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The rise of Dale Talde

Dale Talde—the fiery Top Chef contestant who's now dominating the Brooklyn dining scene—on tattoos, hot dogs, and his beloved Windy City

Written by Jourdan Crouch Fairchild

Photographed by Marc Moran

It's a dreary Wednesday afternoon in March, and Dale Talde is describing plans for his newest tattoo. "So my business partner is boys with this tattoo artist in the Lower East Side," he explains. "And since I'm from Chicago, the city of big shoulders, I wanna get the Chicago skyline across the top of my back." Talk turns to the Cubs—"I drink the Kool-Aid every spring, and then I'm putting vodka in it after the first month"—shitty dive bars, and other Chicago spots that brings back memories. And when the conversation shifts to food—particularly the flavorful Filipino dishes Talde grew up eating—there's no mistaking it: he'll always stay true to his roots.

Given all the attention Talde has recently earned, it's an impressive feat. In five short years, the 34-year-old chef has risen from sous chef at Buddakhan to owner of three Park Slope hot spots: Talde, his eponymous, Asian-American restaurant, Thistle Hill Tavern, a neighborhood gastropub,

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and Pork Slope, a new, roadhouse-inspired bar. Talde also lit up televisions across America as a contestant on *Top Chef, Season 4* and *Top Chef All-Stars*, exposing viewers to Filipino cuisine, his beloved sneaker collection, and a temper that “made my parents worry about my emotional state,” he admits.

But these days, Talde seems calm despite his hectic work schedule. “It’s always the busiest when you’re trying to open a restaurant,” he says. “You’re working like 18-hour days, and you have to make sure the food and drinks are good so you order everything as if you’re a customer.” Talde and his business partners, David Massoni and John Bush, consumed dozens upon dozens of hot dogs at Pork Slope until they figured out that they just weren’t good enough to serve. Because for Talde even the most casual, stoner-friendly bar fare needs to taste top-notch—a standard that’s paid off given Pork Slope’s recent accolades in New York Magazine for the best bar burger and nachos in the city.

A 1998 graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, Talde chopped and sautéed his way through the kitchens of Vong in Chicago, followed by Morimoto and Buddkahn in New York. But he gleaned priceless culinary wisdom as a boy watching the women in his family cook. “My mom is one of eight sisters, and we celebrated everybody’s birthday, anniversary, and baptism with a big potluck of Filipino food,” Talde says. His heritage can be traced throughout the dishes at Talde—but thanks to his creative spin, each one remains distinct. “Like right now, we’re serving these banging pieces of crispy rice topped with guacamole, a piece of Edwards Surryano ham, and a little slice of chili on top,” he says.

What will Talde and company do next? “We just want to keep working hard and making these restaurants as successful as they can be,” he says. And beyond his Park Slope empire, Talde dreams of opening restaurants in other cities like the Windy City. “Brooklyn is now my home, but Chicago will always be my heart.”

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