

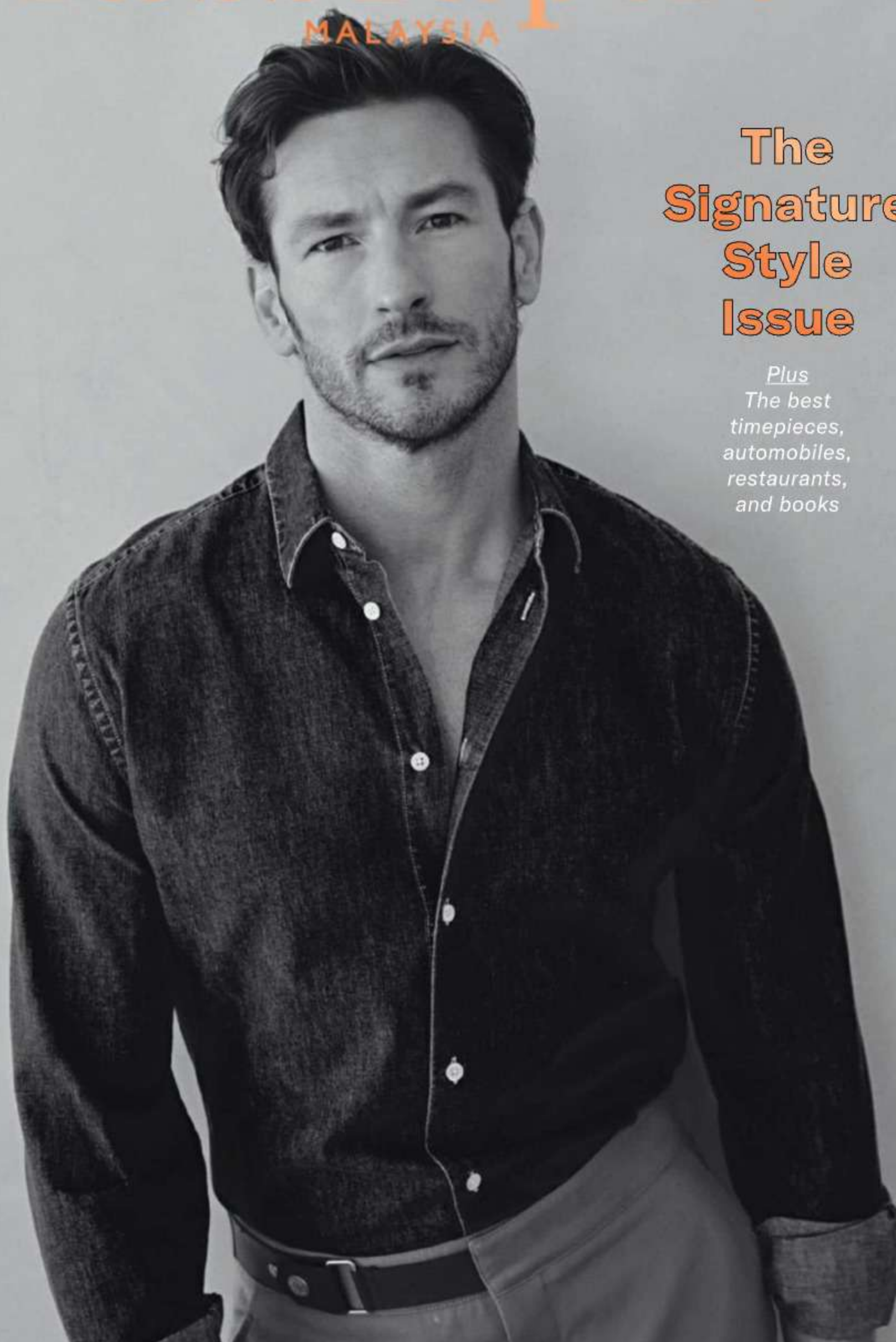
LUXURY WITHOUT COMPROMISE

# Robb Report

MALAYSIA

## The Signature Style Issue

*Plus*  
The best  
timepieces,  
automobiles,  
restaurants,  
and books



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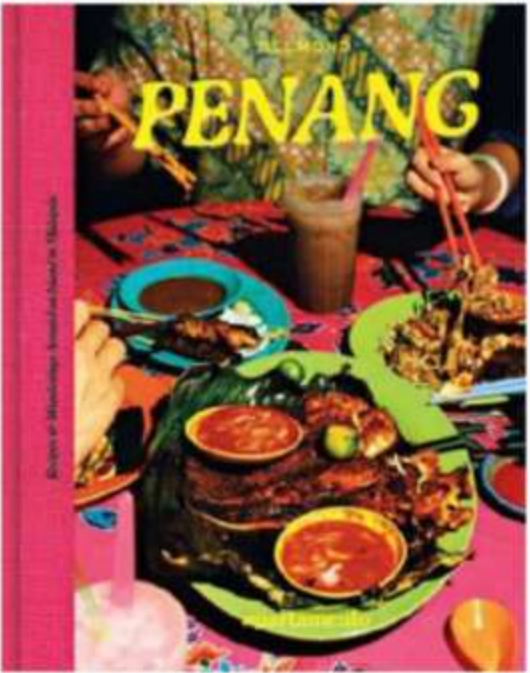






This page, from top:  
André Chiang; Ikan Bakar.

