

‘Cook with love and listen to your customers, they will come back,’ says Marie Dang owner operator.

of H&M Café

Originally from Vietnam, now fifty-three, Marie Dang is married with two grown-up beautiful children. She arrived in Australia 17 years ago. Marie considers herself incredibly lucky to have learnt cooking from her family ‘especially from my mother who is a very good cook.’ Coming from Hue, a Central imperial City in Vietnam which used to be a home of the Nguyen Dynasty from 1808-1945. Cooking skills are especially important in that part of the world. Strict cultural rules on imparting girls with cooking skills are well alive in Hue. In this imperial City, each year, families commemorate their deceased through feasts where an array of delectable dishes are presented. ‘We cooked and organised big parties of approximately 100 guests.’

Back in Vietnam, Marie had a small restaurant for a few years and gave it away to her family when she was leaving for Australia. In Australia, Marie did not really want to be a restaurateur because ‘I know that it is a physically, mentally and emotionally demanding job’ but with a family to support, she had no choice but worked in a café upon arrival in Australia, for 6-7years. She then lost that job when she went back to Vietnam for a holiday. Marie then decided to have her own restaurant. With her husband, they bought the famous Pies Café in Collingwood which they eventually renamed ‘H&M’ which stands for ‘Hung & Marie,’ her husband and Marie’s names combined.

‘It was very hard at the beginning as we started from scratch, now we can see some growth in our business.’ H&M is open seven days and they have been working hard and long hours of approximately 12 hours per day, especially Monday to Friday, as the café does slow down a bit on weekends. They went through lot of challenges during covid like everyone other shops and lost quiet a lot.

H&M Café

Located in the heart of Collingwood, in Smith Street, a terribly busy café specialising in Vietnamese rolls, rice paper, fried and steam rice, spring rolls as well as gluten free food. A takeaway café with a small space for eats- in. Using incredibly special cooking techniques that Marie learnt from her family. Marie also caters for corporate and families for any type of event serving finger food, Singapore vegetarian noodles, vegetarian burgers and other vegetarian dishes feeding approx. 20 to 150 people.

‘There is a high demand for our Vietnamese rolls!’ Using crispy pork belly, mayonnaise, different flavours, sweet or sour pickle, coriander, cucumber, some spices, chilli, homemade sauces, all that put in a fresh Vietnamese burn is an irresistible mouth-watering roll.

‘Cook with love and listen to your customers, they will come back.’

Marie gets a lot of satisfaction through serving her own signature food to people. ‘I love people and meet a lot of them.’ Regular customers keep coming back reassuring her that she and her staff are doing an excellent job. ‘I put all my love in the food I cook because I love people.’ ‘You need to respect all the customers, be patient and cook with love.’ Maria urges restaurateurs to listen to both their positive and negative customers’ feedback, ‘Control your feelings when you are upset or tired and don’t show it because each customer expects your presence when serving them.’ She also advises to be patient when having a high volume of people

coming into the shop, not to panic but to relax. 'Always be conscious that people put their health in your hands. Cook with love and listen to customers, they will come back,' she concludes with a happy smile.