



From left to right. Back row: Jason Wagner, Angelina, Reece Ng, Jonathon Lim, Eve Chang, Molly Love. Front row: Shailin Doudney, Khor Weiren.

Keppel Cafe owners, Khor Wieren and Eve Chang, with some of their staff. Khor credits much of their success to the hard work and versatility of the team. Khor says ex-apprentice Reece helped perfect the gourmet pies, and ex-apprentice Shailin played a key role in getting the cafe to where it is now.

From palace to pie shop

by Emily Friedel

As a chef, Khor Weiren is no stranger to catering for fast-paced, high-profile events. But Marysville's slower pace of life and the opportunity to start his own café there has led Khor and his wife, Eve Chang, to settle and start a family.

After completing a four-year culinary degree in his birth country of Malaysia, Khor wanted to travel and experience the profession in other places. This desire took him to Singapore where he worked at air shows and Formula One races. He even made regular appearances at the residence of the country's leader. ➤



Top: the cafe's interior is bright, vibrant, and spacious. Khor's mum has adorned much of the inside with floral decorations and greenery, giving the cafe a distinctly Asian feel.

Above: the menu is varied and changes every few months, which means locals and visitors alike can find something to their taste.

Right: the cafe even offers house-made cold drinks that are canned on the premises.

"I was working at the Orchard Hotel, which is a five-star hotel. I went to the Istana, which is the presidential palace, probably more than anyone. The Orchard is one of the trusted hotels and they do a lot of catering there," Khor says.

Singapore not only gave Khor a taste of what was involved in preparing food for groups of up to 1,500 people, but it also gave breadth to his cooking skills.

"In Singapore, it's not just the local cuisine, but because it's an international hub as well and everyone goes there, they have to cook every cuisine that's available in the knowledge. There's nothing comparable in Australia to the coverage of the fare," he says.

The contrast between the bustling island city-state and the sleepy country town of Marysville is stark on many levels – from climate to culture. Khor's and Eve's arrival in the Murrindindi Shire around eight years ago highlights some of the striking differences.

"I remember when we first came here [to Marysville] and there was only one hotel. On my first day arriving here, we didn't have anywhere to eat and we didn't have a car and we had to walk to the golf club. I think it took about half an hour. Because it was in the wintertime, we were on our phones with the torch light, and it was pretty scary because you can't see what's around you. But we needed to at least get some food – we were so hungry," Khor says.

While it may have been chilly on that first night, Khor warmed to Marysville and he and Eve have made it their home. Their family has also expanded with two daughters who are growing up in the tranquillity of the small town.

"I'm quite surprised myself to be in this town for eight years, but I have grown into it. I like Marysville: it's good, it's peaceful, and Marysville has a really nice community – that's why I'm still here," he says.

Khor worked in several local hospitality establishments for many years, including the Duck Inn where he was the head chef. However, he had always wanted his own business. With the help of former Duck Inn owners, Ashraf and Christine Doos, Khor and Eve finally took the plunge with the launch of Keppel Café in March of 2020. Unfortunately, their grand opening happened just before Victoria's first Covid-19 lockdown.

"So we were only open for two days. We got everything in stock and everything ready to go, and during that lockdown was pretty hard especially with all the new stock coming in. We had to clear everything out, so we actually gave some away or we had to repack to minimise the wastage," Khor says. ➤

Keppel Café weathered the storm of Covid with the assistance of their generous landlord. Having worked in high-pressure environments may have given Khor the resilience to bounce back and make a go of it after the lockdowns.

“We have only two people in the kitchen, and that’s it. So on the busiest day we have two, on the quietest day we have one. The busiest day we have ever had in here we served about 400 meals. That’s pretty big for two people. My other chef [Jonathon Lim], he was also in Singapore for a couple of years, so he also has those skills. So we are all very efficient and the productivity is very, very high,” Khor says

In addition to the efficiency he developed working overseas, Khor has applied what he learnt there to add a little spice to Marysville’s food scene.

“We change our menu every three months because for me, I can’t stick to one menu for too long. I need to keep myself fresh and have something new all the time. It’s modern Australian cuisine, it’s a mix of everything – Italian, Greek, Asian and some Asian flare as well,” Khor says.

“We do a lot of Asian nights, where we have Asian foods and Asian takeaway. Sometimes we do like the Thai night or the Hong Kong night. So just trying to put as much of our knowledge to into the food and let people try and taste of something different.”

Over the last four years, Khor’s and Eve’s business has crept down the main street to include a gourmet pie shop and a produce store, which is also where their house-made gelato is whipped up.

In the produce store, customers can find a range of locally made goods, Keppel Café apparel, and take-home versions of some café items. Khor says the jams and relishes they make are very popular, as is their rosemary salt. In the past, they have had a kafir lime tamarind relish and a bell pepper relish, but availability changes with the café menu.

With the gourmet pies, Khor puts his spin on an Aussie favourite. They are made from scratch with a flaky, buttery pastry and a range of fillings, which Khor is always changing and perfecting. His pies won many accolades at the



The gourmet pies have a butter-based pastry and a range of mouth-watering fillings, often with international inspiration. For example, Tuscan chicken or beef rendang. Hot and even frozen pies are available at the pie shop, along with family-sized pies, which are made in deep pans to ensure generous portions.





Great Aussie Pie Competition in 2022 and 2023, and he says that the red wine beef bourguignon and the truffle mushroom pies are favourites with café-goers. Pie fans looking for something a bit different might find other enticing fillings available, like Buxton smoked trout or Korean beef or Thai tofu.

As the temperature drops over autumn, hot pies are always a winner. But if a pie for lunch isn't quite enough, there are frozen pies available for people to take home and have later.

"Sometimes I sell more frozen pies than hot pies," Khor says with a chuckle. "I don't mind, as long as they're enjoying the pies, that's the main thing."

Khor runs the café in a very hands-on manner and goes wherever he is needed, whether that be cooking in the kitchen or front of house serving customers. He says the other Keppel Café staff are just as adaptable.

"I'm lucky enough my whole team,

The produce shop adjoins the cafe and gourmet pie shop. Here, customers can find a range of locally-made items and some condiments that are currently available on the cafe menu.

they are all over everything."

Jonathon might be found clearing tables or taking promotional photos and Molly Love, who is often behind the counter with the coffee machine, is the chief pie-maker too. Eve, who has been busy with their young children for the past couple of years, is also returning to the cafe.

"She was the barista before our first kid was born, she worked right up until a week before labour, and she's always known for great coffee in the town. Now she can, she's coming back to work this year," Khor says.

So with their young family and growing business, Khor and Eve have put down firm roots in Marysville. And even though it's a far cry from his days working at the palace in Singapore or Formula One, Khor is more than happy with how things have panned out.

"I just love it here."

For more information on Keppel Café or Marysville Gourmet Pies, to order online, or to find their socials go to linktr.ee/keppelcafemarysville