

Chef Benny Se Teo is the creative force behind a highly successful chain of restaurants, known not just for its hearty, no-nonsense good food, but also for its continuing efforts to help ex-offenders and youths at risk.

Himself an ex-offender, Chef Benny's inspirational life story is now the backdrop of his first cookbook, **HONEST GOOD FOOD**, where he brings together a collection of comfort food recipes, inspired by his childhood memories and personal experiences, and most notably his internship at Jamie Oliver's Fifteen in London.

With punchy quotes, personal anecdotes and cooking tips, **HONEST GOOD FOOD** provides an insight into what drives this plain-speaking chef, his culinary secrets, and what some of his favourite dishes are. As Chef Benny says, "cooking, like life, becomes better through trial and error. If the experiment fails, just try again!"

"Benny has a story, and it's peppered into his recipes which makes it not just delectable, but meaningfully moreish. This book is about what flavoured his journey."

KF Seetoh
Founder, Makansutra

"Benny Se Teo has delivered the dream of many chefs – his own restaurants and a successful business. I could see this vision in his eyes from the minute we met over a pasta boiler in Fifteen, London. I have followed Benny's progress after he returned to Singapore. His passion and focus are an inspiration to all. I will especially cherish my visit to Singapore where I met up with Benny and visited the food market and culinary shops."

Andrew Parkinson
Head Chef, Glasshouse & Stables
The Grove Hotel & Spa, Hertfordshire, UK

visit our website at:
www.marshallcavendish.com/genref

mc Marshall Cavendish
Cuisine



Marshall Cavendish
Cuisine
mc

CHEF BENNY SE TEO

HONEST GOOD FOOD

HONEST GOOD FOOD

CHEF BENNY SE TEO

Bold Flavours, Hearty Eats

For Review Only

HONEST GOOD FOOD

CHEF
BENNY
SE TEO

Bold Flavours, Hearty Eats

© 2017 Marshall Cavendish International (Asia) Private Limited

Photography by Ng Chai Soong
Text by Yuling Li

Published by Marshall Cavendish Cuisine
An imprint of Marshall Cavendish International



All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner. Requests for permission should be addressed to the Publisher, Marshall Cavendish International (Asia) Private Limited, 1 New Industrial Road, Singapore 536196. Tel: (65) 6213 9300
E-mail: genref@sg.marshallcavendish.com
Website: www.marshallcavendish.com/genref

The publisher makes no representation or warranties with respect to the contents of this book, and specifically disclaims any implied warranties or merchantability or fitness for any particular purpose, and shall in no event be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damage, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

Other Marshall Cavendish Offices:
Marshall Cavendish Corporation. 99 White Plains Road, Tarrytown NY 10591-9001, USA • Marshall Cavendish International (Thailand) Co Ltd. 253 Asoke, 12th Flr, Sukhumvit 21 Road, Klongtoey Nua, Wattana, Bangkok 10110, Thailand • Marshall Cavendish (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, Times Subang, Lot 46, Subang Hi-Tech Industrial Park, Batu Tiga, 40000 Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia.

Marshall Cavendish is a registered trademark of Times Publishing Limited

National Library Board, Singapore Cataloguing in Publication Data

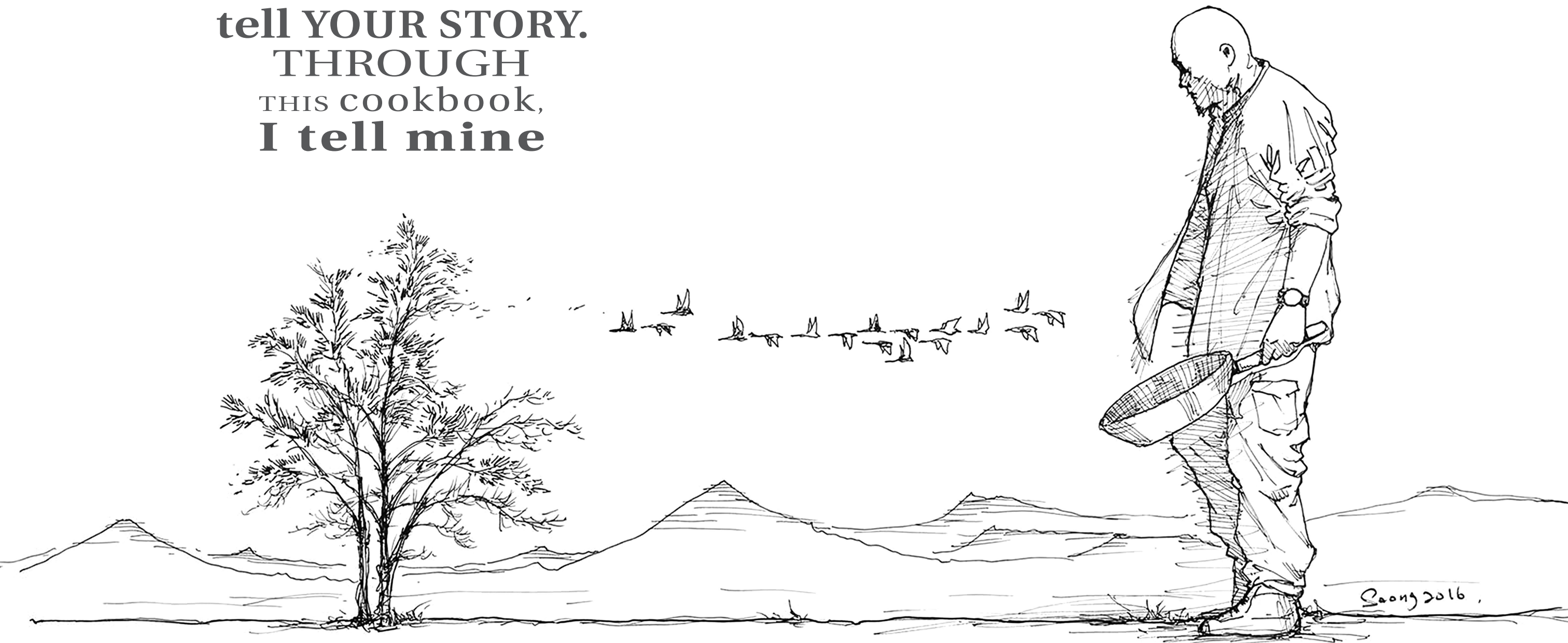
Name(s): Se Teo, Benny, 1960- | Ng, Chai Soong, photographer. | Li, Yuling, contributor.
Title: Honest good food : bold flavours, hearty eats / chef Benny Se Teo ; photography by Ng Chai Soong ; text by Yuling Li.
Description: Singapore : Marshall Cavendish Cuisine, [2017]
Identifier(s): OCN 960283897 | ISBN 978-981-47-7102-3
Subject(s): LCSH: Cooking, Singaporean.
Classification: DDC 641.595957--dc23

Printed in Singapore by Tien Wah Press (Pte) Limited

To my wife Mei,
who has seen me through the tough times

For Review Only

no MATTER
what YOU DO,
YOUR JOB IS TO
tell YOUR STORY.
THROUGH
THIS cookbook,
I tell mine



