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volume 16, issue 3



MISSION POSSIBLE

If there is a critical culinary task at hand then Chef **Kushan Perera**, Executive Sous Chef at St. Regis Saadiyat Island, is the man for the job

DUEL ON THE PALM

Young chefs from W Hotel and Waldorf Astoria, both located on Palm Jumeirah, compete for glory



EMIRATI COOKIES

Chef **Alhassan Ali Alfalasi's** cookies on wheels is attracting patrons from across the country



SWEET TOUCH

Exclusive interview with **Sanjaya Rathnayake**, the executive pastry chef at Le Meridien Dubai



Kushan Perera

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Dear fellow chefs, ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the March issue of our Gulf Gourmet.

I am sure many of you are training in full swing for our Salon Culinaire 2021. Your Guild team is working hard on planning this event. Once again, we are bringing in something new.

We are adjusting to the present situation. And for the very first time, you will see the competitions happening both on the ground as well as streaming virtually. Our plan is to have at least 6 hours live every day. 9am to 12noon and 3pm to 6pm UAE time.

The teams from International Centre for Culinary Arts (ICCA Dubai), Emirates Culinary Guild and Purple Kitchen Events (Expo Culinaire) have teamed up to present a worldwide audience with a great show.

All static classes plus sandwich and cake deco will be held on the 4th and 5th of April in Zabeel Ballroom of Radisson Blu Hotel Dubai Deira Creek. All live cooking classes will be on the 6th and 7th of April in the Gardens of Jumeirah Creekside Hotel. On the 8th we will have the Chaine Des Rotisseurs Young Chef Final in the International Centre for Culinary Arts – Dubai (ICCA) in Knowledge Park. This event is by invitation only.

I would like to give a big Thank You to our Partners. Without our loyal Partners we would not be able to put up this great event. Our main Sponsors for 2021 are US Beef Export Federation and USA Poultry and Egg Export Council and IFFCO. Our Class Sponsors are Masterbaker, Arla Pro, Tilda, Barakat Quality Plus, Il Granaio Delle Idee, Upfield, Barilla and Nestle Professional.

Our Kitchen Partners are Ginox and



Convotherm Welbilt while RAK Ceramic / Restofair will be providing the amazing plates. Jumeirah Creekside, Radisson Blu Hotel DDC and International Centre for Culinary Arts (ICCA Dubai) are hosting the International Salon Culinaire and Virtual Expo Culinaire 2021. Ronai is supplying the jackets for our jury and marshals.

Thank you to all of you who support us, planning, building and executing. Thank you to all judges and marshals. Last but not the least, I would like to wish all the competitors, good luck for the show. Remember, the key is not just winning. The most important aspect is to learn, gain experience, make new friends and enjoy.

2021 Entry Fee for this Competition is FREE. There is NO Entry Fee this year.

Please visit gulfgourmet.net to browse through previous issues of this magazine. Visit emiratesculinaryguild.net to see latest happenings on the events calendar. And visit fb.com/wacyoungchefs for young chefs to be in contact with over 4,000 chefs across the globe.

Please do not miss the company profiles of our corporate members. We really do appreciate your support. Also do look at the Friends of the Guild pages to check all our supporters.

Thank you to Chef Diyan Manjula De Silva and Radisson Blu Dubai Deira team for hosting the last meeting.

Culinary Regards,

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



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editor'snote

email editor@gulfgourmet.net

If you read all the articles in this edition of the magazine, you will spot a subtle underlying theme. A large number of the chefs that have been featured in this issue have performed extremely well in their careers by staying loyal to their place of work. While they have not stayed at the same property all their life, they have not jumped ship within a couple of years either.

And most of them have seen sufficient growth coupled with mental satisfaction from the job they do. This is extremely great to see given that monotony and boredom can easily set in when creative arts are not channeled properly.

Talking of properly channeling creativity, the Salon Culinaire is on next month and I reckon chefs will find new ways of making an impression when cooking in the Gardens of the Jumeirah Creekside Hotel. We will bring you exclusive images from the event in our May issue.

Our cover story this month features Chef Kushan Perera, who I have known for a very long time. He is a third-generation hotelier and grew up living in a hotel where his dad worked. How that childhood experience metamorphosed into a culinary career has been captured in this story.

