

APRIL 2010

GULF GOURMET

from us, for us.



EYE ON THE FUTURE

Chef Poonsak Sumonratanakul shares his vision



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FROM THE

President's station



Dear Fellow Chefs, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the April issue of our Gulf Gourmet, the issue with more pictures from the Salon Culinaire 2010. I am aware that many of you are waiting for information about the Junior Chef of the Year 2010 – sorry, but we are not able to confirm the event yet, as budget and location have still not been cleared.

Recently, the World President, Mr. Gissur Gudmundsson, ratified the appointments of the two new junior WACS ambassadors for the term of office 2010 to 2011. Ms Kelly Lee Conwell, representing the American Culinary Federation, and Ms Sarah Primrose, representing the New Zealand Chefs Association. The two candidates will take up their position with immediate effect, and they will be reporting directly to the chair of the junior chef's liaison committee, Mr. Andy Cuthbert.

I am pleased to announce a new corporate member in this issue – Iqdam International. We are also happy to announce that Fonterra Brands Middle East is the first member who has

renewed and paid the corporate membership for the next three coming years.

Also, please do make sure you scroll through the Friend's of the Guild pages and Thank You page for the last Salon Culinaire to recognise the people who support the Guild. Thank you to every single individual and company.

There are still spaces for a few teams for the MLA Black Box 2010. The competition will be held on 30th May and 1st June in Madinat Jumeirah. Please do register with Josephine in the ECG Office, or directly with Mr Rodney Sims from MLA.

Finally, I would like to thank Chef Patrick Lannes and the team from Grosvenor House Dubai for hosting the April meeting.

Culinary regards,

Uwe Micheel

*President of Emirates Culinary Guild
Director of Kitchens
Radisson Blu Hotel, Dubai Deira Creek*

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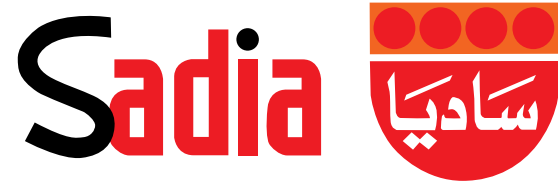
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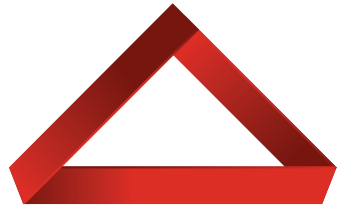


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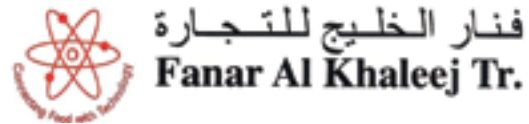


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GULF GOURMET

FROM US, FOR US.

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GULF GOURMET

FROM US, FOR US.

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AND THE SHOW GOES ON...

Gulf Gourmet brings you some more moments from Salon Culinaire 2010 - the participants, the winners and the ecstasy.



















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Pastry Chef Challenge 2010_{GCC}

ENTRY FORM

ESTABLISHMENT DETAILS

Name of establishment: _____

Name of Executive Chef: _____

Chefs Office Number: _____

COMPETING TEAM DETAILS

Name of Senior Pastry Chef: _____

Position of Senior Pastry Chef: _____

Contact Number (Mobile): _____

Name of Junior Pastry Chef: _____

Position of Junior Pastry Chef: _____

Contact Number (Mobile): _____

- All Participants to provide a brief resume on their career for use by the organiser for PR activities
- Participants agree that all recipes become the property of Fonterra FoodServices
- Scan and Email your Entry Form and Recipes to anchorchallenge@fonterrafoodserves.ae or visit www.fonterrafoodserves.ae for further details and entry submission
- Entry submission deadline is 10th May, 2010

Senior Pastry Chef

Junior Pastry Chef



We thank all of our supporters for helping us to host
a very successful Salon Culinair 2010

Our main business partners and major supporters were:

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Federal Foods
Dubai World Trade Centre

Total logistical support, maintenance and the hosting of the judges welcome and briefing:

Jumeirah Emirates Towers Hotel - Jumeirah Hospitality

Logistical support to the international junior teams:

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Al Qasr Jumeirah
Jumeirah Beach Hotel
Oasis Beach Tower
Grosvenor House Hotel
Renaissance Hotel
Raffles Hotel
Coral Boutique Hotel Apartments
City Seasons Hotel
Radisson Blu Hotel Dubai Deira Creek

Daily meal support for the international jury:

More Cafe
Fairmont Hotel
Rosa Rotana Hotel
Shangri-La Hotel
Dusit Thani Dubai
Number 1 Tower Suites

ARE YOU UP TO THE CHALLENGE?