For Review Only

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 13

INTRODUCTION 15

HOME-STYLE COMFORT FOOD

Hairy Gourd with Glass Noodles and Dried Prawns 22

Roast Cracked Pork Belly (Siew Yoke) 24

Steamed Pork Belly with Prawn Paste Sauce 28

Leftover Magic 30

Pan-roasted Chinese BBQ Pork (Char Siew) 34

Rice Vermicelli with Pork Trotters 36

Bee Tai Mak with Century Egg 38

Braised Pork Buns (Kong Bak Pau) 41

Hainanese Pork Chop 44

HOME-STYLE COMFORT FOOD: READY IN TWENTY

Corned Beef Hash 50

Asian 'Pasta' (Kway Teow with Minced Meat Sauce) 52

For Review Only

SHIOK & SPICY SINGAPOREAN SIGNATURES

Hainanese Chicken Rice 56

Indian-Chinese Chicken Curry 60

Devil Curry 62

Lamb Lentil Curry 68

Beef Rendang 70

Ayam Masak Merah 72

Sambal Tumis Cuttlefish 74

Stingray Asam Pedas 78

Chilli Crab 80

Sayur Lodeh 84

Eurasian Prawn and Pineapple Curry 88

Mee Siam 92

Mee Rebus 94

Indian Butter Chicken 96

Dum Biryani 100

ZI CHAR & ASIAN CLASSICS

Steamed Song Fish Head 106

Black Pepper Crayfish 108

Clay Pot Crab with Glass Noodles 112

Braised Abalone, Hong Kong-style 114

Lobster Shang Meen 118

Kung Po Chicken 120

Stewed Beef Brisket 124

FUSING FLAVOURS

Braised Oxtail 130

Heart Attack Fried Rice with Wagyu Beef 132

Baby Lamb Rack with Couscous 138

Pan-fried Salmon with Dark Soy Sauce and Starfruit Salsa 140

Pan-fried Sea Bass Fillet with Braised Fennel 142

ABOUT CHEF BENNY SE TEO 145

WEIGHTS & MEASURES 148



INTRODUCTION

I love food and I love music. My cooking philosophy is like that of rock music: dare to be different and authentic. This cookbook celebrates both my passions, and I hope to share my story through the recipes that follow.

For those of you who do not know, I am an ex-convict. I struggled with drug addiction in my youth and went in and out of jail because of that. While serving my sentence in prison, I was tea boy to the superintendent, and I cooked for him and the other officers. They didn't complain about the food, so I guess they liked it.

Some years after my release, I joined a disaster-relief project called "Love Turkey". The mission brought medical supplies and other necessities to the victims of the earthquake that struck Turkey in 1999. My role was to run the kitchen and prepare meals for the volunteers from Singapore and Malaysia. Everyone really missed home then, and nothing comforted us more than having a meal consisting of Chinese sausages (*lap cheong*) and curry!

Over the years, friends who have tasted my cooking would often encourage me to go into the food business. Thus in 2005, I started Goshen, my first restaurant. It was a social enterprise that hired ex-offenders. Unfortunately, things did not work out as I had hoped, and Goshen closed its doors in 2006.

That same year, I also found out about Jamie Oliver's Fifteen, a successful non-profit restaurant based in London. I wrote to Liam Black, then CEO of Fifteen, and asked if I could join their apprenticeship programme. I was turned down many times, but I didn't give up trying. I was eventually offered a spot – on condition that I found my own way to London.



Working in the kitchen of Jamie Oliver's Fifteen was an eye-opening and unforgettable experience for me. I learnt so much in just three weeks. The chefs were highly professional and showed a lot of pride in their work. I still remember how a senior corrected me when I tossed a salad with one hand instead of two. The attention to detail, such as using both hands to gently mix a salad, impressed me.

You could say I returned to Singapore a different man. Exactly how different is something I am still discovering today. It was a short but intense stint, and there were many concepts that I did not understand then, which became clearer with time.

In 2007, I co-founded Eighteen Chefs and opened the first outlet at Eastpoint Mall in the east of Singapore. Today, there are more than 12 Eighteen Chefs outlets scattered across the island, a testament that people enjoy eating our food.

What is the secret to making good food, you ask? Let me tell you the honest truth: there is no secret. Cooking, like life, becomes better through trial and error. Of course, if you want some ideas, refer to the recipes in this book! They are meant to be easy to follow, and you will be able to recreate the dishes in your own kitchen.

I have also included tips that I picked up over the years from friends in Singapore and all around the world. On pages 50 and 52, you will find two special recipes contributed by my friend, Kuik Shiao-Yin, who co-founded Food For Thought, a popular local restaurant that is also a social enterprise. I know you will enjoy her recipes too.

At home, I cook with whatever I can find in my fridge and pantry. Should I find that I am out of black vinegar when I want to cook *kung po chicken*, I use balsamic vinegar as a substitute if that is what I have on hand. And why not? Don't get me wrong; I am not saying that anything goes, but cooking should not be restrictive. Work with what you have and you will be surprised by how well a dish can turn out. But should the experiment fail, just try again!

Chef Benny

For Review Only

The Power of an Encouraging Word

When I was young, I knew I was good at replicating dishes, but I never thought of myself as a chef. In 1999, I joined a disaster-relief project called Love Turkey where I was tasked with cooking for the other volunteers who were mostly doctors and nurses. They looked forward to every meal and told me that my cooking helped them feel less homesick. Finally at the age of 39, I started to consider the possibility that I could be a chef (I was a dispatch rider then). Sometimes, people have gifts that they do not know of. Don't underestimate the power of your encouragement to help others realise their gifts.





For Review Only

HOME-STYLE COMFORT FOOD

There is a story behind every recipe featured in this book. The dishes in this section are made of happy, cherished moments shared with family and friends around the table.

This is an unforgettable dish that my late mother used to prepare for me. I remember when I was detained at the police station for using drugs, and Mum had come to bail me out. It was late and I had not eaten. When we got home, she used whatever she had in the fridge, and prepared this dish in the rice cooker. All it took was a few minutes. I remember thinking that there was no better taste on earth than this.

STEAMED PORK BELLY WITH PRAWN PASTE SAUCE

Serves 2–3

INGREDIENTS

200 g (7 oz) pork belly
¾ Tbsp fine shrimp paste
1 tsp cooking oil
1½ tsp ground white pepper
2 tsp sugar
1 tsp cornflour
2 Tbsp water
1 red chilli, sliced
1 spring onion (scallion), sliced

METHOD

1. Cut pork belly into slices. Place on a steaming plate and add fine shrimp paste, oil, pepper, sugar, cornflour and water. Mix well, cover and set aside to marinate for 30 minutes.
2. Place in a steamer over rapidly boiling water and steam for 10 minutes or until pork well cooked.
3. Garnish with red chillies and spring onion. Serve hot as part of a meal or with white rice.



A close-up photograph of a chef's hands cooking in a large, dark metal wok. The chef is using a long-handled metal spatula to stir the contents of the wok. A bright, intense flame is visible at the base of the wok, suggesting high heat. In the background, there are blurred stainless steel pots and kitchen equipment, indicating a professional kitchen setting. The overall lighting is warm, with a strong orange glow from the fire.

For Review Only

SHIOK & SPICY SINGAPOREAN SIGNATURES

I am proud to be
a Singaporean. Our cuisine
is known around the world.

People may not know
much about our country,
but they would definitely
have heard of our food.

Of my happy childhood days, I will always remember eating the curry that my Indian neighbour would often prepare. There are many ways of cooking curry, and the first version I learnt to make was Indian. The Chinese way of cooking curry is more methodical, with different ingredients introduced in separate batches. The Indian style focuses on the slow stewing process. Over the years, my style has become something in between.

INDIAN-CHINESE CHICKEN CURRY

Serves 4–5

INGREDIENTS

1 kg (2 lb 3 oz) chicken
3 medium potatoes, peeled

MARINADE

4-cm (1½-in) ginger, peeled and sliced
6 cloves garlic, peeled
200 g (7 oz) store-bought chilli paste (*cili boh*)
1 Tbsp turmeric powder
4 Tbsp meat curry powder
1 tsp chicken seasoning powder
2 Tbsp salt
2 tsp sugar
A dollop of yoghurt
1 can (390 g / 13 oz) evaporated milk
2 green chillies, seeded and halved
1 cinnamon stick
2 star anise
6 cloves
12 cardamom pods
20 g (¾ oz) cashew nuts, ground
25 g (⅔ oz) fried shallots
1 large tomato, cut into wedges
3 stalks curry leaves
2 sprigs coriander leaves (*cilantro*), finely chopped

METHOD

1. Clean and cut chicken into 6–8 pieces.
2. Pound ginger and garlic into a paste. Transfer to a large bowl and mix well with chilli paste, turmeric powder, meat curry powder, chicken seasoning powder, salt, sugar, yoghurt and evaporated milk. Add remaining ingredients for marinade to bowl, then add chicken and mix well. Transfer to a saucepan. Cook over low heat for 30 minutes or until oil separates.
3. Boil a pot of water and cook potatoes until tender. Drain potatoes and cut into large pieces. Add to curry and mix well.
4. Serve hot with white rice or bread.



