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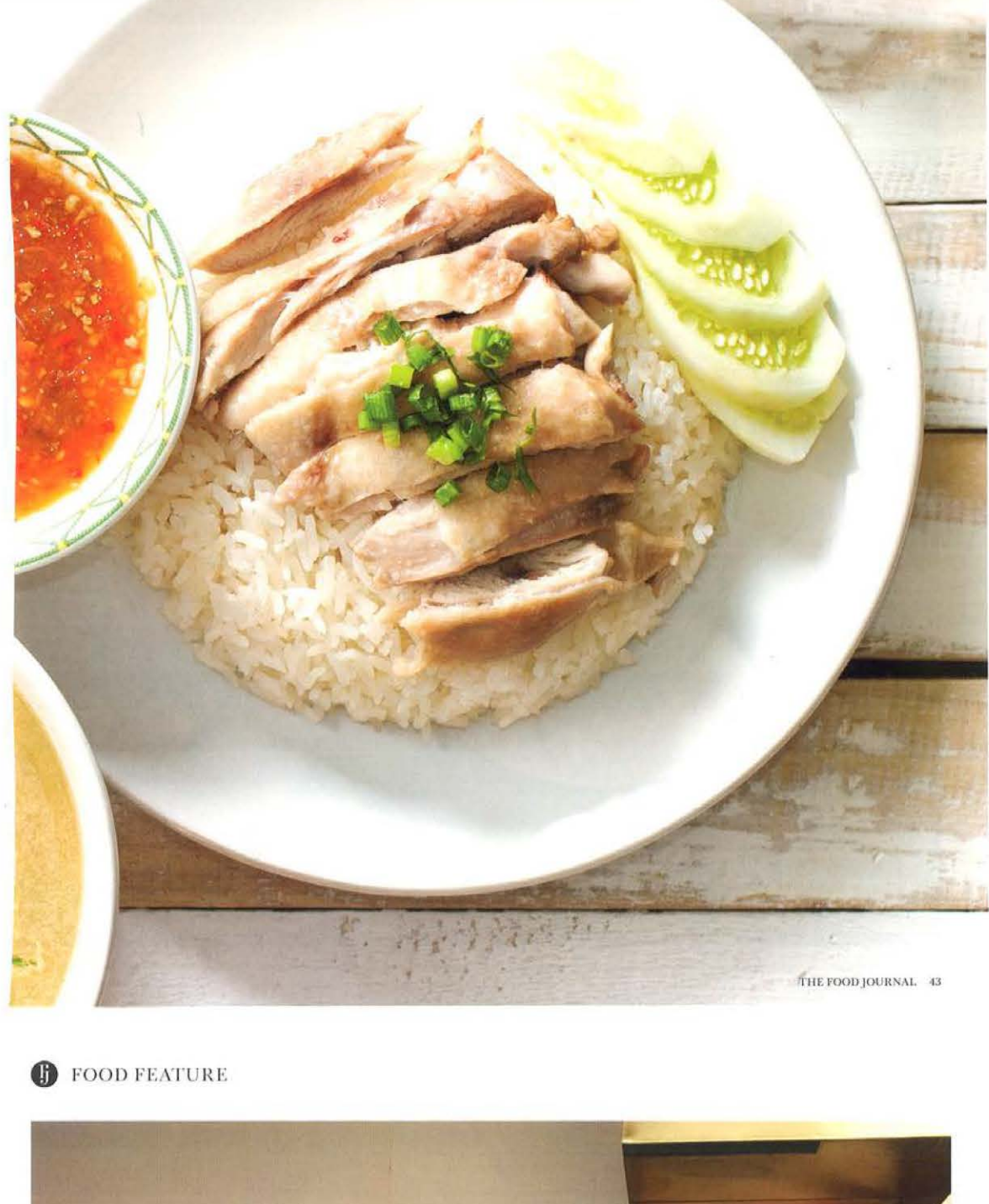
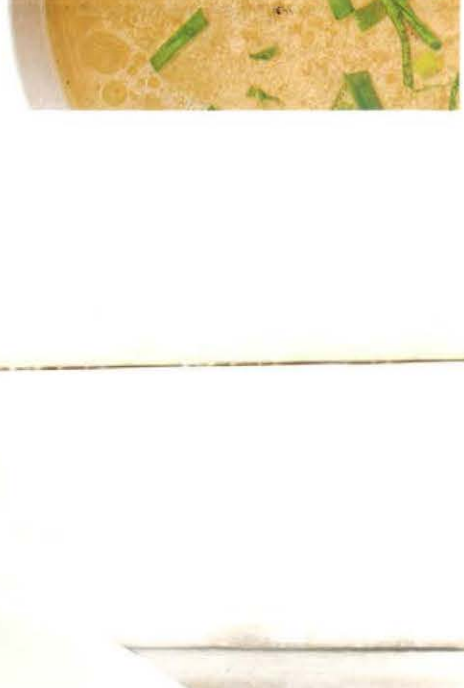
Chicken, rice, and everything nice

The future is bright for Singapore's favourite rice staple -
 By Anna Fernandez

A HAINANESE HEAD START

Chicken rice was first introduced to Singapore by early Chinese immigrants from the Hainan island, off the southern coast of China. There, locals call the dish "Wenchang chicken" and a particular fowl that is bony and fibrous is used.

