

why now?



Rosewood Phnom Penh

* PHNOM PENH

Kitchen goddesses

Two acclaimed female chefs in Cambodia are influential in the world of publishing and Khmer cuisine

by JONATHAN EVANS

Ask which country is at the forefront of contemporary Asian cuisine, and many might be surprised it's Cambodia. In fact, the best-known chefs are women.

Ros Rotanak affectionately known as Chef Nak, sent shockwaves through the culinary world last November when

she won the top prize at the 29th Gourmand World Cookbook Awards held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia for *SOAY: Royal Cambodian Home Cuisine*, which creatively reimagines dishes from the pre-war years.

One of Cambodia's first celebrity chefs, the 39-year-old marked her ascension to the culinary vanguard when she curated a menu at Brasserie Louis last year at Rosewood Hotel in Phnom Penh.

Today, she passes on her wisdom from a lifetime of cooking with local produce at her uber-cozy, century-old wooden home by the Mekong, also called Chef Nak. Surrounded by a vegetable

garden, here she hosts acclaimed, private home-dining evenings with traditional music performances, home cooking classes and immersive homestays in the adjoining antique, wooden suite.

These adventures are designed to



Chef Kimsan Pol

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK (PIZZA)

enlighten guests not just about food, but Cambodian heritage and community.

"My journey began when I travelled to the United States in 2010," says Chef Nak. "I saw cuisine from our neighbours everywhere – Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore – but none from Cambodia. I wondered why this was so, when our cuisine is just as good. Cooking is an artform that tells stories about who we are, how we eat and how we live."

Another female chef shaking up the local culinary scene is 40-year-old Kimsan Pol. Originally from Kampong province, she is a graduate of the Paul Dubrule cooking school in Siem Reap and runs the fine-dining restaurants Embassy in Siem Reap and Sombok in Phnom Penh.

In Sombok,



Chef Ros Rotanak

innovative Khmer cuisine is rustled up by all-female teams – a welcome development in this field. Aspiring to become Cambodia's first Michelin-starred chef, Kimsan perfected her approach over years of experimentation and after research of forgotten recipes in the national archives.

Kimsan has also carved out an illustrious career well beyond cooking, appearing as a host, guest speaker and participant at

competitive events across the globe.

Sombok is a tantalising space on the Mekong riverfront, with striking design from architect Kimseng Ouk. The emphasis is on inventive cooking, artful presentation as well as taste – typical dishes are Petrossian caviar

Sombok's King prawn and Kap crab salad



* SURABAYA
Have a secret slice

Head to the port city's most popular hidden restaurant, **Salomon Pizzeria**, which serves Neapolitan-style pizza that fans have declared the best one in town. Located inside a house in the largely residential area of Petemoran village, the "kitchen" is by the entrance while the living room has been turned into the dining area. Salomon Pizzeria sits a maximum of 20 people and is open only from 5PM–9PM.

● [salomon_pizzeria](#)



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Garden of delights

Maya Garden is an immersive, bucolic community of timber houses near Chroy Changvar peninsula, the principal venue for last year's Southeast Asian Games. Surrounded by lush nature and showcasing the simple beauty of Cambodian country living, the homestay lets visitors enjoy an immersive cultural retreat. Maya Garden also offers guests bicycle, horse or bullock-cart rides on nearby Silk Island.

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