

# Wa Na Wari X Cousoumeh

Art and design by Khalil of The Egokillas  
for Cousoumeh x Wa Na Wari

## Cousoumeh X Wa Na Wari

"Come for the food, stay for the culture."

### Who we are!



Cousoumeh Collective aims to foster meaningful collaborations and create safe spaces for connectivity through food + art; two mediums that provide us with means to sustain both ourselves and our wider communities.

Cousoumeh customises each experience by engaging in dialogue with partners across the Caribbean and the diaspora, identifying and expanding on affinities between our contexts. Every event is crafted around a collaboratively determined theme, using the acts of gathering, sharing food and conversation as a social practice project; exploring what can be achieved by affording our creativity, thoughts and ideas the opportunity to combine, ripen and reach maximum richness.

We at Cousoumeh Collective at its core believe in the spirit and immense potential of collaborations, particularly through food. We seek to provide a safe space with a focus on Caribbean people and people of the diaspora to come together, whether to rejoice, to cry, to vent or just simply share experiences.

The Caribbean stands as a living, breathing and ever evolving example of reclamation of space in the face of trauma and harrowing histories, creating a deep empathetic connection to initiatives such as Wa Na Wari that have sought to protect and uplift the Black community in the face of not only historical, but also contemporary attempts at erasure through gentrification. Cousoumeh is thrilled to collaborate with Wa Na Wari to host this special gathering, with a focus on

self-care, preservation and reclamation, both in relation to the cuisine we are serving and to the context of Wa Na Wari's local community, honouring our shared histories.

In Volume 30, No. 1 of the long running publication Callaloo, A Journal of African Diaspora Arts and Letters, Haitian author Edwidge Danticat says in an interview with Nancy Raquel Mirabal: "We're nostalgic about food because food sustains us. We literally couldn't live very long without food. But food is also what anchors us to a place... We eat, and so food easily becomes symbolic of life itself, of the people who love us...That's what we first notice, what we're first introduced to, and I think that's what we notice most when we switch cultures..." (*Dyasporic Appetites and Longings: An Interview with Edwidge Danticat*, Winter 2007, pp.26-39).

Whether it is Kamau Brathwaite's *In the Castle of My Skin* (New York: Collier, 1953), Antonio Benitez-Rojo's *The Repeating Island* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), or Austin Clarke's *Pigtails 'n' Breadfruit: The Rituals of Slave Food* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 1999) to name just a few, there are countless accounts across literature and critical cultural thought around the immense value of food and particularly certain dishes to the identity of Caribbean and African diasporic people. To this end, our offering for this collaboration will feature two such critical dishes that celebrate our roots and the multiplicities of our heritage across continents and regions: callaloo and cou cou.

This intimate event invites open conversation and candid sharing of cultures, through collective remembrance and the creation of new memories and moments of celebration. We wish to generate an atmosphere that engenders agency within our own joy; it is a stereotype that people of African and Caribbean descent love to dance, to lime, to party – and we reject any attempt to assign negative connotations to this culture and our happiness. In taking ownership of our ways of communion, Cousoumeh and Wa Na Wari encourage attendees to shed external perceptions, and to embrace the comfort that comes with sharing food, dance, laughter and care for one another; a space of softness that stands against a pervasive harshness that threatens – but does not thrive – in our communities.



This kind of resourcefulness, resilience, nurturing and ingenuity is the backbone of what Cousoumeh Collective aims to celebrate and amplify; to see what can be achieved by affording our ideas the opportunity to combine, ripen and reach maximum richness.

## History of Trinbago Callaloo

Brought to the Caribbean territories by formerly enslaved Africans and able to be traced as far back as the early 1400s, our beloved callaloo is an ode to the resilience of the formerly enslaved, and is ever so present throughout several Caribbean islands, many offering their own version of the dish. Callaloo is considered to be one of Trinidad and Tobago's national dishes; according to one article, callaloo is perhaps the 'Caribbeanized version' of a dish called palaver sauce (sometimes referred to as egusi stew) which can be found throughout West Africa. "Trinidad and Tobago in particular is rich in mythology since our people come from so many parts of the world...The result is a cultural callaloo." (Allsopp, Jeannette, and Richard Allsopp. Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage. Kingston, Jamaica: University of West Indies, 2003.)



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## Recipe

### Ingredients

- 1 onion sliced/chopped
  - 4 cloves garlic
    - 2 tbsp oil
      - 1 tsp grated ginger
- 1 bundle callaloo bush/ taro leaves (washed and chopped)
  - 2 cups coconut milk
- 8 - 10 ochros/okra chopped
- ½ cup finely chopped pimento
  - 1 bundle cilantro
- 1 cup pumpkin/squash
  - Salt to taste
- Hot pepper to taste (optional)
  - Sugar to taste

### Preparation

Sautee onion, ½ the amount of garlic, pimentos, grated ginger and celery in hot oil, reserving the remaining garlic for later.