The dish was then adapted to accommodate local tastes and influences, resulting in Singapore's very own rendition, which uses chicken that is fatter and more tender, and does away with the pork-bone stock when cooking the rice.



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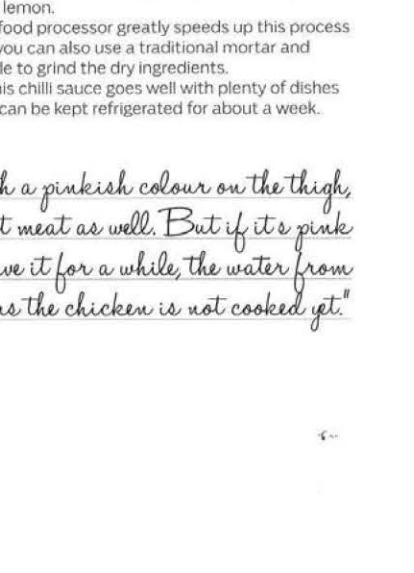


Master Mentor Chef Eric Teo putting the finishing touches on his crystal dumpling wrapped with chicken rice creation.

the 5 elements

Five essential ingredients are added to the rice to give it its wholesome fragrance and flavour. Finely chopped shallots, garlic and peeled ginger are stir-fried until fragrant before being cooked with the rice and chicken fat.

Lemongrass and pandan are also added for further fragrance. The pandan leaves are usually tied into a knot and discarded once ready to serve. The green tops of the lemongrass, which are inedible, can also be used for flavouring as long as they are discarded before eating.



STRIKING THE PERFECT BALANCE

At the recent Food Services Transformation Conference at the Asian Culinary Institute (ACI), Master Mentor at ACI, Chef Eric Teo, conducted a demonstration on food innovation using the example of chicken rice, and showed attendees how the dish can be transformed into a dumpling.

To Chef Eric, who is arguably one of Singapore's most recognised culinary faces both on and off the telly, a good plate of chicken rice is a matter of perfecting all the elements which constitute the dish in its entirety.

He mentioned, "A good chicken rice must have a very tender chicken and it should be cooked right to the bone. The rice has to be fragrant, tasty, and a little bit oily. Some prefer it to be sticky, some prefer loose rice. But at the end of the day, it has to have the five elements in it. The chili has to be perfectly ground with lime and then of course you still have the soya sauce, the ginger paste and the stock."

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the chilli

How you make the chilli sauce will depend on whether you prefer it with more or less heat. If you're going for the latter, remove the chilli seeds before finely dicing and grinding them with all the other components: garlic, ginger, lime juice, sugar, rice vinegar, and salt to taste. Thereafter, chicken stock is gradually added until a paste-like consistency is attained.

Although calamansi limes are preferred for their sweet and sour mix, key limes work fine too. Do note however, that lime should not be substituted with lemon.

A food processor greatly speeds up this process but you can also use a traditional mortar and pestle to grind the dry ingredients.

This chilli sauce goes well with plenty of dishes and can be kept refrigerated for about a week.

"It has to be cooked to the bone, with a pinkish colour on the thigh, sometimes you can get it on the breast meat as well. But if it's pink and the bone is bloody and when you leave it for a while, the water from the chicken is a reddish colour, it means the chicken is not cooked yet."

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Other chicken+rice varieties in Singapore



Mod-Sin poached chicken sushis at \$8 a plate. It is accompanied with garlic chili and held together with a strip of seaweed. #06-00, People's Park Complex.



Although the chicken rice equivalent of a burger has yet to surface, rice burgers are nothing new. Fast-food chain Mos Burger alone has four varieties of rice burgers: Ebi, Kakiage, Yakimiku and Tsukune.

Eat Chicken Rice's signature dish is the truffle chicken rice, which is mixed with truffle oil-infused mushrooms. Each meal is generously served with half a spring chicken, and a lava egg. #B1-D18, Cathay Cineleisure Orchard

Nasi ayam is the Malay version of chicken rice, and ingredients like star anise and cinnamon are usually added to the recipe. Sedap Corner Nasi Ayam Hainan specialises in the Hainan version of the dish and is famous for their roast chicken. S-11 Bukit Batok Food House, 640 Bukit Batok Central, Singapore 650640

For Asian food with a twist, Stateland Asian-Fusion Cafe is the place to go. Their Hainanese chicken rice risotto is served with a soy braised chicken on a bed of ginger risotto, and topped with spicy sriacha chili vinaigrette. 32 Bali Lane Singapore 189666