June will see Fonterra hosting their second professional competition of the year. This time, they are looking to crown the best pastry team in the GCC.



Competing against the very best pastry chefs in the GCC is not an easy challenge, but with 30,000 AED at stake in the Anchor PastryChef Challenge, there are plenty of world-class pastry chefs in the region who we know cannot wait to be part of the action...

Following the hugely successful Anchor MasterChef Challenge back in January, which saw Chefs Edward Mair and Jay Williams from The Westin Mina Seyahi walk away with top honours, Fonterra are expecting the crème de la crème of the culinary world to rise up to the challenge once again.

Providing a platform for professional chefs to showcase their skills, is central to the New Zealand-based company and they are passionate in their commitment to improving the skills of chefs and exposing the culinary talent, which is embedded in the region's world-famous hotels and restaurants.

The Anchor PastryChef Challenge is open to all executive pastry chefs, pastry sous chefs and junior/trainee pastry chefs currently working in the GCC, and will once again take place in Fonterra's very own innovation kitchen – the Culinarium – which is their brand new; state-of-the-art facility, making the chefs feel right at home.

Each team must comprise of two chefs, one senior pastry

chef and one junior pastry chef, who will be representing both themselves and their establishment.

Chef Peter Hallmanns, Advisory Chef for Fonterra is anticipating the competition to be even fiercer than during the Anchor MasterChef Challenge early this year.

“We are ready for up to 24 teams to compete against each other. To attract the very best pastry talent in the region, we have upped the price money considerably. Let's see who is the best pastry team in the GCC,” Chef Peter challenges.

“Fonterra is well aware of the outstanding culinary skills being demonstrated every day within the region and we realize the importance of working with, and more importantly, supporting the industry with opportunities to enhance the skills of chefs throughout the GCC.”

The competition will run from 9th – 23rd June and teams need to have their entries posted to Fonterra by no later than 10th May to ensure they are received before the closing date, Wednesday 12th May. The successful teams will be announced the following Thursday, 28th May.

To qualify for selection, teams must submit the following recipes with their entry form, and if successful, will prepare their chosen dishes during the competition:

- A specialty / signature cake serving 12 portions (+/- 22 cm in diameter)
- Four individual, identical dessert plates, each serving

three (3) different miniature desserts, either all cold, or a combination of cold & warm, with a maximum of 1 frozen component permitted.

- A Friandise/ Petit Fours Platter for four (4) people, displaying 2 Fruit Friandise and 3 Fine Pastry Petit Fours per person.

Fonterra is encouraging entries to be creative, innovative and exciting but without overlooking taste and texture. The pastry chefs may want to consider creating recipes or themes reflecting the cultural and culinary heritage of the Middle East or in combination with global food trends or fusion cuisine; although no preference to entries incorporating these will be given.

“This is an opportunity for pastry chefs to be very creative and we hope to see new styles, recipes and methods of using ingredients that we have not seen before”, adds Chef Peter. “If chefs are choosing more traditional recipes, we encourage them to be as true to the essence of the recipe as possible.”

“Through this competition, the quality, consistency and multi-purpose in application, and flexibility of Fonterra's products will be demonstrated through their recipes,” comments Chef Peter.

Each team will compete over their allocated days during June. On day one, they will be allocated a four hour morning or afternoon slot for mis-en-place and preparation of their dishes. The following day, the team will be again allocated a morning or afternoon slot, this time for three hours, for final preparation, plating and set-up.