A close-up photograph of a chef's hand holding a large, cooked crab. The crab is light green and white, with its claws visible. The chef is wearing a grey shirt with some text on it, which is out of focus. The background is also blurred.

For Review Only

ZI CHAR & ASIAN CLASSICS

Over the years,
I've learnt to cook many things.
But I am, at heart, a *zi char* chef.

This dish was a hot favourite at Goshen, my first restaurant. Till today, old customers still tell me that they miss it. Freshwater fish, like song fish, tend to have an earthy taste that some do not fancy. To remove traces of this taste, drain away the excess liquid from the fish head after steaming.

STEAMED SONG FISH HEAD

Serves 4–5

INGREDIENTS

- 1 medium song fish head, cleaned
- 1 Tbsp cooking oil
- 3 cloves garlic, peeled and sliced
- 2.5-cm (1-in) knob ginger, peeled and finely chopped
- 1 Tbsp tapioca flour, mixed with 1 Tbsp water
- 1 Tbsp fried pork lard

SAUCE

- 3 salted plums
- 3 Tbsp fermented bean paste
- 1 Tbsp tangerine sauce
- 5 Tbsp sugar
- 2 Tbsp calamansi juice
- 2 bird's eye chillies, chopped
- ½ tsp dark soy sauce
- 125 ml (4 fl oz / ½ cup) water

GARNISH

- 1 spring onion (scallion), cut into thin strips
- 1 red chilli, cut into thin strips
- 1 sprig coriander leaves (cilantro), chopped

METHOD

1. Place fish head on a shallow steaming plate and steam for 14 minutes over high heat. Remove fish from steamer and carefully drain away steaming liquid.
2. Heat oil in a pan over medium heat. Add garlic and ginger and stir-fry until fragrant. Add ingredients for sauce and simmer until fragrant. Add tapioca flour slurry and stir to thicken sauce.
3. Pour sauce over steamed fish head. Top with fried pork lard and garnish with spring onion, red chillies and coriander. Serve as part of a meal.



For Review Only

FUSING FLAVOURS

When I travel,
I love eating and sampling
new food. Here are some recipes
that draw from my experience
at Jamie Oliver's Fifteen
and my trips abroad.



Indonesian dark soy sauce or *kicap manis* is a staple condiment that goes very well with grilled dishes. In this recipe, I've used the sweet dark sauce as a glaze for the salmon, and it balances the flavour of the fish perfectly.

PAN-FRIED SALMON WITH DARK SOY SAUCE AND STARFRUIT SALSA

Serves 1

INGREDIENTS

200 g (7 oz) salmon
Sea salt, as needed
Ground black pepper,
as needed
5 Tbsp cooking oil
2–3 tsp Indonesian dark
soy sauce (*kicap manis*)

STARFRUIT SALSA

$\frac{1}{3}$ medium cucumber, diced
1 medium red onion, peeled
and diced
1 medium star fruit, cut into
15 thin slices
3 Tbsp *sambal belacan*
(recipe below)

SAMBAL BELACAN

5 red bird's eye chillies
2–3 shallots, peeled
2–3 cloves garlic, peeled
4 g ($\frac{1}{8}$ oz) dried prawn paste
(*belacan*), toasted
2–3 small green limes, juice
extracted
1 red chilli, sliced
1 tsp sugar
1 tsp sweet chilli sauce
1 tsp grated green lime zest

METHOD

1. Prepare *sambal belacan*. Using a food processor, process ingredients for *sambal belacan* into a paste. Set aside for making starfruit salsa.
2. Rinse salmon and pat dry. Score skin to prevent fish from curling while cooking. Season with a pinch of salt and black pepper.
3. Heat oil in a pan over medium-high heat. Gently place salmon skin-side down in pan. Let cook for 2–3 minutes before turning salmon over. Add Indonesian dark soy sauce and let cook for another 2–3 minutes.
4. Prepare starfruit salsa. Toss ingredients together and mix well.
5. Spoon salsa onto a serving plate and arrange salmon on top. Serve.



