



LES AMIS GROUP CONCLUDES INAUGURAL CULINARY CHALLENGE HELD ON 30 AUGUST

Les Amis Group organized its first Culinary Challenge in an initiative to nurture new talents in the F&B scene. Held over two occasions – qualifying round on 23rd August and final round on 30th August, Raphael Sim from the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) emerged as the winner of this competition. The group looks set to lever this competition to a regional scale next year.

In line with their 20th anniversary mission to groom and nurture young minds, the award-winning Les Amis Group organized its inaugural culinary challenge with the qualifying and final rounds held on 23rd and 30th August respectively.

Supported by the Singapore Chef's Association (SCA) and Singapore Tourism Board (STB), 13 participants gathered from various institutions including at-Sunrice GlobalChef Academy, Culinary Institute of America (CIA), ITE College West, Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP), SHATEC Institutes and Temasek Polytechnic (TP) on 23rd August at SHATEC Institutes for an intensive round of cook-off. As an individual-based mystery box competition, participants were given 2.5 hours to prepare 3 identical plates of appetizers and main course. The catch to this qualifying round – live lobsters were revealed to be the mystery ingredient to the surprise of many.

Les Amis Chef de Cuisine Sebastien Lepinoy, Wild Rocket Chef Willin Low, STB Executive Director John Gregory Conceicao and Chef Leons Tan and Chef Kong Kok Kiang from the SCA committee graced the event as judges for the qualifying round. After a never-racking morning, 5 participants were shortlisted for the final round. The list included Calvin Tan and Raphael Sim from CIA, Andy Ng and Koh Han Jie from ITE and Lisa Tang from TP.

“This competition helps to motivate young and aspiring chefs and create awareness for the F&B industry. We are glad that Les Amis Group recognizes and supports this event. All of them [the participants] are winners regardless of whether they go into the finals or not. The main thing is to keep going and [to continue] taking part in competitions that will groom you for further challenges.” Leons Tan, Honorary Secretary, Singapore Chefs Association.

For the final round, the 5 finalists were required to prepare a 3-course meal tailored around “star” ingredients based on a \$300 cash budget. The “star” ingredients included capers (appetizer), plain yogurt (main course) and eggs (dessert). Given the freedom to express their creativity and technicality, the finalists dealt with added pressure to impress the heavyweight judging panel which consisted of Tetsuya and Waku Ghin Chef-Owner Tetsuya Wakuda, SCA Vice-President Eric Neo, Workforce Development Agency (WDA) Deputy Director Janice Foo,

Quasi-professional Chef Melina Yong, STB Executive Director John Gregory Conceicao and Les Amis Group Chairman Desmond Lim.

The heat in the kitchen turned up a notch as the finalists displayed their passion and culinary skills over the 2.5 hours to prepare the 3-course meal. Raphael Sim emerged as the winner of the competition walking away with \$3,000 cash and an exclusively curated all-expenses paid “10 Michelin Stars” trip to Burgundy to dine in the most sought-after restaurants of the region. First runner-up Lisa Tang walked away with \$2,000 cash and an Omakase dinner for 3 persons at Aoki while third runner-up Koh Han Jie received \$1,000 cash and a Degustation dinner for 3 persons at Les Amis.

“As this is my very first competition, I am extremely lucky that Calvin gave me advice and help me along the way [in preparation for the competition]. No doubt that on the day of the competition, panic did set in but at the end of the day, I enjoyed this experience. The knowledge gained has validated my time [that I have] dedicated over the last couple of months.” Raphael Sim, Winner of Les Amis Culinary Challenge.

With the first Culinary Challenge in place, the group looks set to lever this competition to an international level in the future, first baby steps by extending this competition regionally to ASEAN countries next year.

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