Add ochro, pumpkin, callaloo leaves and combine. Mix for approximately 1 minute.

Add coconut milk - just enough until you see it rise (to the same level as the ingredients). Add some salt, and hot pepper (pepper optional).

Bring to boil, lower heat & cook covered for about half an hour, stirring occasionally. Be sure hot pepper does not burst in pot (take it out if need be).

When all ingredients are soft, swizzle (or blend) to make a smooth pulp. Taste for salt and add accordingly, and add a bit of sugar to round out the flavour.

Add in the remaining garlic and let it cousoumeh (sit to let the flavours develop) for another 2 - 3 minutes. Take off fire and serve over rice, on its own (like a soup) or with macaroni pie

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## History of Bajan Cou Cou / Coo Coo

Cou cou, a dish which bears resemblance to polenta or grits, is yet another Caribbean staple with traces to the West African diaspora that survived the journey across the Atlantic, and also happens to be the national dish of Barbados. Primarily comprising butter/margarine, cornmeal and okras (which, in Haitian creole, are actually referred to as kalalou themselves), it is traditionally prepared using a special wooden cou cou stick, and being able to “turn cou cou” is a prized skill among cooks. Connections can be drawn to a similar Ghanaian meal popular with the Ga tribe in Accra called banku, made from fermented corn flour and eaten with okra stew and fish.



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## Recipe

### Ingredients

- 2 cups cornmeal
- 2 cups cold water
- 4 cups water
  - 1 tsp salt
  - 8-12 okras
- 1 medium onion (chopped)
  - 2 tsp minced garlic
- Pepper and spices to taste
  - 3 tbsp butter

### Preparation

Combine corn meal with the cold water and mix well, leaving to soak.

Put 4 cups of water and the salt to boil in a medium-size pot. Thinly slice the okra, chop the onion and mince the garlic. Add to the boiling water and cook for about 10 minutes, until the okras soften. Lower the heat.

Slowly add the corn mixture to the okras, stirring constantly with a flat wooden spoon or cou cou stick. Add 2 tablespoons of butter (and the pepper/spices to taste if desired) into the mixture and incorporate well. When the mixture comes away cleanly from the side of the saucepan, the cou cou is ready.

Butter the bottom of your serving dish well, and turn the cou cou into the dish. Add the remaining butter to the top of the cou cou to melt into it. Best served hot, and often with fish or meat gravy

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## About Trinbago Stew Chicken

Stew chicken, if you're unfamiliar with the process, is a site to behold for no other reason than the use of brown sugar to give the meat that dark brown colour. The sugar is cooked on a high enough heat for it to caramelize before adding in the meat. You have to be careful not to let the sugar burn (become super dark in colour) as you'll have to start the process over because if the meat is added it will absorb the burnt taste of the sugar, you want it melted enough that its golden brown in colour. When it gets that golden brown colour then you add in the meat.

Fun fact, that 'burnt' sugar is the basis of all Trini stew meats.



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## Recipe

### Ingredients

- Approx 4lbs chicken (cut up)
  - 4 tbs brown sugar
  - 1 tomato diced
  - ½ lg onion chopped
  - 3 scallions chopped
- 4 cloves garlic minced finely
  - Salt & pepper to taste
  - Chadon beni & thyme
  - Scotch bonnet (opt)
- 1 lbs potato peeled & cubed (opt)

### Preparation

Wash chicken with juice of one lime, lemon or vinegar and water. Remove slime and excess fats.

Wash a second time with plain water. Drain well.

Add green seasonings (pimento peppers seeded, chives, cilantro, chadon beni, spanish thyme) and let marinate for 2 hours or (overnight optional).

In a large coal pot (cast iron pot) on medium heat, add brown sugar and let it bubble and froth until all has melted and it is caramel in colour. Do not allow melted sugar to darken and smoke, if it does start over otherwise chicken will absorb burnt taste. Timing is everything.

Add chicken to the pot. Raise heat to high and coat chicken generously in brown sugar mixture for about 3 minutes. Add chopped onions, scotch bonnet pepper and let cook a couple more minutes while stirring. Add in potatoes next.

Cover and cook for 20 to 30 minutes over medium heat, occasionally stirring roughly every 5 minutes. If chicken releases a lot of water and is fully cooked, no need to add extra water.

Just cook til the 'sauce' has thickened.

If more 'sauce' is desired, add 2 to 3 cups of water, stir and let cook down

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