Recipes will be judged according to WACS recommended standards by a panel of independent ECG approved and accredited pastry chefs, and the team with the highest points scored will be determined the winner.

Judging criteria will include, mis-en-place, presentation and innovation, taste and texture, timing and hygiene and food safety.

In the event of a tie, a bake-off will occur between these teams on 22nd June, where the finalists will prepare and present their dishes once again.

“It's not just the generous prize money we are awarding - AED 15,000 for the winning team, AED 10,000 for the runners-up and AED 5,000 for the team in third place – the winning team will also receive one year's worth of media exposure and all three final teams will be given the opportunity to attend a specialized, three-day training course (all expenses paid), on the latest pastry trends at the “French Culinary School” in Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur hosted by the celebrity Chef Jean Francois Arnaud, the “Un des Meilleurs Ouvriers de France - M.O.F. Pâtissier 2000”.

“This is not a competition where the winner's are simply congratulated and then go back to their day-jobs, they will have the option to receive specialized training, learn new skills and expose the establishment they work for on a global



scale,” Chef Peter passionately and proudly comments.

The winning team will be officially announced by Fonterra at an exclusive event on 23rd June.

Chef Peter adds, “There is no doubt we have an extremely talented pool of pastry chefs in the UAE and we are looking forward to seeing what striking dishes will be produced.”

For further information, terms and conditions and to download the details of the recipes that must accompany the entry form on the following page, please visit, www.fonterrafoodsolutions.ae. Alternatively, contact Fonterra's Advisory Chef Peter Hallmanns, peter.hallmanns@fonterra.com for any further enquiries regarding the competition.

SIMPLE AMBITION

Chef Poonsak Sumonratanakul, Executive Chef, Dusit Princess Hotel, has a very straightforward philosophy in life - work hard, learn as much as you can, and put your experience to good use. He shares this, and many more such valuable advice with Gulf Gourmet.



It's very important for us to guide younger people today. Youngsters feel that they can have everything on a platter and are always looking for quick gratification. But the reality is that this is a tough profession and you have to work hard," says Chef Poonsak Sumonratanakul, Executive Chef, Dusit Princess Hotel.

And he should know. For, he has spent many months and scores of meetings, interviews and even tastings to bag the position he currently holds. "It was quite a long time, but of course, I realise that for a position like this, a company does need to be very careful," he smiles.

This happy and understanding attitude is trademark for Chef Poonsak, who has always taken his life one step at a time, not just accepting the bad with the good, but also seeing opportunities in that. Like when, as a young boy in his hometown of Bangkok, Thailand, his dream of wanting to work in the navy was inadvertently shattered. "I failed the physical exam, maybe because I was not strong enough or something. But being in the navy or army was definitely out," he explains.

With his original plan shot down, he was scouting around for options when a friend suggested he get into hotel management. "Why not," he said, taking the first step towards success in the culinary industry.

"Today I can think back and realise that life is not just about getting what you want. Sometimes, you want to be number 1 in a particular field, but that is not possible. You have to take the next best thing, and make sure you give it your 100 per cent," he advises.

So he enrolled in a two-year hotel management course in Bangkok. At first, he was not confident of doing well in this field. But then, as fate would have it, he was sent to the Sheraton hotel in Bangkok for his three-month training period. "That's when I realised how much I loved this job. I was not out in the scorching sun. I was in the comfort of an air-conditioned, luxurious hotel, wearing a nice

uniform, meeting nice people, and doing a good job. I was quite happy, and that reflected in my work," he smiles.

His positive attitude and eagerness to continue in this profession did not go unnoticed. The executive chef at the hotel was a German gentleman, and he asked Chef Poonsak if he would like to stay on for another three months as an intern. "Why not," he said again.

MY TIME AT THE
INTERCONTINENTAL
TAUGHT AND
TRAINED ME IN
A LOT OF WAYS. I
WOULD NOT BE
WHERE I AM TODAY
IF I HAD NOT HAD
THAT OPPORTUNITY



For the first two and a half months though, Chef Poonsak did little other than butchery. After only a very short time in the hot kitchen, he was offered a job at the hotel as Commis 1. "I was still so young, unmarried, and living with my parents. So money was not a big requirement for me. I was there to learn, so I accepted the job," he says.