Braised fennel was often cooked at Fifteen, but it is still relatively uncommon in Singapore. Fennel doesn't have a strong taste on its own, so braising it in the same pan used to sear the sea bass will infuse it with the flavour of the fish. This is a simple and delicious dish that reminds me of Jamie Oliver's cooking style.

PAN-FRIED SEA BASS FILLET WITH BRAISED FENNEL

Serves 2

INGREDIENTS

300 g (11 oz) sea bass fillet,
skin lightly scored
A pinch of sea salt
A dash of ground black pepper
A drizzle of olive oil
2 Tbsp cooking oil
Fennel leaves, to taste

BRAISED FENNEL

1 Tbsp olive oil
1 fennel bulb, halved, then cut
each half into 3 pieces
A pinch of sea salt
A dash of ground black pepper

METHOD

1. Prepare braised fennel. Heat olive oil in a frying pan over medium heat. Add fennel and season with salt and black pepper. Add tomatoes, garlic, onion, thyme, white wine, capers, lemon and seafood stock. Cover pan with a lid and braise for 20 minutes or until fennel is soft. Add butter and stir to thicken sauce. Dish out to a serving plate and set aside.
2. Season sea bass with salt, black pepper and a drizzle of olive oil. Heat oil in a frying pan over medium heat. Once pan is hot, place sea bass skin-side down and cook until edges of fish turn golden brown. Turn fish over to cook to on the other side.
3. Arrange fish on braised fennel. Garnish with fennel leaves and serve immediately.





For Review Only

ABOUT CHEF BENNY SE TEO

Chef Benny is well known in the Singapore food scene as a chef, restaurateur and social entrepreneur. Featured in local and international media such as the *Straits Times*, BBC and CNN, Benny has also spoken at universities and conferences, including the globally renowned TEDx Talks.

Benny's story is an inspiring tale of humanity, hope and redemption. A high-school dropout, former drug user and ex-convict, Benny has known failure and condemnation. For years, drug addiction controlled Benny's life, but his mother's love remained a constant through those dark days. The turning point came in 1992, when Benny's brush with duodenum cancer delivered a wakeup call, and led him to find absolution in Christianity.

This cookbook is a celebration of the love and fellowship that Benny has experienced in his journey of self-discovery. Growing up, Benny had always been curious about cooking. He knew he had a knack for recreating dishes, but it was not until he served as a tea boy to the prison superintendent that he discovered his creative gift.

With the encouragement of friends and strangers, Benny eventually came to embrace his culinary talent. In 2005, he took a leap of faith to start his first restaurant, Goshen. The following year, Benny secured a place in the apprenticeship programme at Jamie Oliver's Fifteen, a non-profit restaurant in London. Goshen folded shortly after his return to Singapore, but Benny remained undeterred, and went on to co-found Eighteen Chefs—a successful restaurant chain and social enterprise that helps ex-offenders and youths at risk.

Ten years on, Benny now shares his story through this collection of well-loved recipes. Inspired by his Sei Yap (a Cantonese dialect group) and Singaporean heritage, his childhood and many cherished memories, the dishes are packed with nostalgia and punchy flavours. Alongside the recipes, Benny candidly shares practical tips that home cooks will find most handy.

When Benny is not busy cooking up new projects or travelling with his wife, Mei, he can be found chatting with friends over a hot cup of bullet kopi (black coffee with butter). Do say hello when you see him. Chef Benny may not be smiling, but don't worry, that's simply his default expression. Remember to tell him how much you enjoyed *Honest Good Food*.