Another great article is of Emirati Chef



Our Golden Chef's Hat Award young chefs section continues with two teams from Palm Jumeirah – W Hotel and Waldorf Astoria – competing to make their mark. One of the teams is an all-women's team, which I think is befitting given that International Women's Day falls this month.

If you are a pastry chef in this country, chances are you know who Sanjaya Dhanushka ER Rathnayake is. The executive pastry chef of Le Meridien Dubai Hotel and Conference Centre has built many a career over the years and is one of those names that may not be popular in mass media but is highly respected among industry peers. Read his story in this issue.

And finally, we have an exclusive spread of images from the 7th International Young Chef Olympiad (YCO). The images are of UAE's Srijaenthi Natraj – a student of ICCA Dubai – who won the silver spot from among 100 contestants worldwide and got recognized for creating the best chicken dish inspired by an Emirati dish.

All this and more stories are waiting to be explored in this issue.

Until next time, enjoy the read and keep cooking with passion.

Aquin George
Editor

Alhassan Ali Alfalasi. The Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management student started a food truck selling cookies after a class project and found it to be extremely successful. He says Emirati people are afraid of launching a culinary initiative because they "are worried about how the community would see them. But what I experienced when I stood behind the counter of my food truck was that many Emiratis were happy to support me and were proud of me."

This is so great to hear. Read his story in this issue and we can't wait to see his food truck Stuffed: Cookies & More become a successful sensation.

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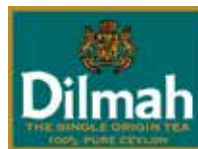




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March 2021 Gulf Gourmet

newsbites

Michelin superstars Bottura, Beck and Gagnaire in Dubai

Chef Massimo Bottura is hosting three dinners and a “laid-back” Saturday lunch at his Dubai restaurant Torno Sabato between March 18-20. The outlet is the signature Italian restaurant at W Dubai – The Palm.

The dinner will include an eight-course menu for AED 690 per person, and will feature ‘Piadina on the Beach’, served with warm Piadina bread, smoked veal, squacquerone cheese and aromatic salad. Other dishes include ‘Il Re Granchio’, a stunning king crab salad with yoghurt, red cabbage, and green apple ceviche, ‘Merluzzo Spring in Green’, served with roasted wild cod fish, green bagna cauda sauce, spring vegetables and black truffle, and ‘Wagyu!’, a succulent glazed Wagyu flank steak, with a balsamic and cacao sauce. For something sweet, foodies can indulge in different textures of coconut with ‘Cocco Bello’ and a refreshing limoncello ice cream, also known as ‘Sorrento Baba’.

The Saturday “sharing-style” lunch is AED 499 per person, inclusive of food



Massimo Bottura



Heinz with Francesco

and selected house beverages. Dishes include aperitivo bites, ‘Milanese O Bolognese’, with breaded veal tenderloin, tartara sauce, roasted potato and tomato salad, ‘Risotto Seppie E Piselli’, served with green peas, cuttlefish, lemon and bottarga, and a ‘Focaccia Club Sandwich.’ Diners can enjoy the sweetest of finishes with ‘Pink Banana’, a sweet caramel banana mousse, served with Tonka beans and salted caramel crumble.

Prior to that, Heinz Beck, who helms three Michelin-stars for La Pergola in Rome, will be in Dubai from March 1-4. He will be promoting his restaurant Social by Heinz Beck, which opened in 2014.

Their PS says that the chef will be in the kitchen cooking alongside his culinary team led by head chef Francesco Acquaviva. Diners can choose a five-course meal for AED 600

to taste Marinated buffalo fillet with grilled fennel, celery mayonnaise and spinach; Lobster with artichoke and black truffle; Beef cheek tortellini with wild garlic and fava beans; Sea bass fillet with winter perfumes; and a dish called Tribute to the women.

For AED 800 you can upgrade to a seven-course meal that gets you and additional Scallop with cauliflowers and caviar; and Veal tenderloin with mushroom and mixed beans.

Not to be left behind, Chef Pierre Gagnaire will visit his Dubai restaurant, Pierre’s Bistro & Bar at the InterContinental Dubai Festival City. The chef will be in the city to celebrate the restaurant’s three year anniversary between March 8 and 13.

