

Filipino Flair Down Under

Dahon Gourmet Tea Lounge and the **Puzon family** create an interest in Filipino food in Melbourne, Australia

In a recent trip to Australia to attend the **Melbourne Food & Wine Festival 2012**, I met the Puzon family, who owns and operates a hip and trendy Filipino restaurant called **Dahon Gourmet Tea Lounge (Dahon)**. The head of the family, **Romeo Puzon**, hails from Bataan and his wife, Fe, from Cebu. They migrated to Australia in 1977, when their eldest, Cherry, was only four years old and their second child, Edward, was three. Upon arrival in Melbourne, Fe was seven months in the family way with their third child, Roy.

THE HEART OF A FILIPINO KITCHEN

The early years of the Puzons in Melbourne is a wonderful story of a real family struggle to earn a good living in this country they decided to call home. Every day after school, the Puzons together with their three siblings would gather in their family kitchen

and for a couple of hours, prepared 'Pinoy' delicacies like *longganisa*, *tocino*, *tinapa*, *chicharon*, and *atchara*. On Saturdays and Sundays, the whole family would hop into their car with all the goodies in the trunk and do the rounds of Filipino homes knocking on their doors announcing "*bili po kayo ng longganisa, tocino, tinapa at chicharon, masarap na, mura pa!*"

They would take every opportunity to join Filipino fiestas and festivals all around Australia. **Edward Puzon**, currently **Dahon's Restaurant Manager**, remembers fondly how he would get so tired at the end of the day because of never ending orders of *halo-halo*, therefore never ending *kaskas ng yelo*. It was through the family industriousness that all three kids were able to finish schooling and eventually start their own careers.

In 2007, the family decided to buy a franchise of one of Australia's popular Portuguese food chains **Nando's**. They closed down this restaurant in 2011 and then set up Dahon, which opened in August last year. **Cherry Puzon Moore**, the eldest who is in charge of all the buying requirements for Dahon, says majority of their clientele are the Filipino community and their Australian families and friends. They are seriously encouraging more Australians, as well as other nationalities, to try and hopefully like Filipino food. They intend to continually study the Melbourne market and introduce new items to their current menu to keep their loyal customers coming back.

HOW DAHON FLOURISHED IN MELBOURNE'S DINING LANDSCAPE

Dahon Gourmet Tea Lounge menu is a smart fusion of honest to goodness Filipino comfort food, presented western style with a wide variety of tea blends including their own version of gourmet teas. Their menu includes Pancit Bihon, Canton and Palabok, Lumpia, Pork Tocino, Chicken Adobo, Chicken Inasal, and Pinakbet. Their dessert choices include Halo-Halo, Mais con Hielo, and Turon.

I asked Roy, the youngest

who was born and raised in Australia, if there was anything Filipino in him. Without any hesitation Roy returns my question with another question in perfect Australian English—"is calling Ate Cherry and Kuya Edward Filipino enough for you Kuya Vic?" I was dumbfounded for a while there! The Puzon family loves the Philippines very much and try their very best to live by their Pinoy values and visit the country as often as possible. It was a wonderful afternoon over nice watermelon tea and delicious *bibingka* at Dahon. Sharing the afternoon were executives and students from the **Center for Culinary Arts (CCA)** headed by **CEO Badgie Trinidad**, **Public Relations Manager Anne Palmares**, **Executive Chef** and culinary graduate of **CCA Jonathan Bautista**.

The group was in the city to participate in the 20th anniversary of the Melbourne Food & Wine Festival, a visit accompanied by a cooking demonstration with their partner school **William Angliss Institute**. The CCA group also hosted the first ever **Filipino Barbie**, successfully held at the **Northcote Social Club**, where **CCA Academic Programs Head Melissa Sison** and her team cooked up a wonderful Pinoy lunch, which included two *lechon*s, for our *kabayans* down under.

Edward concluded the interview telling me that the family is committed to contribute in the best way possible to promoting Filipino food in this city, known for its local populace who enjoy eating out from breakfast to dinner. In a city regarded as the food and wine capital of Australia, Dahon has shown that Filipino cuisine can thrive with its combination of flavorful comfort food and Pinoy hospitality.

Dahon Gourmet Tea Lounge
Shop 5, 111 Cecil St.
South Melbourne Central, Australia



VICTOR ALCUAZ

Victor Fabregas Alcuaz is a hospitality headhunter, trainer, and consultant. He is Chairman of Five Star Media, Inc., a television, events, and concert production company. You may email him at vic.alcuaz@fivestar-media.com or visit his website at: www.vicalcuaz.com.



The Puzon Family of Dahon Gourmet Tea Lounge



Dahon's Escabeche



Modern Filipino furnishings emit a warm atmosphere to draw in the Melbourne crowd.