

GROWING EXPONENTIALLY

The Moment Group talks about handcrafting their restaurants toward business success.

By Maan D'Asis Pamaran | Profile photos by Sam Lim

#MEATOUR BLENDS



Eliza Antonino talks about what made them want to differ with their first venture. Cue: "Everybody in the world does barbecue, so we decided to do something based on that. We want people to eat barbecue the way they want it."



Barbecue, when taken to local context, requires changes of the neighborhood. *Barbecue*, the 40-to-60 places where one is told to cook and a solution to cravings of meat with a touch of smoky charcoal flavor. This was not what Eliza Antonino, Abba Napa, and Jojo Njoo had in mind when they put on "Que" their grillery. If you will—offering different cuts of meat that are cooked to tender juicy perfection.

The delighting concept of the three friends was born out of an opportunity they saw in the market. While the usual dinner is familiar to Filipinos, they realized that there was nobody doing their take on the concept. "We were always looking to get into the food business, and when a space opened up, we said, 'where?'," recalls Napa, **Founding Partner for Creative Development**.

FANNING FLAMES

On why they chose to rebrand old profiles, Antonino explains, "The space called for Que. We looked at the area and realized that nobody else was doing barbecue done. More than just a cheap house, we decided to offer meats that were cooked and grilled right. It was a regular routine found either since the restaurant offers a wide array of choices ranging from American ribs, Mexican barbecue, Korean ribs, and Japanese jowlsteak. These meats are treated with

different marinades and dry rubs and then customers are given options for side portions to make a more personalized dining experience.

They knew that barbecues are ubiquitous, not only in this country, but also in other shores. Instead of treating that commodity as a liability, they actually took that fact as the leading block for their concept. Word spread through social media like wild fire, and most covers soon booked to the restaurant, with waiting lines soon appearing at the front door. When a second space opened up, the trio went for it with little hesitation. Que has since opened at **Q-Daddy**, allowing them to have a wider reach of the meat-loving market.

GRIDDLE ME THIS

While others starting out in the food business would test the waters carefully and accumulate before making their brand, the group has decided to make a game study up expansion. The Moment Group has currently opened 12 restaurants in 24 months, and they are not showing signs of slowing down.

One of their core strengths, they reveal, is their passion for innovation. Napa states it so, "We really try to look for new things to offer, and not add to the noise or saturation of the industry. If there are too many concepts competing in one category, if there are people already filling that need—why would we go into that slot? There are always other spaces that are not being served. What we want to do

in our group is to add value and variety."

This philosophy also existed in another popular concept—**Burger Bar** and its subsequent spin-off, **8 Cuts Burger Blends**. Burgers are another common dining item, but as major chains battle it out to compete closer toward their ground meat and bun offerings. Here, again, The Moment Group put their own spin on things. "You can't really invent, especially when it comes to this—burgers are burgers. What we did was to offer something different," Napa states. This time, they added some flip on the way their burgers are served. "It started when we were experimenting with different cheese on a burger that was unique offer at Que—don't know that since it was a meat place, we had to have burgers there too. So we tried out combinations of different cuts, and came out with an amazing blend." At Burger Bar and 8 Cuts, customers choose their party blend, the toppings they want, and now at the new Rockwell branch, even the size that fits their appetite.

TAKING PULSE

While the three partners have their own personal backgrounds in F&B, The Moment Group could still be considered as a newbie in the industry. Nevertheless, they have showed their innate love for the industry's current high tide and ascending in its quest on the way to business success. An active collaborator that "the industry has become very dynamic



The Moment Group has collaborated with other brands to accommodate their concepts, including Filipino restaurants Manannan, which was created to reverse-engineer the things that they said in the restaurant, because it's a unique concept. "Manannan, with different portion sizes, classics and twists, definitely fits the bill."

because of social media. Our group thinks it's great, because we get instant feedback. This helps the industry, as it keeps everybody on their toes and keeps everybody in the know." The success of their brands can also be attributed to word of mouth, or, in these days, word of click. This is why they are quite active on sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Indeed.