If you are not going to experience these occasions, we suggest you check out the young chefs from both the W Hotel and Waldorf Astoria featured in this issue.

Al Faisaliah and the MO connection

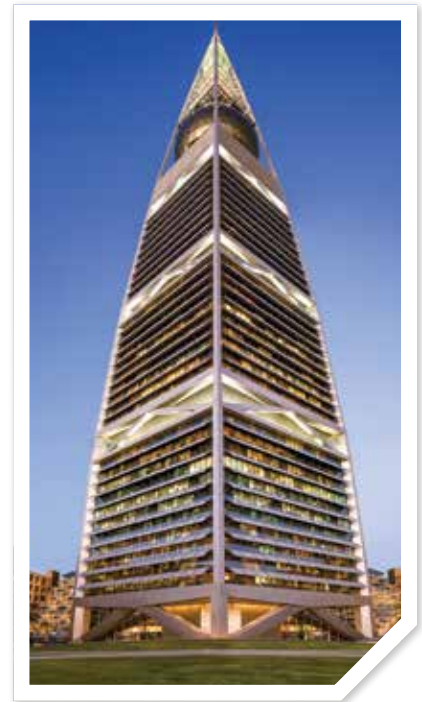
Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group has taken over the day-to-day management of the renowned Al Faisaliah Hotel in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Reservations for the property are now available through the Group's website.

The property is currently undergoing an extensive guestroom and public area renovation scheduled for completion in late 2021, after which it will be rebranded as Mandarin Oriental Al Faisaliah, Riyadh.

Located in the heart of the city's Central Business District, the hotel offers 321 guestrooms and suites and a variety of wellness experiences, restaurants, lounges and bars, including the popular top floor venue which commands outstanding views of the city.

Adam Tihany Design, New York has designed the new interiors, which will enhance the hotel's timeless style while maintaining its Arabian-influenced elegance. He has previously worked with the Group on projects in London, Hong Kong, Geneva and Beijing.

"We are delighted to be further strengthening Mandarin Oriental's presence in the Middle East by introducing the brand to Saudi Arabia. We look forward to providing our guests with memorable experiences, in majestic surroundings, all underpinned by Mandarin Oriental's exceptional service" said Christoph Mares, Chief Operating Officer of Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group.



BRF partnership with Aleph Farms

BRF has partnered with Aleph Farms to bring cultivated meat to Brazil. Jim Toy, Consumer Analyst at GlobalData, says, "Following Aleph's joint venture with Mitsubishi Corporation in Japan, Aleph's latest partnership with BRF now gives them potential to disrupt the food industry in Brazil too, especially if the products are made available through popular foodservice outlets."

According to their consumer survey, "three times the number of Brazilian respondents claimed that they are spending and buying more on plant-based meat alternatives, when compared to Japanese respondents. Brazil's consumers may also be particularly critical when trying new foods, as GlobalData's survey also showed that two in five (40%) of respondents abide to some form of low or less meat intake diets."

Spencer is GM at SLS Dubai

Spencer Wadama has been appointed General Manager of SLS Dubai, which is set to open in Q2 this year. Accor's introduction of the SLS brand to Dubai follows the hospitality company's recent acquisition of sbe's hotel brands.

Prior to his current position, Wadama served as General Manager at Jumeirah Living Marina Gate as well as Jumeirah Al Naseem where he directed the operating, sales and marketing efforts. He also served as General Manager at the Armani Hotel in Dubai

Spencer's 30 years of experience includes 12 years of senior management positions in North America, Asia and the Middle East. He will oversee the day-to-day operations, including management of the hotel's executive team and hotel employees, as well as the roll-out of the hotel's launch that is underway.

