

GRID EATS

CHEERS TO THE CHEF

Interview by Nina Unlay Photography Fruhlein

JAZELLE CARANDANG, founder of SERBESA MNL, makes it her business to do justice to food and drink, regardless of whose kitchen she's in.

There's always chaos to be found in the kitchen, but amidst that, she seems to be settled comfortably. Somewhere between the bulk of the metal equipment, prepared food, containers filled with all kinds of colourful spices, and bottles of beer (in fact, one already in hand), Jazelle Carandang seems to have found her place. "I was always taught that in a comfortable kitchen all you need to do is reach," she demonstrates by reaching from station to station, not needing to take more than a step. "So if you have to move or get something, your preparation is all wrong."

Preparation is the bulk of the work here—hours on hours spent days prior just preparing for today's event. This is the calm before the storm: food for hundreds of people ready to be cooked before the crowd for the night comes bustling in. There does seem to be some orderly set-up happening even in this small space. This is the first time that Jazelle is setting up here, in the open kitchen of Red Light in Poblacion, Makati City, but such is the nomadic

nature of her work and enterprise Serbesa MNL, a pop-up concept for food and drinks.

Jazelle hosts events and collaborates with different venues to serve these pairings: combinations in food and drink that are simple but hit the spot. The term 'elevated street food' comes to mind. "It's food on-the-go; something to eat while you walk around. Now, everything is always fast-paced. That's what I want: food na walang arte. Nowadays, food has so many frills. I'm not really mad at dishes for looking nice, but there should always be more flavor."

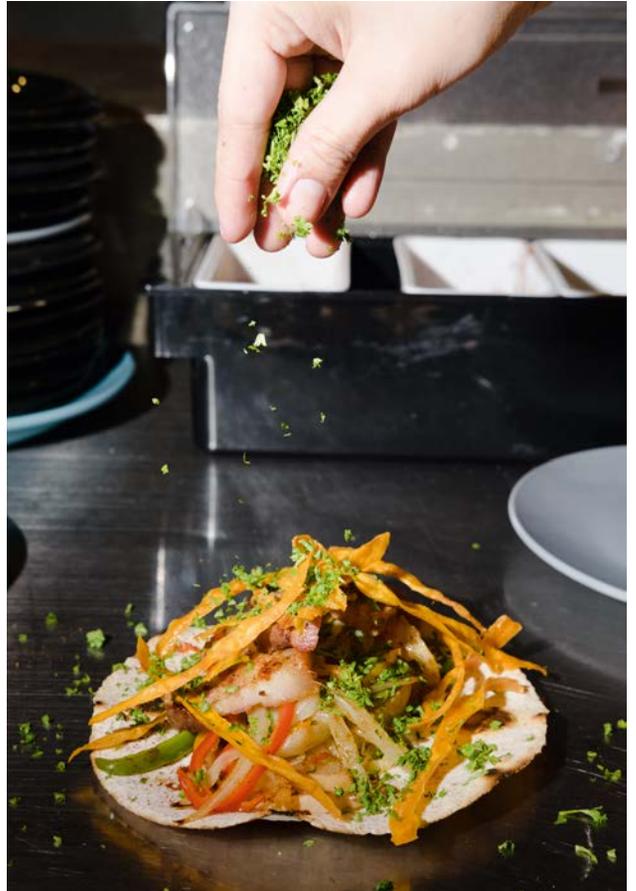
Formerly a sous chef for Rambla and a graduate of American Hospitality Academy, Jazelle has spent much of her time studying flavor, even having it seep into her thoughts after hours. Finding her mind wandering to newer concepts, potential menu items, she decided to create Serbesa MNL. Serbesa's has been a cuisine without any particular rhyme or reason: food of all kinds, just packed with flavor, and ready to eat.

