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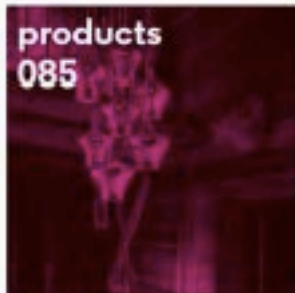
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open farm community

By Alissa Parrichione



Photos by OWEN RAOUGETT

SECRET GARDEN

Farm-to-table takes on new meaning in Singapore

An urban farm is an ambitious project for any city but especially in Singapore, where sourcing local materials and food is nearly impossible, and land is scarce. Yet, luckily, a 35,000-square-foot property came available (a former mini-golf, golf range, and tennis complex) and Open Farm Community (OFC), an experiential F&I complex—and a first of its kind in Singapore—from designer Alan Barr, chef Ryan Clift, his partners Spa Esprit Group, and local urban farming group Edible Garden City, won over the Singapore Land Authority (SLA), which had put the property up for public bid.

1. Open Farm Community's first veranda features yellow steel ping pong tables and a red timber screen that wraps the first of two buildings, home to Common Man Coffee Roaster.

2. White and red parasols on the coffee shop's patio resemble flowers.



open farm community



Clift was importing all of his ingredients at his local restaurants Open Door Policy, Tippling Club, and Rin 38, and was troubled that “nobody was growing anything of interest” in the area, he says. “I wanted to have a stronger relationship with the garden, being able to work out what can grow and actually implement that in the restaurant,” he says. When coming up with the idea for OFC, “we instantly knew it needed to be an urban farming community-based project,” explains Barr, the global managing director of Singapore-based design agency greymatters, who designed Tippling Club and Rin 38 for Clift.

But it wasn't easy. The property included two buildings, “both in total disrepair,” says Barr, which needed to be torn down and rebuilt, and the landscape was wild and overgrown. To get an urban garden up and running would require ingenuity. “Our goal was to create spaces that show off—on a world-class level—how urban farming practices can and do work, and are sustainable,” Barr says.

OFC's design plays off Singapore's diaspora aspects, mixing old and new, modern and colonial, interior and exterior. As guests cross the front veranda outfitted with yellow steel ping pong tables and oversized white and red flower-like umbrellas, they are welcomed into a modern front building that houses the Common Man Coffee Roaster with its bar fronted with red and pink stacked porcelain tiles. The exterior is concealed by a red timber screen

that is juxtaposed with the restaurant's colonial-industrial warehouse structure in the back. Both feature roofs handmade with terracotta tiles in brown and rust hues, which are repeated on top of the wooden walkway that connects the two buildings. At dusk, the roofs partially reflect the sky's colors when the sun is setting.

Beyond the coffee shop, guests wander past an unexpected sculpture garden and enter the restaurant, the placement of which “was deliberate to make sure they experience every aspect of the property as they arrive and depart,” Barr says. Inside, walls of cracked blue and green porcelain tiles flank the open kitchen, and feature copper piping mounted in a diamond pattern with silver tipped bulbs for ambient lighting. Green industrial chairs and Barr's take on classic directors chairs done in an orange fabric with a “cheeky” print of animals and plants sit on wooden floors beneath a wooden ceiling.

Because there's very little raw material or manufacturing in Singapore, Barr tried to limit the project's carbon footprint by sourcing everything from local Southeast Asian regions. Recycled timber, railroad ties, and salvaged dock wood (seen in the gardens as pavers and planting beds) were used throughout, while the restaurant's ceiling lighting installation is made from antique window and door gates from the area and is “wrapped in hundreds of strands of fairy lights, so the effect is stars in the sky at night,” says Barr. And the timber communal



1 A wood-lined walkway past a sculpture garden leads to the restaurant.

4 A lighting installation on the restaurant's ceiling is made of antique windows and doors covered with lights, while walls of blue and green porcelain tile flank the open kitchen.

table features long strips of steel salvaged from old chairs and tables once found in Clift's original Tippling Club location (the restaurant recently moved to a new space).

But it's the gardens that surround the window-walled buildings and their solid teak and steel frame people-filled outdoor patio (where the restaurant's passion fruit grows) that shine. In addition to a monthly farmers market, the various herb, vegetable, and flower gardens are playgrounds for children as well as adults with lawn bowls and hands-on educational sessions.

The community experience extends beyond the materials to the food production, as well. Items not found in the garden are sourced within a 25-mile radius of Singapore, and rainwater-harvesting tanks surround the property's perimeter along with storage facilities for gardeners and mulching areas for organic waste from the landscape and restaurant. A small copper still makes herb oils from plants grown onsite, with plans to use them in beverages and accents to the food. Even wine is brought in through biodegradable kegs, says Clift.

Serving customers food with ingredients grown in the backyard is a “beautiful feeling,” he adds. “It's amazing to know we're doing something good for the environment, especially when Singapore's carbon footprint is so high,” but