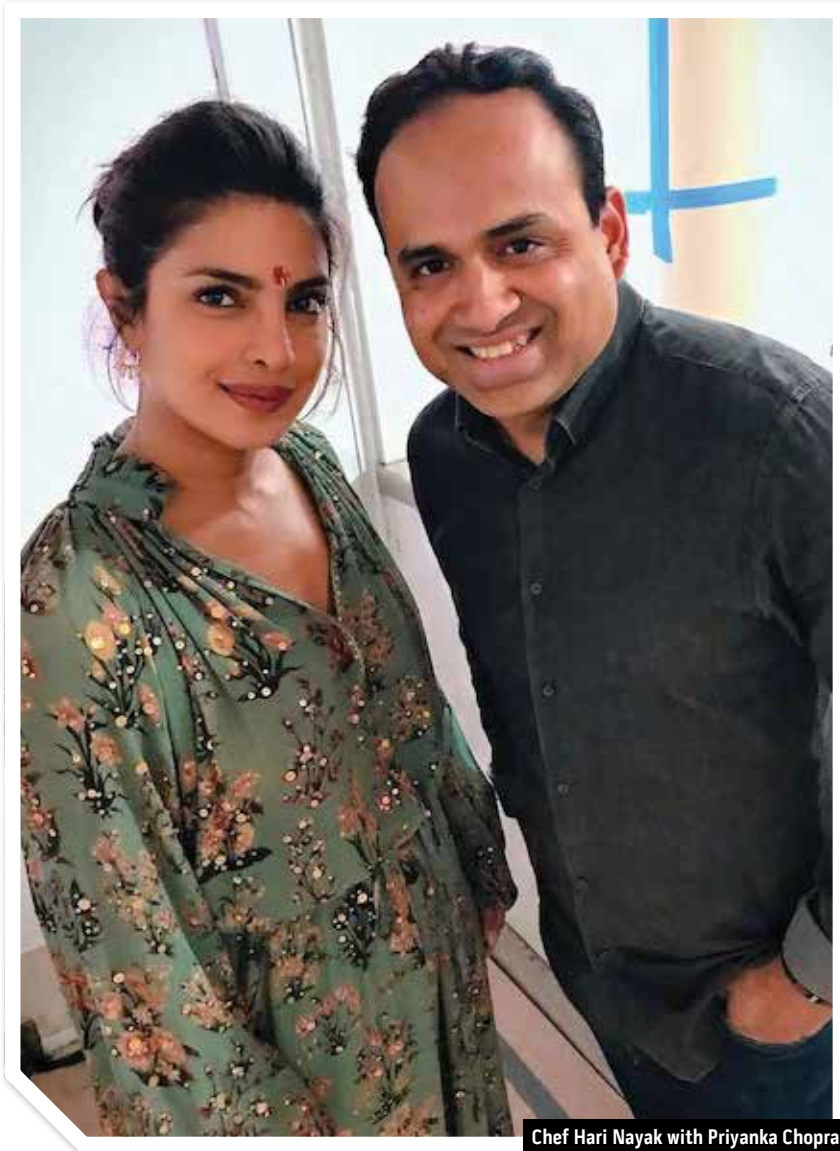
SLS Dubai will mark the opening of



the seventh SLS hotel, with seventeen additional destinations expected across North America, South America, and Asia within the next five years.

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Priyanka Chopra teams up with Dubai chef



Chef Hari Nayak with Priyanka Chopra

Actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas has teamed up with chef Hari Nayak, the culinary talent behind Dubai's Masti eatery. The two will launch an Indian restaurant called Sona in New York, she announced on Instagram on Saturday, reports Arab News.

"I'm thrilled to present to you SONA, a

new restaurant in NYC that I poured my love for Indian food into. SONA is the very embodiment of timeless India and the flavors I grew up with," she said.

The new outlet is a collaboration with restaurateur David Rabin and entrepreneur Maneesh Goyal.



Gürcan Gülmez is Executive Chef at Rixos

Chef Gürcan Gülmez has been appointed Executive Chef at Rixos The Palm Dubai Hotel and Suites. He brings over 15 years of experience to the role. In his last role he was heading the Divan Istanbul Hotel in Turkey. The chef has previously worked at Soho House Istanbul, The St. Regis Istanbul, Raffles Hotel Istanbul and Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul.

Chef Gülmez has also participated in several culinary competitions, most notably the Bocuse d'Or Turkey, where he placed first and then went on to represent the Turkey in the European finals at Stockholm.

In his new role, Gülmez will oversee the kitchens and their food and beverage offerings across the resorts' 10 F&B outlets. He plans to bring forth his passion and flair for Turkish cuisine, ideas for menu enhancements, kitchen operations, and catering events, along with his new team.

