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## **New Café Goes Local**

### ***La Terrasse offers a taste of Palawan on plate and palate***

Puerto Princesa City, Palawan – In an increasingly urbanised town where fast food and imported goods can often be revered, **la terrasse**, situated along the bustling stretch of Rizal Avenue, is crafting a new chill out spot with a novel approach that redefines where food should come from.

‘Essentially, we wanted a place that sells the Palawan lifestyle and showcases what Palawan has to offer, with a relatively small carbon footprint,’ says partners, Ditchay Roxas of Ditchay’s Bistro, and Melanie Alvarez who used to run a hotel in Puerto Princesa. Their common love for good food sparked not just a vision but also a 20-year friendship that began when Alvarez introduced Roxas to the municipality of San Vicente where she has a small eco-house on Boayan Island.

Roxas who is no stranger to baking her own bread and growing vegetables from her time there, extols the French virtue of ‘goût du terroir’ (or taste of the place). La Terrasse takes pride in sourcing local organic ingredients. It even has a delicatessen at the back offering strictly local organic produce freshly homemade from local entrepreneurs – dried dilis, bread, chorizo, smoked bacon, yoghurt, cheese and vegetables, to name a few. Roxas and Alvarez are not simply selling local ware and fare; they are selling the idea of locality.

With the help of talented chefs, Manila-based Louie Guerrero, seasoned owner of Strumm’s, and 28-year-old ISCAHM graduate and Executive Chef, Mark Magnaye, the menu draws inspiration from a blend of cultural influences that is symbolic of what Puerto Princesa has become in recent years – a melting pot of diversity. Yet La Terrasse is far from puritanical when it comes to going local. One can expect a smorgasbord of Asian flavors with a dash of Europe, with pica pica like crackling pork belly in an aromatic

ginger-turmeric sauce, cheese platters, grilled prawn and BLT sandwiches, croque monsieur, quiches, green mango salsa and hummus dips, and even a ceviche trilogy of the freshest squid, shrimp and fish, whetting any appetite.

La Terrasse's passion for variety transcends cuisine to include its architecture and ambience, as designed by Philippe Girardeau, a widely-travelled French photographer who has worked for the likes of Le Figaro and Marie Claire and specialises in interior design. The café is at once both contemporary and colonial, reinvigorating a unique café culture that has been lacking in Puerto Princesa up till now. The double-storey terraced establishment exudes a charming minimalism with its tawny red and smoky gray interior. And lush bamboo plants are grown in place of concrete walls opening diners up to the natural elements while buffering them from the rude awakenings of a busy street.

Girardeau had also conceptualised the structure to be environmentally friendly in casual luxury while paying tribute to local culture. The bar is entirely outfitted with native hardwoods recycled from old houses, and the flooring is made of renewable compressed bamboo. The café even boasts low hanging lamps specially handcrafted by the city jail inmates using banana fiber paper made by indigenous communities in Southern Palawan. The roof slanted specifically to collect rainwater for flushing of toilets and dish washing will also bear solar panels in the future that will in turn power ceiling fans to offer a breeze from the balmy heat. However, the 100 sq. m. multi-function hall on the second floor, is equipped with air-conditioning for those who prefer something cooler.

In such close proximity to the airport, it offers a prime place of respite to lounge, people-gaze and wait for a flight over a coffee or more to the croons of Glen Miller or the reggae dubs of Horace Andy while celluloid projections of wildlife documentaries or black and white classics loop in the background.

Dining at La Terrasse comes with a philosophy that outweighs trend, commodity and price; an experience reserved for those curious to know Palawan for its place, people and produce – a distinct and delectable kind of pasalubong.

by Nizhen Hsieh

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