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Tasting success in the kitchen

Awal Ashaari is one step closer to fulfilling his culinary dreams, writes **Faisal Asyraf**

POPULAR TV host Awal Ashaari is embarking on a journey — to become a restaurateur and a celebrity chef. He wants to prove that even with little or no experience, anyone can succeed in this line.

The bubbly and energetic father-to-be says: "I've been in the entertainment scene for a long time. Sooner or later, I may decide to quit and so I need a back up plan. This is one way to diversify my source of income."

He and his wife, actress Scha Al-Yahya, run a fashion and accessory kiosk at The Curve, Mutiara Damansara. But that alone is not enough.

"I want to be involved in a business that I enjoy. Other than fashion, I am very passionate about food. That is why I've decided to open a bistro," he says.

But Awal realises that he has to equip himself with the knowledge of business know-how and also culinary arts.

"Proper guidance and education are necessary. You need people to evaluate your performance. Otherwise, you end up doing the wrong thing and that would be such a waste," he says.

The stars must have been aligned as opportunity knocked on his door. KDU University College, in collaboration with IMI University Centre, offered him a six-week crash course in culinary arts, and he accepted right away.

It will be filmed and aired on Asian Food Channel's TV programme called *How To Make It:*

Culinary Dreams.

In the six-episode reality series, fans will see Awal in the kitchen and the classroom as the camera follows him around. Viewers will see him taking tough culinary challenges set by his lecturers, from preparing gourmet dishes to creating an inviting dining atmosphere.

"One thing for sure, it is not as easy as it seems. I put my ego aside and made sure I learnt as much as I could, from being a good waiter to becoming a good cook — all in six weeks," he says.

THE CHALLENGES

Some of the tasks include tasting various dishes and then reproducing them within a given period of time.

He claims that it's not easy to prepare dishes in fine-dining restaurants or hotels. "We race against time to prepare the dishes but nevertheless, that can be fun too," he says.

Awal has to get up early to make sure he is in the classroom by 8am.

"I love being a student again. It reminds me of my college days. If I were as young as my KDU classmates, I wouldn't mind extending my studies," says the Digital Film and Television degree holder from Lim Kok Wing University of Creative Technology. (Awal also holds a diploma in mass communication from Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), Shah Alam.)

"But then again, if not because of the camera following me around, I might have fallen asleep in class because theory lessons make me sleepy," says Awal, adding that subjects such as marketing has opened his eyes to the important elements of setting up a successful restaurant business.

In one episode, fans will see Awal handling a diner's complaint. "I was waiting tables in

that scene. One has to put on a straight face and smile constantly," he adds.

At the show launch at KDU University College, Damansara Utama recently, Awal

(accompanied by lecturer Chef Fami Taufeq) demonstrates to the Press how to prepare chicken zurichoise.

"It took me three days to learn how to slice the ingredients like a pro," admits Awal.

Does he have second thoughts after going through the crash course?

"There's no regret in obtaining knowledge because at the end of it all, you gain something. Besides, this is the right platform to tell everyone that I am committed in my endeavour," he says.

Awal's biggest challenge is conversing in English.

"Since the show is broadcast internationally, I have to get used to expressing myself in English," says the host of TV3's *Melodi* and 8TV's reality show *One In A Million*.

When asked what he learnt most from the crash course, he says: "Kitchen is the heart of home.

"You can sleep anywhere in the house, but when it comes to cooking, there's only one place to do it which is in the kitchen."

If you're wondering how the busy Awal and Scha have time to cook together, Awal says they normally plan a date in the kitchen.

"When you're in the kitchen with your better half or even family members, you create a good family moment. Good food and good bonding moment will lead to long-lasting happiness," claims Awal.

With plans to launch his bistro by year-end, he says: "I have done a lot of research and surveyed a few popular restaurants. For now, the menu centres on desserts and signature drinks."

He adds that the restaurant will be at The Curve, Mutiara Damansara.

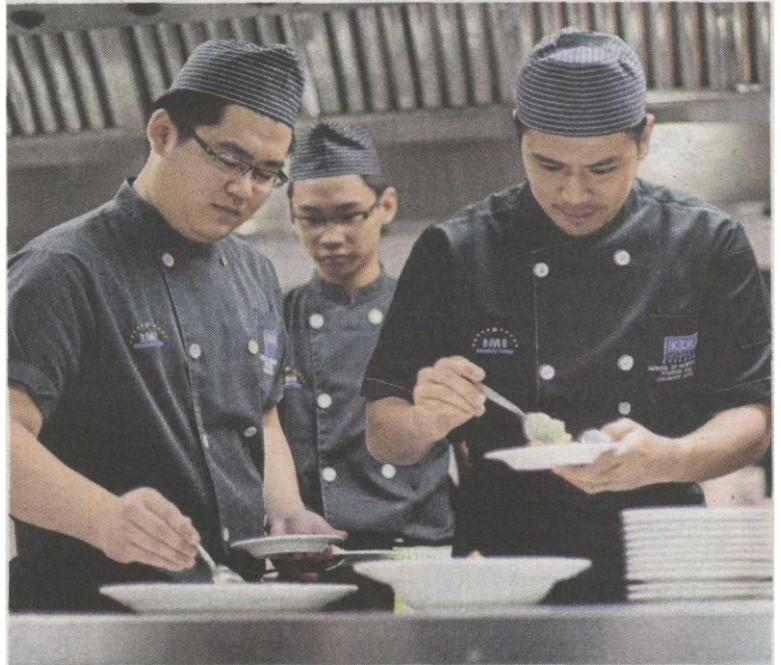
"My childhood breakfast, mum's

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lempeng kelapa (pancake with coconut) will make its way into the menu as well," he says, smiling.
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**How To Make it:
Culinary Dreams**

comes on every Wednesday at 9pm of the Asian Food Channel (Astro Channel 703)



Awal Ashaari (right) becomes a student again in AFC's new programme How To Make it: Culinary Dreams.



Awal with his chicken zurichoise.