Since they also have Filipino restaurants, **Manannan** and **Manann Express**, Napa has gained insight on where the Filipino culinary scene is and should be headed. "We are on the cusp of evolving. It is about doing things that are sound and add value—not sensationalized things." This, they feel, is the responsibility of the F&B industry, "to come up with things that would be iconic, about our culture and really give value and offer world-class quality."

THEIR A-HA MOMENT

They are looking into partnering with other food entrepreneurs both local and abroad, and have started by partnering with **Jason Hyatt**, a



For Sylvia, founding a new franchise Development, started his own burger chain in Cebu when he was 19 years old and wanted to pursue another burger concept. Jon & Burger Joint was a major pit-stop burger place, something that resonates in the group's two eateries today.

Cebu-based American who set up a Vietnamese franchise chain called **Phat Pho**. The group bought the rights to Manila, serving up steaming bowls of pho in the Serendra area. There are two other concepts coming soon, **Linguini Fini** and **Bistro Du Vin**, which Filipinos can look forward to.

When choosing to bring a brand in, Antonino says they have a pretty simple formula. "We don't just look at the bottom line or the top line. For us, it has to deliver a certain kind of experience. That's why we call our group Moment, because aside from our food, dining in our restaurants is also about the service and the atmosphere."

MOVE ACCORDINGLY

One of the key factors to their groups' success, they say, is their willingness to try something new. Antonino says it is important to keep moving forward. "Even when you find something that works, you need to keep evolving. The industry itself is evolving so you really have to stay on your toes. Being in the



The group's philosophy is the creation and operation of establishments that make people happy through unique value. "Whenever we happy with our food, we say that this is the sort of restaurant we want to build. This is the moment that we want to bring. As always, we speak about the brands that they bring in, such as Phat Pho.

food business is not like making a painting, where you do it once and you are done. You have to be able to deliver every day. It is what makes it challenging, but also makes it exciting."

There can be too much of a good thing too, though, and Napa cautions against forgetting too far off the path. "One of our friends did put it very nicely. He said, 'You should always lead the parade, but make sure you are not celebrating the wrong holiday.'"

The challenge for The Moment Group lies in a Manila dining scene that is headily different from New York or London, where the goal is to push the envelope because of filled market spaces. "In Manila, you can do something three steps ahead, and it may not be understood. You have to be cognizant of where the market is, so you don't overdo it."

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The concept for both Burger Bar and 8cuts Burger Blends was born out of the partner's own personal preferences. "I like cheeseburgers," Napa declares. "Other people want bacon or mushrooms. We want to offer what people like and give them choices."



Diced Manina & Drink from Cue



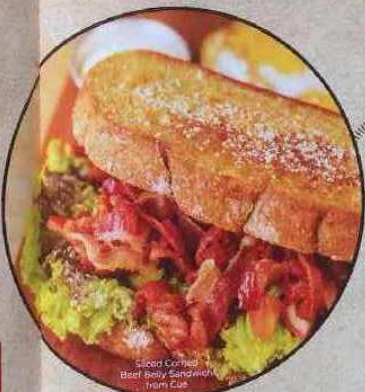
Pho Special from Phat Pho



Brown Cow Float from Cue



Citrus Margarita from Cue



Bacon Cheddar Beef Bowl Sandwich from Cue



The Beef from Burger Bar



The Hangover Burger from Burger Bar

"WE'RE ALL ABOUT THE CREATION AND OPERATION OF RESTAURANTS AND ESTABLISHMENTS THAT MAKE ALL THE PEOPLE AROUND US HAPPY THROUGH UNIQUE VALUE. OUR MISSION IS HANDCRAFTING RESTAURANTS AND ESTABLISHMENTS THAT ARE DEDICATED TO CREATING A GOOD TIME FOR EVERYONE, EVERY SINGLE TIME."

The Moment Group of Restaurants may be a relatively new player in the industry, but the string of successful concepts launched in the past few years promises that there's more to come. For them, innovation is not just about having the ideas, but also translating these into action.

The group has not only been actively creating hometown brands and collaborating with local partners, but also bringing in exciting concepts like the French **Bistro du Vin** by Les Amis Group in Singapore, and the Italian-American **Linguini Fini** with the 499 Group in Hong Kong.