



A LIFE LESS ORDINARY

AN UNCONVENTIONAL PATH LED GOME
GALILY TO ARRIVE AT CULINARY ARTISTRY

Most chefs, save for the occasional television celebrity, are modest enough not to describe themselves as artists. This is definitely true of Israeli-born Gome Galily, yet watch him work from the open kitchen at Lamuella Ibiza and you'd be forgiven for thinking otherwise. Presented with one of his dishes, it's hard not to bring to mind any of the conceptual artists of the 20th century – say Yves Klein or John Baldessari.

Where that particular art movement explored the narrative possibilities and associative influences of image and language, Galily does the same but with flavour. Unlike those artists, he is beautifully unaware of how his own creative process is steeped in the philosophy of a revolutionary artistic movement. There is no intellectualising, just pure creativity. Flavour, colour, texture and context are calibrated on the plate in an intuitive performance that emerges from the enigma of human imagination. It appears effortless, like all good art, but is the culmination of the complex journey that all good artists must undertake.

Galily's journey started on a farm in the centre of Israel, where family life aligned with the seasons and where, by osmosis, he picked up a deep understanding of the connection between the earth and the table. His passion for cooking surfaced as a child in his mother's kitchen. "I was an extremely fussy eater until I was able to reach the stove," he says. "Then I told my mum to move aside – I'd do it myself!" The gift of a cookbook for his bar mitzvah sealed Gome's fate and dreams of becoming an actor were firmly pushed aside. Life would centre on the pursuit of excellence through food.

It seems the classic coming of age story in Israel entails finishing ones military service, saving some money, grabbing a backpack and taking a flight to somewhere, anywhere, as far away from the army as possible. It was no different for Galily. In order to secure his passage to freedom he took a job at one of his favourite restaurants, where he insisted on joining the kitchen. The head chef looked over the fresh faced, self-possessed upstart and immediately put him on dishwashing. Six months later, Gome was sous chef – with no formal training, just a whole lot of passion and determination. "I just wanted to learn," he says of that time. "I wanted to have the ability." At some point he understood that to really grasp the intricacies of cuisine, he had to eat.

"India is full of flavour," he says of his first pit stop. "Your taste buds are jumping." Within a few weeks of arriving in Goa however, Gome was robbed of everything, stopping him in his tracks. It was a serendipitous catastrophe, for soon after he met Ilan and Shiran Dascal who were in the process of opening the first Lamuella restaurant. Gome helped out in the kitchen to raise more money to continue travelling, all the while understanding his goals and his knowledge didn't match up. And so he took himself of on a mini tour of some of his favourite restaurants to stage.

Staging is peculiar to the world of haute cuisine. It's part internship, part slave labour and a certain rite of passage for any chef worth their salt. Young chefs from all over the world are this very minute knocking on the kitchen doors of their heroes offering themselves up in a bizarre sacrificial ritual to spend even just one minute in the hallowed grounds of the globe's top restaurants. If you want to be a great chef, you must first be a stage. It's from this battalion of half-formed young enthusiasts we will see our next Adrià, Redzepi or Matsuhisa. Naturally, Galily's road to stage was fuelled not only by a desire to learn but also by love.

He found himself selling sunglasses on the streets of Copenhagen at one point, spending nights in the arms of the girl he'd followed there. But he missed the kitchen like missing a limb, so started to cook sumptuous feasts for friends, students and acquaintances in their homes. Every day he would ride his bike past an expensive looking restaurant with an open kitchen. He would sit across the street, have a cigarette and watch the chefs at work. Finally, he saved up enough money to go in for a lunchtime tasting menu. The head chef came out, recognising him as the kid who sat in the street every day. They chatted and he invited Gome to join the kitchen. The chef was Rene Redzepi and the restaurant was Noma.

"I had no idea what was happening. I could barely cut with a knife professionally," Gome remembers. "It was so inspiring. I was just peeling potatoes and cleaning asparagus but it totally changed my career. It changed people's perception of me." The experience inspired Galily to return to Goa, back to the first Lamuella and to open his own restaurant, Matsya Freestyle Kitchen. He started to make dishes of a higher standard, flavours and combinations that resonated with what he had learned as a stage and his own creative processes.







“Now I look back and I don’t know how I had the balls to do that,” he recalls. “I was 24. If someone came to me like that now, I’d tell them sit down, peel potatoes, watch and learn. But I just went for it back then.” It’s his deep-rooted passion and belief, his love of the process of cooking and eating which fuels what some people might call precociousness but others may call genius. After all, the demagogue chefs that populate the echelons of the culinary world didn’t get there without a whole lot of chutzpah.

Galily has enough of the stuff to turn his tale into a modern day epic. In Israel people stop him in the street because he became famous after reaching the semi finals of the Israeli version of Master Chef. While working in the French Riviera he cooked for politicians, celebrities and the very wealthy on super yachts. He’s travelled all over the world on boats of all sizes, creating culinary magic in some of the most difficult and opulent locations. But it has been Ibiza, the most recent stop on his gastronomic adventures that has seen him truly come into his own.

An invisible thread has long connected Goa and the white isle. Both places hold a romantic and inspirational position in the minds of hippies, trailblazers and vagabonds across generations. It was a natural progression for Gome, Ilan and Shiran to bring the Lamuella vision to Ibiza. A nod to the tribal mind set of a certain global community of creative travellers. For the first time since leaving Israel as a wide-eyed youth, Gome sees this as a place to call home.

Lamuella Ibiza was conceived as a creative space for art, education and healing. The food is part of this triumvirate equation, and the spiritual concept fits well with Gome’s approach to cooking. It’s when he is developing new dishes that the conceptual artist in him comes to the surface. “When I create a new dish I buy many things” he explains. “I lay it all down on the table and start to put things together, like a painting, or a puzzle, until the colours and tastes look good together. I need to make a mess, start something and then change it. The process is very visual.” The results are evident in the vivid colours and composition of the finished dish. Some dishes become performance as they are prepared and cooked at the table; another way of drawing in the diner who becomes a participant in its creation.

The story of Gome Galily and Lamuella Ibiza is dense with all the elements of a good yarn, crossing continents, weaving through class structures and flitting between the highbrow and the street, always with a cheeky grin. To best condense it to its essence, one must turn to the origins of the restaurant’s name. In Douglas Adams’ The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy, the hero Arthur Dent is the Sandwich Maker on the utopic planet of Lamuella. Musing on his exalted position he says: “There were those in the village who were happy chopping wood, those who were content carrying water, but to be the Sandwich Maker was very heaven.” It would seem here in Ibiza, Gome Galily has found himself a very heaven.