

## A master of 'haughty' cuisine

Ex-MasterChef contestant Sharone Hakman seemed arrogant on the show, but he says it was all drama

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Chef Sharone Hakman prepares Sharone's Grilled Foccacia Chicken Sandwich with Professor Brawn Cafe employees. -- PHOTOS: MARK CHEONG FOR THE STRAITS TIMES



Together with 2am: dessertbar's owner Janice Wong, Hakman worked on a deconstructed lemon cheesecake, which had dehydrated potato skins and Hak's BBQ Sauce. -- PHOTOS: MARK CHEONG FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

By Eunice Quek

He may have come across a tad arrogant in the first season of American reality cooking competition MasterChef US, but Sharone Hakman dismisses it as "drama".

The 31-year-old former financial planner says: "Joining MasterChef was the last thing on my mind as I had left my job just three weeks before the auditions. I'm not a big dramatic guy. It's not me.

"But I would get very critical about my dishes and keep thinking about what I can do differently."

He was in Singapore recently to promote the third season of MasterChef US, which is hosted by chefs Gordon Ramsay and Graham Elliot, and restaurateur Joe Bastianich. It airs every Sunday on Star World at 8pm.

It has been two years since the competition, which has proven to be a launch pad for Hakman's culinary success so far.

He runs a catering and private chef business, counting the Kardashian sisters among his celebrity clientele.

But opening his own restaurant, something he had once considered before joining MasterChef, is now the last thing on his mind.

The Los Angeles-born chef, who picked up cooking skills from his 86-year-old grandmother, says: "I'm a finance guy, so I know the high risks of running a restaurant. I don't want to spend hours slaving in the kitchen."

He has more ambitious plans, and is critical about products that carry too many preservatives.

He says: "I have a bigger vision. I want to change the world with respect to groceries. There's so much c\*\*p and bad products sitting on our shelves. My goal is to produce a line of foods that is local and natural."

And his first step into this mission is through producing a range of gourmet barbecue sauces in the United States, which he calls his "secret weapon" during MasterChef as his homemade sauce received praise from the judges.

The first of Hak's BBQ Sauce is chipotle bourbon, which includes seven types of roasted and smoked chillies, and caramelised onions. Other flavours in the pipeline include green Thai chilli tamarind, and habanero pineapple.

He is also working on a snack range called Hak Snacks which, instead of potato chips, will feature items such as quinoa pops, made from an ancient grain that has become popular in the last decade or so. He says: "This doesn't mean I'm a health freak. I'm a healthy eater but I enjoy everything. I'm a 'real' freak, meaning I want 'real' food made with proper ingredients."

Hakman is married to 30-year-old stylist Monica, whom he affectionately calls his "favourite sous chef". The couple have a 2 1/2-year-old son, Lukah.

Back home, the charitable chef works closely with the American Heart Association, as he says that he lost his grandfather to heart disease.

And during a cooking demonstration at Professor Brawn Cafe in Novena Square, he showed his soft side when he cooked with its special needs staff to create Sharone's Grilled Focaccia Chicken Sandwich, which includes a spicy mango salsa.

He also displayed his showmanship when he worked with 2am: dessertbar's chef-owner Janice Wong on her version of a deconstructed lemon cheesecake with dehydrated potato skins and drops of Hak's BBQ Sauce.

As Wong prepared the dessert, he cheekily tasted the blended cheesecake and chomped on the skins as well.

The cafe plans to include these two dishes in the menu soon.

In MasterChef, Hakman clearly expressed his disdain for producing desserts, and he still has no desire to be in the pastry line.

He says: "You go into the kitchen and it's 250 deg C, sweaty and noisy. I love it. Then you go to the pastry side and it is 60 deg C, cool and playing classical music. That's so not me."

Of MasterChef's new season, he only lets on that souffle-making will be one of the challenges.

As for what he enjoys most of the competition, it is the Mystery Box challenge, where contestants have to create a dish with a selection of random ingredients.

He says: "I could do Mystery Box challenges every day. I would just pick the first five things I can get in the wet market with my eyes closed. It's all about unleashing the inner chef and letting my mind go."

[euniceq@sph.com.sg](mailto:euniceq@sph.com.sg)

**MasterChef US Season 3 airs every Sunday at 8pm on Star World/Star World HD (StarHub Channel 501/555).**

<http://www.straitstimes.com/premium/life/story/master-haughty-cuisine-20120919>