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Food for Thought: a slice of New York

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Interview Tan Dee May
Photos Andrew Chan

Born and raised in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty in Jersey City, Andrew Bellucci talks to us about the challenges of setting up **Mikey's Original New York Pizza in Bangsar**, the first New York slice pizza place in Malaysia, from the ground up alongside founder Michael Helfman

If I had to pick one thing that defines the original New York pizza, it would be the cooking process. In Italy they generally use a wood-fi red oven so they're using a direct heat from the flame, which is why it cooks in one or two minutes. The American style is more of a baking style, which takes longer—maybe to eight to ten minutes, it depends.

My mother is French. I used to go to France as a child every other summer and I speak fluent French. I've always been interested in food and I was looking to get out of the corporate gig that I was in, so I went to France and worked with a couple of small places and I worked for free at a few popular and reputable three-star Michelin places such as Le Crocodile in Strasbourg and Auberge de l'III in Ilhaeusern. I learned a lot.

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I think anybody can make a great pizza, it just takes some time, you need to use really good ingredients and you have to be like part scientist almost.

Here in Malaysia it's humid all the time so you incorporate that into your dough making using a cold fermentation process

When we first opened, I thought we were going to start slow and I thought I was going to talk to everybody that comes in and I would make the pizzas, but suddenly we were so inundated.

I still make the pizzas but now I have trained a couple of people in order to maintain the quality control. People still like to do things their way and not my way, and that's not the way to get things done.



What we are putting the whole pies on—I don't think they are even made for pizzas—we happened to have found after spending hours and hours in Chow Kit. We had to pay USD300 in shipping to get some stuff from Amazon from the United States, but it did come in three days. Even getting XXL chef clothes here was a challenge.



We use the same dough for all the pizzas. It's our classic dough that we first hand toss, that's the only way that I have people stretch out dough. You're allowing the weight of the dough to open itself up consistently, not with a rolling pin, plus it's traditional. We have the circle, we have our cooked pizza sauce, so it's not something out of a can, then we put on a shredded Argentinean mozzarella—we shred all the cheese ourselves.

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