Executive Chef gets added F&B charge

Park Inn by Radisson Muscat has given Ajay Dhoundiyal the additional charge of F&B Manager. Ajay has been the Executive Chef at the hotel since 2012.

With over two decades of experience in the culinary industry, the Indian national has worked from brands such as Hyatt, Kempinski, Starwood, and Radisson.

Chef Ajay's current role is to oversee the food and beverages department with three outlets under him – Sama Terrazza rooftop lounge, RBG Grill, The Palm Restaurant – and to drive events and overall guest satisfaction.

"I intend to implement new concepts to enhance our offerings. This includes the relaunch of RBG Grill and new menus," he said.



Stephen Bukkof is Executive Chef

The Langham has appointed Stephen Bukkof as Executive Chef. In this role, Stephen will lead the culinary team at The Langham, Boston, overseeing in-room dining, banqueting, the highly anticipated restaurant Grana, and destination bar The Fed.

Prior to joining The Langham team, Stephen spent 16 years with Four Seasons Hotels across the Western United States and Canada. A graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, Stephen worked as a chef de partie at Four Seasons Boston, then became Sous Chef at Four Seasons Westlake Village in California before moving onto YEW Seafood + Bar at Four Seasons Vancouver. Most recently, Stephen was the Restaurant Chef at

EDGE Restaurant + Bar at the Four Seasons Denver.

Chef Stephen's appointment comes on the heels of the addition of Kyung Lee as Director of Food & Beverage.

"I am thrilled to bring the experience I have gained not just from my culinary career but from around the world to my hometown," said Stephen. "I'm looking forward to utilizing incredible locally-sourced produce, meats and seafood to create the kind of food that goes perfectly with The Langham's promise of being a new American classic in the Boston market. I eagerly await the opportunity to help our guests create the type of lasting memories that The Langham has always provided but in a new, innovative way."



To get your chef or company related news featured in this section, email editor@gulfgourmet.net

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Nestlé
Golden
Chef's Hat
Award



GIRL POWER

Challenging the boys' club this time is a powerful girl gang of two. Chef **Restu Dinar Aulia** and Chef **Jhaneen Dela** are made of grit and talent more than of sugar and spice. The young chefs, who are representing the W Hotel the Palm Dubai, will bring the fusion of Asian and western flavours to our plates at the Golden Chefs Hat Award

JHANEEN DELA PAZ

Talented mothers inspire a lot of professional chefs. But have you ever heard of a talented daughter influencing her mother in the same way? If not, you have to meet Chef Jhaneen Dela Paz.

The 25-year-old Demi Chef de Partie at W Hotel the Palm inspired her mother so much, that she decided to turn her apparel business into a restaurant!

Chef Jhaneen is a chef at the Torno

Subito Italian restaurant by Massimo Bottura. "I have been given a promotion, which came into effect this month," she says with a proud smile. Working at the restaurant since its pre-opening a couple of years ago, Chef Jhaneen specializes



RESTU DINAR AULIA



JHANEEN DELA PAZ



in pasta and pizza but also dabbles in pastry from time to time.

Born and raised in the Philippines, she came to Dubai as a 15-year-old when her parents moved. "My mother is a businesswoman in Fujairah. Now, she wants to turn her clothing store into a restaurant because she wants to serve Filipino food and desserts and make our cuisine popular here."

As a child, while helping her mother cook at home, Chef Jhaneen decided that profession cooking was her true calling. She got a diploma in culinary cooking from the International Centre of Culinary Arts (ICCA Dubai) and secured a job at the JA Ocean View Hotel in Dubai through the placement programme. Chef Jhaneen worked there for three years. Then, she moved to the Sheraton Grand Hotel for another three years before taking up her current assignment at the W Hotel.

Her dish for the Golden Chefs Hat Award is beef tenderloin with buttered

vegetables, foie gras and cherry compote, cherry jus and yuzu foam. "It's my personal favourite dish and I wanted to share it with the judges," she adds.

Chef Jhaneen has had some experience with culinary competitions. In 2018, she was a part of the junior national team that went to compete in Luxembourg. "We won a bronze medal and then, we went to Abu Dhabi, where we won a silver medal."

