

THE **50** SAOIRSE RONAN ON FAME, JOHANNESBURG'S MABONENG DISTRICT, OUR MADE-IN-SINGAPORE WISHLIST

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HOW A TINY TOWN IN
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HAS BECOME A GLOBAL
CULTURAL ICON

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FEAST OF MERIT



Houston's food scene is hot stuff right now, but it's also a true reflection of the city's ethnic diversity

Words by *Mai Pham*

This February, when Netflix dropped *Ugly Delicious* – the latest food documentary series from celebrity chef David Chang – the huge Texan city of Houston played a starring role. Chang had been singing the praises of its rich and varied food scene for years. He even predicted that Houston would become the “next global food mecca” in a piece penned for *GQ* magazine. “When you get a collision of immigrants, the food scene is guaranteed to be bonkers,” he wrote.

Chang was referring to the city's bright young chefs who are experimenting with imaginative techniques and flavours. A case in point is pop-up **Blood Bros BBQ**, set to open the doors of its first brick-and-mortar restaurant this month in Houston's

Asiatown area. Owners Terry and Robin Wong and Quy Hoang serve up gochujang beef belly, Thai curry boudin and togarashi sausage alongside more traditional barbecue fare.

Chef David Cordua also grew up eating various cuisines such as Vietnamese, Nigerian and Mexican alongside the popular Nicaraguan butterflied tenderloin that has become a signature dish at his family's restaurant, **Churrascos**. “It is not a forced fusion. It's just really what we love to eat.”

One of the most talked-about products of the city's multiculturalism is surely “Viet-Cajun” cuisine, a Houston-born food genre popularised by acclaimed restaurants such as **Crawfish & Noodles** (chef Trong Nguyen was named a 2018 James Beard Award

semifinalist). In the 1980s Vietnamese refugees took inexpensive mudbugs from along the Gulf Coast and started tinkering with a spin on Texas' famous Cajun crawfish boil, enhancing it with Vietnamese cooking methods and employing a slew of Southeast Asian “secret” ingredients.

All across town, examples of culinary mashups abound. At **Himalaya Restaurant**, Pakistan-born chef Kaiser Lashkari whips up a smoked brisket masala which he's dubbed “Indian-Tex-style”. Progressive Oaxacan-inspired dishes are on the menu at buzzy **Xochi**, while at **Connie's Seafood**, coastal Mexican dishes such as ceviche sit alongside Chinese-style fried rice inspired by a family recipe. ■



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