Five years passed by, and Chef Poonsak felt the need to move on. "I was chef de partie when I left the hotel. That's the place where I had the opportunity to learn and work with many different cuisines. The restaurants had mostly Continental cuisine – French, German, etc," he explains.

As happy as he was at the hotel, Chef Poonsak wanted more. His desire, like most chefs at his age,





Chef Poonsak with Mr Wolfi Malik, GM, Dusit Princess City Centre hotel. Mr Malik lends great support to Chef Poonsak for his activities with the Guild

was to go work overseas. An opportunity came along, when he was shortlisted for an interview to go work in Germany for a Thai restaurant. “My friend, who works in beverages, and I applied together. We were both selected, but fate was not on my side, or so I thought,” he smiles.

Chef Poonsak’s visa was rejected, and he was given no concrete reason for that. He only knew that he was not going to Germany, which was disappointing for him. Nevertheless, he took up a job at another hotel in Bangkok, the prestigious Amari hotel.

Six months later, fate showed him that it had indeed favoured him. “My friend, who had gone to Germany, came back dejected. He said I was lucky to have not gone as the owner was horrible. He cheated everyone until they had nothing left, and he shut down all operations leaving his employees with nothing,” he says, still shaking his head in disbelief.

With renewed confidence and a deeper dedication

to his job, Chef Poonsak threw himself into work. From chef de partie, he was promoted to senior sous chef. And three years later, his dream to go overseas finally worked out. “I had applied to a local agent there, who offered me a job in Abu Dhabi. I took it,” he smiles.

“The day I landed, I did feel for a moment that maybe I had made a mistake. But the excitement of finally being out of Bangkok got the better of me, and I looked forward to my work,” he says. Chef Poonsak was Chef de Partie at the InterContinental in Abu Dhabi, and opened the seafood/fish market concept restaurant there. “It was the first of its kind, and a very interesting experience for me. I was working in a multicultural environment for the first time, and to be honest, in the beginning, communication was a problem,” he says.

Besides, his age and position in life – he was a young, single man – allowed him the freedom to explore different opportunities and be a little adventurous. “The brand was strong, and the team was superb. Although language was a problem, I

adapted quickly, which allowed me to learn a great deal. My time there taught and trained me in a lot of ways. I would not be where I am today if I had not had that opportunity,” he states, expressing a strong sense of loyalty to his employers.

But as much as he enjoyed his work, Chef Poonsak was forced to leave the country. “The war had broken out between Iraq and Kuwait, and the hotel was abuzz with rumours of how we were going to be bombed, how we should not switch on the AC as they might put some fatal gas in it, and many more such things. In the hotel itself, we had a strong army presence, with guns being a common carry-on item. I stayed on through it all. However, when my contract ran out, and they offered to renew it, I declined. My parents were very worried about me, so I went back home,” he explains.

That was not the only change he made though. Chef Poonsak also moved from hotels to the franchise business, this time with an American brand. “I had been interviewed on the phone by the people from Hard Rock Cafe, and they hired me to open their first franchise in the country. I went to the USA for training for six months, and it was like a dream come true for me. I mean, you know, at a young age, one always wants to travel to the US or the UK,” he says, almost sheepishly.

That was another eye-opening experience, where, in spite of being executive chef, he was trained from the serving side, taken through each rank over six months. Once he was back, he opened the restaurant, and over the five years he was with them, had the opportunity to hobnob with famous celebrities. “I catered for the Michael Jackson concert in Bangkok. I also closed down the 3-storey restaurant and organised a meal especially for the Miss Universe pageant. That was an incredible day” So many people from so many different countries – it was quite an experience,” he gushes.

Chef Poonsak moved back to the hotel industry in 1995, taking up the position of Executive Sous Chef at the Landmark hotel, overseeing the operations for 13-14 different outlets and supervising 150 chefs. “At that time in Bangkok,

business was booming. It was like in Dubai a few years ago. New brands were coming in all the time, and opportunities came knocking at your door,” he says.