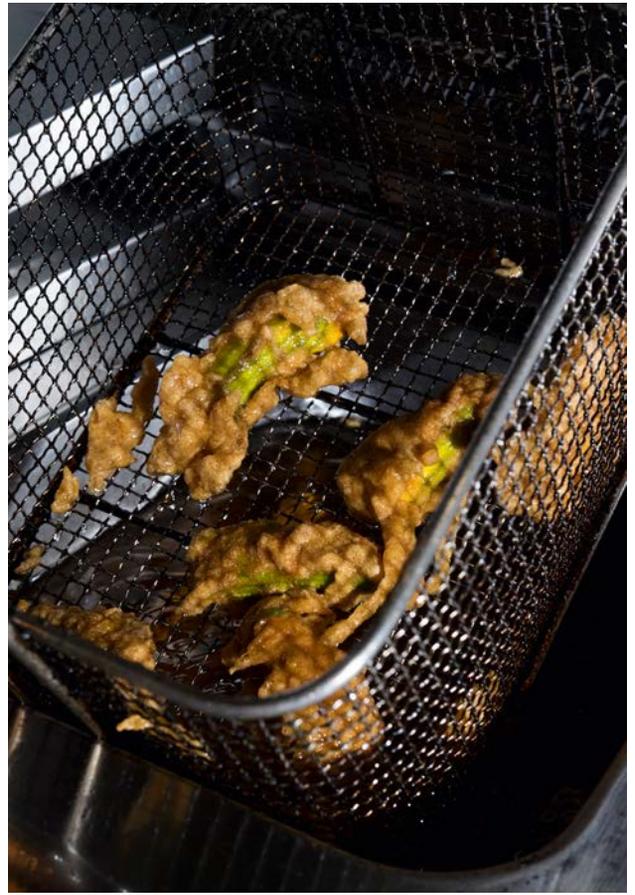
"My mom stays in Singapore three

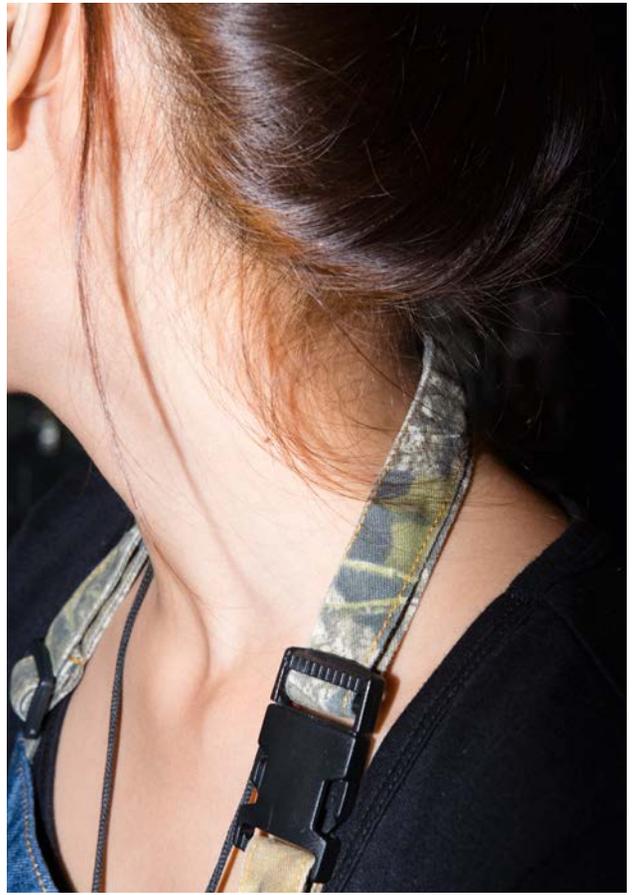
to four times a year, and when I go there, the food and restaurants I tend to gravitate to is hawkers style, which inspired the idea for Serbesa. I took most of my favorites, all the cuisines I've tried—Mexican, Spanish, Filipino—I took everything, it was all over the place but I put it all together."

SERBESA MNL is a pop-up concept for food and drinks. They also produce pop-up events at different establishments, featuring new pairings between their dishes and special cocktails.

For more information, check out IG.com/serbesamnl.







CERDO TOSTADA OR ROASTED PORK BELLY

PORK BELLY

Pork belly, cut to inihaw cuts

Olive oil, pomace

Cinnamon sticks

Fennel seed

Salt, pepper corns

Lime

Parsley stem

TO COOK

In a big pot, add all ingredients together, making sure that everything is submerged in oil. Cook the liempo over low heat over gas for about an hour and a half to two hours. This will make the pork belly really tender. Remove pork from oil and let it cool down. When cooled, slice into bite-sized pieces and pan sear to make it crispy on the outside.

SQUASH AND JALAPEÑO POPPERS

FILLING

Squash blossom

Cream cheese

Jalapeño (fresh jalapeños would be best, but bottled works too)

Salt

Lime juice

FILLING

Prepare the squash blossoms by removing the inner pistil, using a tweezer and cutting off excess stem, just leave around 1-inch stems. To make the filling, mix all ingredients together and adjust season to taste. Spiciness can be adjusted according to preference by adding jalapeños. Tip: leave the cream cheese in room temperature before mixing other ingredients. It makes it easier to mix everything together.

BEER BATTER

Beer

Flour

Salt and pepper

BEER BATTER

Mix all dry ingredients together. Make sure ingredients are incorporated well. Add the beer in small amounts at a time. Batter consistency has to be like thick oatmeal.

TO COOK

Pipe the filling inside the squash using a piping bag. Fill blossom 3/4 of the way, this will ensure that the filling will not spill out. Dunk the filled squash blossom in the beer batter; make sure that they are coated well. Heat oil in a deep pan or pot. Using a fork, remove poppers from the batter and into the oil. Use a fork or a strainer to mix the oil around to prevent poppers from sticking to the bottom of the pan. Fry for about three to four minutes, or until golden brown.

