

THE SECRET THAT'S ABACA

Could this hidden restaurant in Cebu be the country's next 'it' place? **By James P. Ong** / Photographs **Walter Villa**

WE FIRST HEARD about **abaca** around Christmas last year, from a Cebuana socialite who swore by the restaurant's flatbread pizza—the best in town, she said. But it was not until months later that we actually got to visit the place and realize that Ms. Socialite forgot to mention the most important appeal of abaca: its ambiance. So romantic, so hidden, so exclusive. This is where fashion designer Inno Sotto hied off to the night he launched his perfume in

Cebu. No other restaurant in the country looks this good (well, other than Tonyboy Escalante's Antonio's Restaurant in Tagaytay, which has the advantage of a cooperative cool climate).

Owned by a husband-and-wife team originally from Hong Kong, abaca is located on Mactan Island and was designed to take advantage of the



tropical weather and the restaurant's seafront view. According to Anna Hyatt, wife of owner-chef Jason, they were yearly visitors to this space along Punta Engaño road because a relative of Jason's is married to a Filipina who lives there. When

he got burnt out from his job in HK's Lan Kwai Fong district, Jason realized that what he really wanted to do was open his own restaurant, that he could run his way. The result is abaca, which will soon have a nine-suite boutique hotel attached to it.

Even before its first newspaper writeup, abaca was already enjoying a steady stream of guests from as far as Manila. A family would fly in for the day and take the last flight out of Cebu—just to sit down and have dinner there, which could set you back P2,000 per person, including maybe one glass of wine. The cuisine could best be described as nouvelle, with a dependable array of pasta and meat dishes cooked a la California. It's the type of cooking that's restrained, subtle and relaxed. But what's most interesting is the debate it has sparked among Cebu's eater-outers: Is it really worth the meal? It's worth the try. ☺

abaca boutique resort + restaurant is on Punta Engaño Road, Mactan, Cebu City, tel. no. (32) 495-8456 or (32) 342-8905; www.abacaresort.com



Enjoy your salad (above) while looking at Mactan's beach

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