Such an opportunity came for Chef Poonsak when the owner of TGI in Malaysia stayed at the Landmark Hotel. “He asked to speak to me, and at first, I was a little worried. I thought he might want to complain, but he simply asked me if I would sit and have coffee with him, which I agreed to do. He explained to me who he was, and the job he was offering me. I took it,” he says.

CHEF UWE IS LIKE A SECOND FATHER TO ME – HE IS MY MENTOR AND I TAKE HIS ADVICE FOR EVERYTHING



From there on began a whirlwind tour of the region, starting with a training programme again in the US and in Malaysia. Chef Poonsak opened the first TGI in Thailand, and went on to open many more in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, etc. “The business was growing very fast, like dominoes. By then, I was married and had my sons, so I felt this may not be the right job for me,” he explains.

In 1999, Chef Poonsak came to the UAE for an interview with Chef Uwe Micheel, then Executive Chef at the InterContinental Hotel, Dubai. “I have a lot of affection and respect for Chef Uwe. He is the kind of person who trusts you, and gives you confidence in yourself. He trusted that I could do my job, and encouraged me with a raise and promotion early on. He has taught me so much, he is like a second father to me,” says Chef Poonsak of his mentor.



Chef Poonsak's experience at the seafood restaurant in Abu Dhabi meant he was placed at Fish Market, and his heritage helped him assist Chef Uwe in opening Yum. "We worked on the design, concept, menu, everything for Yum from scratch. In fact, some of those old dishes are still on the menu because people enjoy them so much. It's great to see that," he smiles.

When Radisson Blu took over the hotel though, Chef Poonsak moved to Wagamama. "Chef Uwe helped me a lot there. Wagamama had wanted to open for a long time, but they did not have the right chef. Chef Uwe put in a good word for me with the GM, and I got the job as head chef at the outlet.

Chef Poonsak was once again sent for training, this time to the UK. "I worked in the central kitchen there, and we made food in so huge quantities, that it would take a day to make one sauce," he says. That experience taught Chef Poonsak a lot, one of which that he was not cut out to live in England. I am a simple guy. I mean, you experience 3 seasons a day there. I just could not take that," he laughs.

In 2004, Chef Poonsak opened the first Wagamama, soon followed by two more in Dubai. All was well, and he was soon approaching the magic number 5 – the number of years he has worked with most companies. "At one of the Guild meetings, I met the executive chef from Dusit Dubai. We got talking and got along. He offered me a job, and I was called for an interview with Mr Wolfi Malik, the current GM of Dusit Princess hotel.

"He interviewed me, even came to Wagamama to try the food, and surprisingly, came with the regional director, who wanted to do a food tasting. I was surprised at first – a food tasting for an executive chef? I called Chef Uwe, and he asked me what was wrong about it? I said, nothing. So he said, well then, do it. So I did," he laughs.

Time passed, but Mr Malik kept in touch, inviting Chef Poonsak to see the progress of the hotel. "I gave him a lot of tips, but not because I had been hired. I like helping people when I can, and since I


had input that would help them, I gave my advice," he says.

A while later, he got a call from Mr Malik, asking him to join him for dinner. Confused at first, he agreed. And he was offered the job. "I know they had hired someone else for about three months, but for whatever the reason, it did not work out. But I too was confused, so once again I asked Chef Uwe for advice, and he showed great confidence in me. He asked me if I wanted to be an executive chef, and I said I did. So he said simply, then what is the problem, take it," he smiles.

Take it he did, and in January 2010, Dusit Princess was open to the public. Here, Chef Poonsak has brought in many firsts. "Our hotel is all electric – we do not use gas. This is where experience comes in. I have to use my knowledge and technique to adapt the cooking style to suit our resources. Your dish will always be perfect if you put your heart into it," he advises.

Operating 4 outlets with a team that comprises 19 nationalities, Chef Poonsak is at ease in the hotel. "It's everything I dreamed of, but it's still tough. As executive chef, you are no longer just a chef. You also have to know the market, sales, products, etc. As tough as it is to get to this position, it is even tougher to maintain it," he says.

