Simeon Says

Hekka, a quintessential Hawai'i dish, is just one example of Lineage's commitment to serving up local cuisine.

Sheldon Simeon draws culinary inspiration from his past for his new Maui restaurant, Lineage.

words **LIANNE BIDAL THOMPSON**

"To be able to have the opportunity to tell the story from the start to the finish, it's super, I just feel super blessed that we're able to do that in a restaurant," Chef Sheldon Simeon says, describing the concept behind his newest venture, Lineage.

The restaurant, a partnership between Simeon and ABC Stores, opened last fall at The Shops at Wailea on the Valley Isle. For Lineage, Simeon dug deep into his roots to draw inspiration for an innovative menu that mixes creative takes on local cuisine and tried-and-true dishes.

The motto for Lineage is "Eat, Drink, Talk Story," and the purpose permeates through the entire restaurant, from its décor to its service and, of course, its menu. Pupu such as kimchi dip served with Hilo's iconic Maebo One-Ton Chips, pipikaula and boiled peanuts with "oxtail soup" spice are served via dim sum-style carts built by Simeon's father (a former welder).

"From the carts that go around the restaurant, the idea behind that is that if you go to a relative's house or Aunty's house and there's already food on the table," Simeon explains. "There's already food on the stove. You're welcomed with a 'hey, go eat,' and then a 'how are you doing?' Right? It's the first greeting, 'hey make yourself a plate, go eat.'"

At Lineage, every menu item is the result of intense research: from cocktails like the Maneko-Neki, Gimme da Chicken Skin and Keito Izakaya (served from a shoyu bottle) to "snacks" like the Veg & Dip featuring Oprah Farm Vegetables and shoyu mayo.

The restaurant is meant to replicate that easy family feel of Hawai'i households. It's something that—in addition to his menu that resonates with nostalgic kama'aina as well as intrigued visitors—Simeon wanted to bring to Lineage. The space recalls the *Top Chef* alum's hometown, Hilo, with greenery, distressed wood and an abstract map of the lush seaside municipality. Even Hilo's rain is represented, thanks to a tiled wall behind the bar.

One constant that has run through all of Simeon ventures is his celebration of the foods of Hawai'i's local culture—specifically Filipino cuisine. It's peppered throughout the menu: chicharon with adobo spice, adobo turkey tails, crispy pata, a dessert called Filipino Cereal and, probably the most direct tie to Simeon's Filipino background–his family's own Pork n Peas. This is the dish that his father is known for, and any guest at the family home in Hilo knows they'll be served there. It's also Simeon's favorite menu item. "It's more for the feeling of it," he says. "To be at the point in my career as a chef, and just present something as humble as that with so much meaning.

Like a skilled artist, Simeon deftly developed dishes that have clear references to what one may have had at Aunty's house, but are wholly original creations. Items like the cold ginger chicken, served with green onion pesto, salted black bean and chili oil; or the squid lu'au, made with taro leaf, charred he'e (squid) and coconut candy and the Poi Mochi, a dish that encompasses Hawaiian, local Japanese and European influences. It's fried poi mochi dumplings (similar to Filipino cascaron), served with shio koji chicken liver pate and house-made furikake. "So that's when we were able to take something that's not as local," Simeon says. "Chicken pate is not local. To be able to capture a feeling and making it ultra delicious it's been fun to have those dishes."

The katsu curry is another creative take on a local favorite. It's made with fried cauliflower, golden curry and "brown rice," and will have vegetarians and omnivores alike singing its praises.

Likewise, Simeon knew when to leave things just the way they are. Like his dad's pork and peas.

"I think it's the ones that cannot be [changed]—I don't know, that are kind of iconic, maybe, in a sense?" Simeon says. One such dish is the Maui Flying Saucer, a Maui County Fair classic. Found on Lineage's Snacks menu, it's beef goulash and Tillamook Cheddar served Panini-style between two pieces of bread. And it's round, like—you guessed it—a flying saucer.