In the distant future, the ambitious chef wants to own a restaurant that serves a fusion of Sri Lankan and Filipino cuisines. That is an interesting and unlikely combination indeed. Where did she come up with the idea? "I like Sri Lankan spices very much and that cuisine has amazing recipes to offer!" For now though, she will help her mother set up a restaurant, in addition to building her own culinary skills in her day job.

If her dish is any indication, success is not too far behind for this charming lady.

RESTU DINAR AULIA

Chef Jhaneen's partner-in-dine for the Golden Chefs Hat competition is Chef Restu Dinar Aulia.

The Indonesian-born chef sees pastry as more an art than a science. She's rather clear about her belief. Her Instagram account is full of eye-popping colours and creations, ideas she translates with ease into a delicious plateful. Working at the W Hotel as a demi chef, the 24-year-old does the buffet preparations and customized cakes. "I am learning so much from my chef. Chocolate sugar and artistic items. There are so many fine details in pastry making," she gushes.

Chef Restu emphasizes that pastry can be perfect only when the chef puts his or her heart into it. "I learnt that ideology from my sister, who is also a pastry chef. She would decorate a cake or make desserts with so much enthusiasm. Her passion was infectious."

Once her decision was made, a young Chef Restu joined the Bandung

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Institute of Tourism in Indonesia, securing a three-year diploma in baking and pastry art in 2017. "I interned for six months in Raffles Hotel Jakarta during studies and then for one more year after graduating."

Towards the end of 2018, she found her way to Dubai.

Her dessert for the competition is pinna colada, a pineapple and coconut mousse delicacy reminiscent of her native country. Despite her young

age, Chef Rentu is no stranger to competitions. "I participated in SIAL Abu Dhabi last year in the live cake category. I made a chocolate cake with sugar showpiece and I won a gold medal. Next month, I will also compete in the wedding cake category at the Salon Culinare." Chef Rentu hopes to win a gold this time too.

In the next decade or so, she plans to open her own pastry shop in Indonesia. "I want my own kitchen, my own cake shop. I like making custom cakes."

Chef Rentu has good reasons for wanting to go back to her home country someday. As the youngest in a large family with five siblings, she misses being pampered. "Some of my siblings are also in hospitality. My mother is a homemaker but she tailors dresses for weddings. You see, creativity runs in my family."

This genetic disposition towards creativity will be on full display at the Golden Chef's Hat competition. Here's looking forward to it!



Beef Tenderloin with buttered vegetables, Foie gras and cherry compote, Cherry Jus and Yuzu Foam

BEEF

Beef Tenderloin	150g
Thyme	A sprig
Olive oil	1tbsp
Butter	2tbsp

Salt	to taste
Pepper	to taste

Method

- ◆ Season the beef with salt and pepper. Heat pan over medium-high heat until

it is hot. Add olive oil. Carefully place the beef in the pan. Cook until brown and hard-seared. Turn the beef with one teaspoon butter and a sprig of thyme. Cook for 3 to 4 more minutes or to desired doneness.

BUTTERED VEGETABLES

Baby Carrots	2 pcs.
Romanesco	30g
Asparagus	30g
Butter	3tbsp
Salt	to taste
Pepper	to taste

Method

- ◆ Blanch all the vegetables and cool down using ice bath, and sautee in a pan with butter. Salt and pepper to taste.

FONDANT POTATO

Potato	60g
Olive Oil	10g
Butter	5g
Salt	to taste
Black Pepper	to taste

Method

- ◆ Preheat oven to 450°F. Peel potatoes and slice them into 2-inch-thick slices. Season generously with salt and pepper. In a large skillet over medium-high heat, heat vegetable oil until hot. Add potatoes flat side down into oil and cook

about 5 minutes, until golden. When golden, flip potatoes and add butter, garlic and rosemary. Let other side of potatoes get golden, 5 more minutes. Bake until tender, 25-30 minutes.