His pearls of wisdom are not falling on deaf ears. Unlike sons of most chefs, who, seeing their father's long hours of work and lack of family time, stay away from this industry, Chef Poonsak's sons harbour a fierce ambition to excel in their father's field. "My older son wants to work in hotel management, and my younger son wants to be a chef. My focus now is to help him be the best, train him and give him the opportunities he deserves," he says.

For himself, Chef Poonsak has set a plan to work for a few more years before moving back to Thailand to open a quiet restaurant. "I just want to offer fresh, good food. The idea is to be small, but popular, always fully booked, and booked in advance," he smiles. 

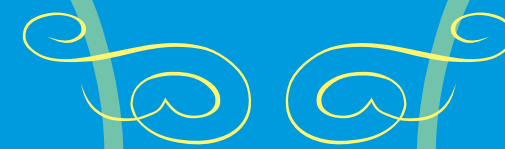
MASTERCLASS FOR MASTER CHEFS

Twelve aspiring pastry chefs from the GCC, including four from the UAE, were treated to a patisserie Masterclass by Jean-François Arnaud, a certified Meilleur Ouvrier de France, courtesy Fonterra. Some moments.


Over three days of culinary art, craft and design, Fonterra reinforced their drive to further increase the passion for pastries and raise the standards of chefs around the region. Jean-François Arnaud, a certified Meilleur Ouvrier de France (awarded to only 113 French pastry chefs around the world), coached senior pastry chefs from some of the region's most exclusive hotels.

The objective of the workshop was to provide delegates with the opportunity to experience the latest trends as well as classical pastry techniques. The second part of the workshop focused on artistic sugar work, encouraging the chefs to create basic designs out of sugar. The workshop was conducted at Fonterra's state-of-the-art Culinarium – their

I LIKE TO THINK OF IT AS A UNIQUE BLEND OF EXPERIENCE AND EXPERIMENTS AND I WANT TO ENHANCE THEIR CURRENT SKILLS AND TEACH NEW TECHNIQUES



brand new innovation kitchen in Al Quoz – Dubai.

As one of the most experienced and celebrated pastry chefs and coaches in his native France, Chef Arnaud is a role model and an inspiration. Says he, "You simply don't have the scope to enjoy this level of creativity in many other kitchen disciplines, and I feel privileged to have the opportunity to show these young chefs the tremendous sense of achievement you can reach through this work. I like to think of it as a unique blend of experience and experiments and I want to enhance their current skills and teach new techniques." 



FATED FOR SUCCESS

Gulf Gourmet talks to *Chef Tarek Mouries*, Executive Chef at the Fujairah Rotana Resort & Spa, about what it means to be a chef, and the element of fate in life

Passionate about food and everything related, Chef Tarek Mourieess is a familiar face around town. Travelling regularly between emirates, be it for a Guild meeting or as a judge for Salon Culinaire and JCY, Chef Tarek is always at hand for help and advice when needed.

“I have taken a backseat when it comes to active work now. I definitely feel I am at a stage when I should spend more time passing on my expertise to the younger generation,” he admits. Luckily for him, his current position of Executive Chef at the Fujairah Rotana Resort & Spa allows him to do just that.

“It’s a great company. I am quite happy with the way the Rotana Group operates. They are very F&B oriented, very detail-oriented, very encouraging. It’s a great place to work in,” he asserts, emphasising the support and affirmation he has received from them.

Chef Tarek has always been fortunate enough to have that. As a young boy, even when he chose cooking school over engineering, his father took

it in his stride, happy that his son was doing something he loved.

This love for cooking came from his grandmother, who was a great cook. “She was a simple woman, and she cooked amazingly simple food. At the time, chicken and meat were delicacies, not part of the daily fare. But my grandmother made delicious food with the most basic and minimal ingredients. Like boiled eggplant with lemon juice served with hot bread. I try to use these basics in my teachings now,” he smiles.

After finishing his education, Chef Tarek joined the Al Borg in Cairo for a six month apprenticeship. He moved to the Movenpick for a further six month apprenticeship, but this one was more valuable. “I learned a lot about tolerance and resilience there. As a apprentice, you do only the most basic work like chopping, peeling, etc. They never let you cook until they trust you, and I was fortunate to be trusted with some cooking in my very last month there,” he laughs.