Simeon explains that, while the flying saucer is a beloved staple of the Maui County Fair, not many people really get to experience its comfort food deliciousness. "So, we wanted to keep it as humble as it is too," he explains. "Believe me, we tried—don't think that we [didn't] try to make it fancy, and put other things in it. But the feeling behind it was the same. I think it was the same for a lot of the other things, of when you eat it, how do you feel, how are we connected to it and that's what we're trying to do with our food is try to be connected to the feeling of when we first eat it, or when we eat it. We really thought about that when we were doing the R&D behind the dishes. The pork and peas is probably the dish that for our family is most meaningful or most requested. And, that was, just me growing up as the chef and just being much more mature and much more confident that I can be proud of something like this. I can be proud about where I came from. And yeah, just being proud to be able to share that.

Staying connected to food is also about knowing his suppliers, and Simeon carefully cultivated relationships with local farms and other food suppliers to ensure the quality behind his menu.

"We're pretty exclusive to just a few farms to who we work with just because of connections," Simeon says. "We definitely are connected throughout the whole community, but these certain farms that we showcase on the menu is

The juxtaposition of some of Lineage's humble dishes, served at the restaurant's posh Wailea location is not lost on chef Sheldon Simeon (pictured).

because of our relationship direct to the farmer. The two farms are Oprah Farms and Oko'a Farms."

That connection has fueled inspiration out of which came dishes such as The Garden Poke, made with gobo kinpira, radish, brassica, inamona and limu.

"It just came from the idea of the farm and I figure went back to that old style of being connected in that way," Simeon explains. "It kind of just developed its own. It's also us being responsible for where we are ... the vegetable poke is the other one of us being mindful of our resources. We wanted to have a poke, so we made it out of vegetables and we fed it to people, and five out of five said this tastes like a vegetable poke, even before us telling them that was what we were going for. 'Okay, we captured the feeling.' It's all that matters. It just came naturally, the vegetables on the menu because of our connection to the farm and the land."

While the Cart and Snacks menus are fun to select from, diners should make sure to keep room for the family-style main dishes. In addition to the aforementioned Crispy Pata (served with Choke Herbs, Braddah Tommy Sauce, finadene and lettuce); there's the Lauya (beef shank, short rib, cabbage and Oprah potato) and Huli Huli Chicken (whole chicken, seasonal vegetables and house pickles). It's also available in a half-chicken serving.

"Our Huli Huli Chicken has been probably the most popular [dish] of them all," Simeon says. "Actually, [it's] our smoke meat, then that."

The drink menus showcase mixologist Aaron Alcala-Mosley's (named "Best Mixologist on Maui" in 2017) creativity. First off, diners start off their experience with a pot of Ryokucha, a blend of toasted brown rice green tea and Hawaiian mamaki tea. Stand-out drinks include the Makule Kiawe, Lineage's take on the Old Fashioned made with Elijah Craig small batch, kiawe bean gum, house bitters orange bitters, orange oil and kiawe smoke; and the Maneki-Neko made with Russian Standard Vodka, jackfruit shrub, sour orange, almond-spice liqueur and ginger and egg white. "Aaron ... he's just so passionate," Simeon says. "He pulls it all together and the way that he explains it in the story of his inspiration [behind each drink] ... is amazing."

For dessert, Lineage offers up Lineage Sherbert, a toasted rice tea sherbert served with puffed rice and pa'akai (salt); Seasonal Sherbert, Chocolate (salty pretzel and Valrhona ganache) and Filipino Cereal a take on a humble local dessert made with avocado, crème cracker mile and Saloon Pilot crackers.

A humble dessert made with Saloon Pilot crackers, a dish made with a longtime family recipe, all served in one of the posh-est areas on Maui. The juxtaposition is not lost on Simeon. "[When] we're like plating the dish, I tell the chef to stop and 'hey, look up,'" he says. "We're in Wailea, that's a Louis Vuitton store and we're plating up a pig's foot. We just sent out chicken liver. That adobo is turkey tails. We're doing it and ... we're proud about it. We can serve this food at this level. We're [told] we have to be this 'certain way.' It was a really proud moment." ■

Lineage, The Shops at Wailea, 3750 Wailea Alanui Drive, (808) 879-8800, lineagemaui.com

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