



A PLAY ON WORDS

By **CARLA DABIS** — Photography, **STEFAN LINDEQUE**

So much more than just a play on words, Chef Reif Othman takes up permanent residence at Play Restaurant, his new playground and a bold follow-up to his six-year run at Zuma. One of the UAE's most prolific chefs, Othman put Dubai on the culinary map having climbed on to The World's Best 100 Restaurants while at the helm of Zuma, for four consecutive years. Forging ahead in hopes of a new challenge, creative freedom and an understudy of 40 chefs, Othman checks any gimmicks at the door for his gastronomic debut.

Housed in epicurean empire The H Hotel, the interiors strike just the right balance between playful and glamorous. From the vintage brass details to the marble tabletops and trumpets, the decor is inspired by the golden era of jazz - it's a space where Jay Gatsby would feel at home.

The most obvious play on words however is Play's menu, coined 'Mediterrasian', which is a fusion of Mediterranean and Asian ingredients. Othman's whimsical take on Indian street food, his 'S+T' Air Crackers, sees lychee transformed into foam atop lobster and embodies Play's curious ethos. One bite of his Wagyu short ribs cooked for 76 hours, on the other hand, reveals the classic Japanese flavour profile and technique that Chef Reif is so famous for.

With roots in Japanese kitchens and with a Singaporean heritage, Othman's self-proclaimed cooking style is light, spicy and clean with a weakness for anything braised. He also has an obsession for consistency. In an effort to get inside his head, *Citizen K* sits down with Chef Reif to talk about his inspiration and how he got started on his culinary journey.



WAGYU SHORT RIBS COOKED FOR 76 HOURS, ON THE OTHER HAND, REVEALS THE CLASSIC JAPANESE FLAVOUR



Did you always know you wanted to be a chef?

No, as I wasn't sure what I wanted to do in my younger days. I started out doing various jobs, but ever since I was young, I was very influenced by food. I used to help my mum on her food stall selling Malay/Indonesian cuisine.

How did you get your first big break in the culinary world?

After a few odd jobs, I started working in some small eateries in Singapore ranging from Italian, Peranakan, French, American etc. From that moment, it sparked a passion in me which led me to be where I am now. With the little money I earned, I travelled across Europe to work for free, just for the experience. Being able to see real produce and working with passionate chefs was the ultimate lesson. From grandmothers making gnocchi to established chefs showing off what they do best, they taught me a love for food, ingredients and all types of cuisine.

What inspires you to create dishes?

I get my inspiration by dining out, eating mainly street food and travelling around the world to open up my mind to various dishes that I can work on so I can eventually interpret the dish in my own way.

What are your three favourite ingredients to work with at the moment?

- 1: My dry-aged beef from Ireland, it's grass-fed
- 2: Spices from every corner of the region
- 3: Fresh produce from Japan ■