From there on, Chef Tarek moved to the Novapark hotel, as a Commis 1, part of the opening team for this Swiss brand of hotels. He grew through the ranks there for the next two years, and by the time





he was chef de partie, the management knew they had someone good on their hands. "They liked my work, so they sent me to their hotel in Zurich, Switzerland. Due to some visa issues, however, I was not given the same position there, although I had quite a few responsibilities," he says.

In that one year, Chef Tarek really started his life, he feels, as that exposed him to experiences he had never had before. Really coming into his own in the one year he was there, Chef Tarek brought his experiences back to the Novapark in Cairo when his work permit expired. "I came back with a promotion, and was now sous chef," he smiles.

But as fate would have it, his executive chef moved to Switzerland to head a cooking school, and when he needed an assistant, he chose Chef Tarek. "I was quite honoured, and at the young age of 26, I moved to Switzerland again to teach at the Caesar Ritz school," he says.

As Kitchen Instructor over the next three years, Chef Tarek felt his life change. Forced to brush up and master the basics of cooking – he had to teach others about it, after all – he read voraciously, and took in as much knowledge as he could. "It also gave me the opportunity to explore and learn about different aspects like pastry that I would otherwise have never done," he explains.

But the hotel industry beckoned again, and in 1989, Chef Tarek moved to Al Ain as executive sous chef. "I was with the Hilton group for about 20 years before moving to the Rotana. It was really an enriching experience in my life. In Al Ain, for example, I experienced the Gulf War, where we had to cater for 2500 American troops every day. It was a massive operation that made me mature beyond my years," he states.

In 1991, he moved to Dubai, at the former Hilton hotel next to the World Trade Centre. "One of the best parts about the Hilton is that they invest a lot in training their chefs. I was lucky to be with them at a point when they did a lot of F&B promotions, bringing in famous chefs from around the world to share their knowledge. At one such event, I worked with a chef from Brussels, and they so liked the starters I made that they rewarded me with a two week trip to Brussels, touring the Michelin star restaurants there," he smiles proudly.

Even as Hilton lay the foundation for his career, Chef Tarek felt the need to take a step back. "I have a family who loves and supports me, but they do need more of my time now. I wanted a role that offered me more consultancy duties, and more freedom to do what I want. And after 20 long years, it was time to make a change as well," he shrugs.

So Chef Tarek joined the Rotana group, where he believes he is the perfect fit. Settled amidst the Hajar mountains, Rotana caters to a diverse group of clientele – from expatriate holidaymakers to both local and international tourists. Maintaining international quality of the hotel's five specialty restaurants and 24-hour in room dining is Chef Tarek's main objective, a task that he willingly and cheerfully accepts.

Being a respected and well-known expert in his field, he also appeared as a guest on the popular Chef Osama Cooking Show, which airs on Dubai TV. He has presented Modern Arabic Cuisine to the show's wide audience. Chef Tarek realises the need for constant training and practice, and as such, openly encourages young chefs to continuously build on their originality – a preaching that he most definitely practices to hone his ever-growing culinary skills.

From his grandmother to his first chef, Alfonse Bertecky, Chef Tarek fondly remembers the people who have made an impact on his life and career. But he is someone who believes in fate and Karma, and believes that doing good can get you good things.

Fate, it seems, had decreed that he would be a chef. "This is a story I was told only after my father passed away. We have a guy called Aamir Saeed who works in my home back in Cairo. My father and he went for a walk along the Nile every evening, and once day, my father saw a swanky white Mercedes outside the Le Meridien hotel. When he inquired who owned the car, he was told that it was for the Executive Chef of the hotel. He then expressed a desire that his son should one day be an executive chef and own a Mercedes like that," informs Chef Tarek.

It seems like God was listening in at that very time, for Chef Tarek has achieved the position he father had wanted him to so many years ago. 🍴



Mr Stefan Menzel and Mr Michael Brown, Iqdam International, receiving the membership certificate from Chef Uwe Micheel, President, Emirates Culinary Guild

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