FOIE GRAS AND CHERRY COMPOTE

Foie Gras	30g
Cherries	30g
Sugar	15g
Breadcrumbs	50g
Flour	50g
Egg	1pc
Salt	to taste
Pepper	to taste

Method

- ◆ Bring all cherries and sugar to a boil in a large heavy saucepan; reduce heat to medium-low. Simmer until cherries are softened and start to release juices, about 10 minutes. And cool down. Put the foie gras in a mold to form a shape. On the top of foie gras put the cherry compote and let it set for about 30 minutes inside the chiller. After it sets, take it out and start crumbing it using flour, egg, and breadcrumbs. And fry until its golden brown.

CHERRY JUS

Cherry	50g
Demi-Glace (Chef)	100g

Water	1 ltr
-------	-------

Method

- ◆ Place the sugar and cherry in a pan on a medium heat and reduce. Pour in the stock and reduce by two-thirds. When you have the consistency you desire, add in the cherries.

YUZU FOAM

Water	100g
Yuzu puree	50g
Lecithin	1tsp.

Method

- ◆ Combine the yuzu puree and water, warm it up then add the lecithin. Use hand blender to mix and to make a foam.

CARROT PUREE

Carrots	100g
Water	1ltr
Butter	3tbsp
Salt	to taste
Pepper	to taste

Method

- ◆ Place carrots in a medium saucepan and cover with water. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat, and simmer until carrots are tender, about 20 minutes. Drain, reserving cooking liquid. Puree carrots in a blender adding cooking liquid as needed and season with salt and pepper.

Tropical Pina Colada with Pineapple Sorbet

COCONUT MOUSSE

Maggi coconut powder	100 g
Water	200 ml
Sugar	45 g
Gelatin	17 g
Whipped Cream	300 g

Method

- ◆ Mix the coconut milk powder with water to get a coconut cream
- ◆ Boil the coconut cream mixture with sugar until it dissolves
- ◆ Add the soaked gelatin into the mixture, mix it until gelatin dissolves
- ◆ Temper a little amount of whipped cream into the mixture until the temperature is

not too hot

- ◆ Put the rest of whipped cream into the mixture

PINEAPPLE JELLY

Diced fresh pineapple	250 g
Pineapple puree	250 g
Gelatin	2 pc

Method

- ◆ Cook the diced pineapple with pineapple puree
- ◆ Let it boil, and remove from the heat
- ◆ Add the soaked gelatin into mixture
- ◆ Pour the mixture into a tray, lined with silpat
- ◆ Let it freeze until ready to cut

PINEAPPLE SORBET

Pineapple puree	675 g
Water	17 ml
Sugar	180 g
Glucose powder	90 g
Stabilizer	3 g

Method

- ◆ Heat water, pineapple puree, and sugar until 40°C
- ◆ Mix glucose powder and stabilizer in a separate bowl
- ◆ Add the stabilizer mixture into the pot
- ◆ Let it boil until the mixture reaches 85°C
- ◆ Put the sorbet mixture into a Paco Jet beaker and freeze overnight

MERINGUE

Egg white	100 g
Icing sugar	200 g

Corn flour 20 g

Method

- ◆ Reheat the rotary oven on 80°C
- ◆ Beat egg white with icing sugar until peak
- ◆ Fold in corn flour into meringue
- ◆ Pipe the meringue into a tray line with silpat
- ◆ Bake on 80°C for 1 hour

PINEAPPLE FLUID GEL

Pineapple puree 750 g

Water 250 ml

Sugar 200 g

Agar-agar 10 g

Method

- ◆ Mix sugar and agar-agar in a separate bowl
- ◆ Boil pineapple puree and water
- ◆ Add agar-agar mixture into the pot

- ◆ Stir continuously and let it boil
- ◆ Pour the mixture into a container and let it set
- ◆ Blend the jelly on food processor until no pieces left

ALMOND CRUMBLE

Sugar 50 g

Almond powder 50 g

Cake flour 50 g

Butter 50 g

Method

- ◆ Reheat oven to 180°C
- ◆ Put all dry ingredients in a mixing bowl
- ◆ Add butter into the mixture
- ◆ Beat with paddle until all the ingredients are mixed well
- ◆ Pour the crumble mixture into a tray lined with baking paper

