

"TRADITION, service and local taste." – MR ADRIN LOI (BELOW, RIGHT), EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN, YA KUN KAYA TOAST



Ya Kun Kaya Toast

By SURENDREN APPAROO

MANY companies in the food and beverage industry tend to keep their traditional recipes secret.

Here in Singapore, only a handful of women know the recipe for the *kaya* (coconut-egg jam) lovingly spooned out at the Ya Kun Kaya Toast outlets.

It all started in 1944, when Mr Loi Ah Koon's wife devised the recipe for *kaya*, sold at his coffee stall at Telok Ayer Basin.

The stall's simple fare of charcoal-grilled *kaya* toast, French toast, soft-boiled toast and traditional-brewed coffee and tea became a favourite with many.

After the transition from that stall to Lau Pa Sat, the second generation took over, opening

their flagship outlet in Far East Square in 1998.

Leading the second-generation management is executive chairman Adrin Loi, Mr Loi Ah Koon's youngest from his brood of eight children.

The younger Mr Loi's mother passed the recipe to her daughter-in-law, who has, in turn, passed it on to her daughters.

Ya Kun Kaya Toast currently tops the *kaya* toast chain of outlets with 15 in Singapore and a further five in Jakarta. Anyone who wants to take some of the signature *kaya* home can only purchase it at these outlets.

In the interest of quality, the chain does not want to retail its wares in supermarkets.

"We want to be unique; there are a lot of copies out there," said Mr Loi. Even local hotels

serve *kaya* toast nowadays, he observed. "We did it using our own manpower," he explained, inferring that some of his family members are still involved in the day-to-day running of the outlets.

Mr Loi's nieces, the keepers of the recipe, manufacture the *kaya* on a daily basis for all the outlets.

It takes about five hours to make a 50kg tub of *kaya*, and the sisters produce 200kg a day. That translates to 5,000 eggs a day. Furthermore, all outlets account for an additional 5,000 eggs daily, used as soft-boiled eggs.

"We serve our customers well. Our only secret is the recipe," he said. The words that constantly crop up in his conversation are: "Tradition, service and local taste."

The company has stayed focused in its offerings, varying very little from what the menu offered even from 1936, before the stall was formally registered in 1944.

The chain has come a long way. It has received 400 franchise enquiries in the last two years. "We are stringent with the franchisee," said Mr Loi. "We look for the 'x-factor'," explaining that only eight of the local outlets are franchised.

Future plans include a limited number of new products like cheesy French toast and ice-cream toast, as well as increasing the number of outlets locally to between 20 and 50.

Overseas franchisees will be limited to Asian countries, such as Malaysia, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan.