the ways of Filipino cuisine.

Some of the things Louross learned from his mom -- cooking hotdogs to perfection in making Filipino spaghetti, picking the best ingredients in making *lumpia* and knowing the best cooking time for *pancit* noodles so they don't get soggy.

In his high school years, he ventured out for more experience. He worked at a kosher bakery store in Pasadena before landing a job at Toto's Lechon Manok where he continued to hone his expertise in Filipino cuisine.

He had to choose between taking up nursing (as most Filipinos do) or going to culinary arts school when he hit his college years. He chose his passion and went to the California School of Culinary Arts in Pasadena.

His parents were doubtful at first when they learned of his decision. Louross related what his dad said: "Well, at least we have another member of the family who knows how to cook."

After college, he strayed away from Filipino cuisine to hit the mainstream. He landed a job at the Ritz-Carlton in Las Vegas. When word got around that a Hell's Kitchen casting crew was holding open auditions at the Mirage, Louross jumped at the opportunity.

Asked why he should be on the show, Louross blurted, "You need a Filipino up there."

"They were cracking up. They just liked my personality," said Louross about the production staff's reaction.

Despite being only in nine episodes, Louross made an impression to the national TV audience. He wanted to bring Filipinos to the forefront. His quick flirtation with fellow contestant Corey and overt passion about cooking (he broke into tears when the team wouldn't work together) gave the Mohawk rocking, "metrosexual" instant popularity.

He wanted to represent Filipinos and he thinks that he really went far in doing so.

"When do you ever see a Filipino on national TV? Now, people recognize me. When I come out of the kitchen, it's Oh my God. We found you. We didn't know you worked here. If you could only see the reaction from them when they see me. People are mad. They're not happy that I got kicked out," Louross said.

He describes Hell's Kitchen as a "culinary boot camp." Surprising as it may seem, he has nothing but kind words for the hot-tempered host Ramsey.

"He's a gentleman. I learned so much from him. These are the guys that you want to work for. I have a newfound appreciation of food. I have passion for cooking but when I went on Hell's kitchen, my Filipino eyes were stretched even more. He opened it up to another level."

Louross will still be at the Ritz Carlton cooking and happy that he accomplished some of his dreams.

"My dream was to work with Chef Ramsey and it happened. That was a blessing," he said. "I also came to represent for the Filipinos. I really wanted people to know that Filipinos can cook. We Filipinos are a welcoming people so why not welcome others with our food." AJ

Publisher's Note:

The Food Issue

It's a given. Being hearty eaters, Filipinos have an innate talent for culinary arts. There is practically no Pinoy household that can survive without the comfort of Pinoy home-cooked dishes - *kare-kare*, *sinigang na baboy*, *adobo*, *pancit* and of course, the ever-popular *lumpia*. The Asian Journal MDWK magazine indulges you with this week's Food Issue - a flavorful showcase that will leave your mouth watering and your stomach grumbling for the gastronomic delights of home. AJ