Facing page, clockwise from top:  
a heritage house in Penang; the cover  
of *Penang: Recipes & Wanderings  
Around an Island in Malaysia*; kaya  
toast, one of the recipes in the book.



# An Ode to The Pearl of the Orient

A new gorgeous coffee-table book, *Penang: Recipes & Wanderings Around an Island in Malaysia*, by Belmond and Apartamento includes contributions by André Chiang and Tash Aw as well as stunning photographs by artist Luo Yang.

Words: Alicia Corbett  
Photography: Luo Yang

PENANGITES ARE FIERCELY proud people, especially of their rich culinary heritage served in countless spots throughout the island that range from cheap hawker eats to Michelin-starred fine-dining establishments. As a born and bred Penangite, internationally acclaimed author Tash Aw sums up my feelings for my home state by writing, “For its inhabitants, it sometimes seems that Penang is more important than Malaysia. For the outsider, this feels both wonderful and unsettling. Why does everything feel so familiar but so different?”

Aw’s apt words are part of just one of the essays that are love letters to the northern state in the newly published 192-page hardcover book, *Penang: Recipes & Wanderings Around an Island in Malaysia* (€49). It is the second volume after the first on Liguria in the new series *Recipes & Wanderings* by Belmond, the luxury hospitality brand that operates high-end hotels and trains such as the Eastern and Oriental Express, and Apartamento, the independent magazine known for its focus on interior design and lifestyle.





This page, from left: Kun Min Chang, the owner of Ghee Hup Nutmeg Factory; nutmegs drying in the sun.

Facing page, from top: the completely revamped Eastern & Oriental Express departs from Singapore and takes guests on adventures through peninsular Malaysia; photographer Luo Yang.



Settle comfortably into your armchair, open the tome's cover, and be transported to the enchanting island with an introduction and recipes by André Chiang, chef extraordinaire and culinary director of the Eastern & Oriental Express. If you're wondering what a Taiwanese chef knows about Penang, Chiang writes: "Penang's culinary practices and traditions have significantly influenced my cooking. Growing up in a multicultural environment, I've had the privilege of experiencing cuisines from across the globe. Penang's food culture, however, holds a special place in my heart. Its rich history, cultural depth, authenticity, and vibrant community blend seamlessly together, shaping my culinary identity both directly and indirectly. Whenever I cook, I find myself naturally incorporating unique flavour combinations that feel balanced and harmonious, an effect I attribute to the influence of Penang."

There are a total of 23 recipes in the book, including those by Malcolm Lee, chef-owner of the world's first Michelin-starred Peranakan establishment, Candlenut, and Abby Lee, one of London's hottest chefs who founded modern Malaysian

restaurant Mambow. Whether you're a home cook or not, this might inspire you to pick up a spatula to make *Nasi Lemak a la française*, a simple Iced Nutmeg Drink, or even a plate of Penang Char Koay Teow. The recipe for the latter is accurately accompanied by the description: "This dish is not only fired up in the wok, it is also fired up in conversation; locals passionately debate each other about where to get the best *wok hei*-fired (breath of the wok) Char Koay Teow on the island. I personally have strong opinions on where to go and where not to go for the rice noodles."

As Chiang explains, Penang's culinary landscape is renowned for its vibrant fusion of Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Peranakan influences. Known as a street food paradise, the island offers iconic dishes such as Penang Laksa and Hokkien Mee, each showcasing bold, complex flavours that balance sweet, sour, salty, and spicy notes. Fresh, local ingredients such as tamarind, *belacan*, and seafood are central to its cuisine. The city's UNESCO heritage status has played a key role in preserving traditional cooking methods, ensuring that its food remains authentic.



PHOTOGRAPHY: APARTAMENTO, BELMOND.

Malaysian writer, poet, and academic Dr Anna Sulan Masing, as well as food and table stylist and cook Kirthanaa Naidu, also penned their thoughts in essays that capture the beauty of Penang in ways I've never thought of. The book also made me discover fascinating facts, such as how Penang became a centre for nutmeg production in the 19th century. These are all accompanied by nostalgic and vibrant images by Luo Yang, a Chinese photographer who Ai Weiwei dubbed as one of the "rising stars of Chinese photography" and who has been listed as one of BBC's 100 Women. In one captivating shot, she captures mace—the dried external fibrous covering of a nutmeg—drying in a basket in the shadows to create a yin and yang effect of sorts.

Whether you are in a far-flung land or are a true-blue Penang *lang*, as the locals say, *Penang: Recipes & Wanderings Around an Island in Malaysia* allows you to experience the poetic beauty of this glorious island through its food. As Chiang tells us: "In Penang, every dish tells a cultural story, offering not just a meal, but an immersive journey through the island's rich heritage."

