

HOW THE WEST WAS DONE

In the heart of Abaca is a soul personified in Jason Hyatt.

by KATE DYCHANGCO-ANZANI • photography CHARLES BUENCONSEJO, BENJIE ORDOÑEZ, JR.

It is a breezy night at Abaca, and on a Sunday, guests would expect a quiet evening, but the restaurant is full, with all orders continually rolling. A group of friends are on a night out, at the invitation of Jason Hyatt and his svelte but expecting wife, Ana. The chef would every so often pop in and out of the kitchen, bringing with him a buzz and energy to the table, thus initiating the mood for the evening. Everyone's definitely excited as they await the evening's degustation.

It is apparent that this celebrity chef is the heart and soul of Abaca and his food is the culmination of a culinary journey of more than a decade of work experiences.

Jason's cuisine is unapologetically Cal-Mediterranean. He likes to call his food philosophy "simple," with emphasis on cooking ingredients to the proper bite, and retaining and enhancing the natural flavors. "Keep in mind that simple does not mean simplistic," he admonishes.

Jason is American. He grew up in Los Angeles and went to school at the New England Culinary Institute in Montpelier, Vermont. His chosen career in the culinary arts had taken him to Europe where he was exposed to techniques of cooking, flavors, reductions and use of the highest quality ingredients. For a couple of years in Los Angeles,





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California he trained under Wolfgang Puck's Granita and solidified his stand on high quality and fresh produce. Fast-forward to today, he introduces to the Filipino palate his signature Cal-Mediterranean cuisine.

An example of his restaurant menu is his Cumin Chicken, Five Spice Lamb Burgers, Shrimp Quesedillas with trio sauces—all simple in nature yet complex and stylistic in execution. It is once mentioned, the more the food goes through a process of cooking, the more complexity it has in flavors. The more complex, the more difficult to perfect. One must always understand the cultural elements of a cuisine before you can really cook it, experiment with it and then change it. Jason has clearly mastered this mantra.

Popular favorites include his home-made ciabatta bread with the authentic rustic texture, his rectangular pizzas, thin to the crust, topped with the typical (cheese, tomato and basil) or the not-so-typical (lamb, goat's cheese and coriander) ingredients. Those with a more adventurous palate can indulge in his duck done two-ways—not in the style of Asian marination, but Jason's way. A salmon potato salad is once again redefined. The ultimate indulgence is the pan seared foie gras with cranberry compote in balsamic reduction.

Jason's life philosophy and food coincide. "I like to keep my life and my career as simple as possible. Minimal amount of drama is what we desire as a family. So, yes, definitely it translates into the food we serve in this restaurant. Our next venture will be a bit more upscale but equally as approachable. I am really excited to get that rolling sometime early next year."

How he ended up in Cebu was probably fate playing its part or simply because the challenge brought him here. But it is revealed in their business name Cebu Dream Realized, why he has planted his roots here. "It just sort of worked out that way. I am very glad it did as Cebu offers us the relaxed lifestyle and environment I needed after six years in Hong Kong. We have amazing friends here and everyone in general is extremely nice. Our kids love it and to be honest it is mainly why we are here."

Once not too long ago, in what he calls the "5/5 plan," Jason devised a blueprint of where he would be for the next five years. The goal was five cities in five years. His career life followed an almost tactical approach which in turn influenced his work ethics, his discipline and developed his cuisine. Cebu, although not in the main plan, presented itself as a blessing.

"It became the extended plan," he muses. Cebuanos can only hope it is the end game...



DEGUSTATION MENU

Smoked salmon with dill potato salad and marinated tomatoes

Pan seared foie gras with cranberry compote and balsamic syrup

Pickled organic beet root with peppered goat cheese and citrus vinegar

Saffron risotto with butter poached prawn

Prime angus ribeye with truffled asparagus

Abaca desserts



RECIPES

from Abaca's Kitchen

Grilled Prawn Saffron Risotto makes 5

Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 4 tbsp butter
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 2 liters fish stock
- 150 ml white wine
- 450 g Arborio rice
- ½ cup green peas
- ½ cup oven dried tomatoes
- 60 g grated parmesan cheese
- 4 tbsp chopped parsley
- 15 prawns
- 2 chopped garlic
- 2 fresh lemons

Procedure:

In one pot, heat the fish stock with two pinches of saffron. In a large saucepan, heat half of the butter and the olive oil, until the butter has melted. Add the onions and cook for three minutes until soft. Add the rice, stir until all the grains are coated with the butter. Pour in the wine and cook for one to two minutes to let the alcohol evaporate. Stirring constantly, begin to add the fish stock one ladle at a time allowing the liquid to be absorbed into the rice before adding more stock. Continue this process until the grains are tender but still have a bite. Add the peas and cook for another two minutes. Add the oven dried tomatoes just to heat through. Take the risotto off the heat and add the remaining butter, parmesan cheese and chopped parsley. Taste and season with salt accordingly. Season the prawns with salt and pepper. Heat a sauté pan. Add the oil, wait until hot then add the prawns. Add chopped garlic and butter. Once cooked drizzle the prawns with olive oil and fresh squeeze of lemon juice. Transfer the finished risotto into serving bowls and top with sautéed prawns.



Smoked Norwegian Salmon with Dill Potato Salad

makes 5

Ingredients:

- 3 medium potatoes
- 7 tbsp mayonnaise
- 1 tbsp pommery mustard
- 1 tbsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tbsp honey
- 1 tbsp brunoised shallots
- zest and juice of 1 lemon
- 1 tbsp chopped dill
- 1 tbsp chopped parsley
- salt and pepper

Procedure:

Peel and cut potatoes into medium dices. Cook the potatoes in lightly salted water until they are just tender, strain and cool. In a separate bowl, mix together all of the above ingredients. Add the cooled potatoes and season with salt and pepper. Serve with thinly sliced smoked salmon, fresh pickled dill and a squeeze of lemon juice.