- ◆ Bake at 180°C for 15 minutes
- ◆ Stir gradually every 5 minutes

COCONUT SPONGE

Maggi coconut powder 67 g

Water 134 ml

Egg white 300 g

Egg yolk 200 g

Sugar 85 g

Cake flour 65 g

Method

- ◆ Blend all ingredients with hand blender until well incorporated
- ◆ Strain the mixture
- ◆ Pour the mixture into siphon bottle and add 3 gas charge
- ◆ Pour the mixture into a paper cup
- ◆ Microwave it for 1 minute





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March 2021 **Gulf Gourmet**

SUGAR AND SPICE

Breathing energy into everything comes naturally to Chef **Sanjaya Dhanushka ER Rathnayake**. The executive pastry chef of Le Meridien Dubai Hotel and Conference Centre, Chef Sanjaya can transform ingredients with his creative ideas as easily as he can mould young minds into talented and dedicated chefs. The Sri Lankan chef shares his secret sauce for success with Gulf Gourmet..



A true leader is someone who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way...goes a popular quote.

If this is true, Chef Sanjaya Dhanushka ER Rathnayake is a true leader indeed.

Mentoring budding chefs comes as naturally to him as making award-winning petit fours and cakes. The executive pastry chef of Le Meridien Dubai Hotel and Conference Centre believes in imparting his knowledge, gained over more than two solid decades, to the younger generations.

The idea? Build the collective productivity of the culinary industry by combining the energy of youth with the wisdom of experience.

Chef Sanjaya, who has been with Le Meridien for over eight years, handles the desserts and bakery requirements of all the 22 outlets, with a team of 15 chefs under him. Like the entire hospitality industry, his operations have



Inspiration can come from anywhere. You just have to look for it instead of seeing your job as something you have to do for a living. If you see cooking as 'just' a job, then the culinary industry is not for you

also been affected by the Covid crisis but he's soldiering on.

"We are currently facing supply issues because of the pandemic. The crisis has caused disruptions in the supply chains overall and some ingredients that we source come from overseas, like

chocolate for example. So supplies have been delayed," says the chef.

However, the support and efficiency of his dedicated team makes it easier to deal with the challenges. With their skills, the chefs make up for the average quality of ingredients with their creativity.

When Chef Sanjaya joined Le Meridien in 2012, he was a sous chef. Through hard work and perseverance, he climbed to the position of executive pastry chef. His philosophy on career growth is simple: "Love your work and keep growing your abilities and value proposition with each passing day. Chasing lucrative jobs and money could bring you short-term gains but sustainable careers are built over time. Your managers are sure to notice your diligence if you continue to deliver."

He extends the same philosophy to those who are junior to him. Chef Sanjaya often picks up promising internal candidates and gives them the training and tools they require to grow into skilled culinaires.

"In my team, there are several people we took from kitchen stewarding. After 5-6 years, they are experienced chefs. My chef de partie, my sous chef, both started in kitchen stewarding."

LONG JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

His own story is equally interesting. Born in Bandarawela, Sri Lanka to a small bakery owner and his teacher wife, Chef Sanjaya made his way from a tiny rural part of the world to one of the most celebrated global cities.

"My brother and I would work in my father's bakery when we were young. Also, my mother pushed me to learn English as a child. That helped open my mind up to a lot of things."

Besides the experiences in his father's business, a cousin who was in F&B at a hotel provided Chef Sanjaya the motivation to professionalise his love of



Chef Sanjaya with his family



cooking. "After high school, I joined the Sir Lanka Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management in Colombo. At the time, competition for a seat in the course was very high and I was very happy to make the cut."

After finishing the course, Chef Sanjaya went as a trainee at the Galle Face Hotel in Colombo, where he stayed for about four years. The hotel, which started out as a Dutch villa, was opened in 1864 by four British entrepreneurs and bears testimony to Sri Lanka's colonial past. Later, Chef Sanjaya joined the Lanka Oberoi Hotel as commis III chef. He spent another four years there.

Around mid-2004, the Sri Lankan chef got an opportunity in the Middle East. He joined the exclusive Falcon Club in Doha as a demi chef de partie but quickly moved on to join the pre-opening team of Four Seasons as a chef de partie. "I was there for four years. Then, a good friend of mine – who had also taught me a lot about pastry – offered me a role in Dubai. He was moving to the Intercontinental Hotel Group in Dubai Festival City."

Qatar gave Chef Sanjaya not just a

footing in the Middle Eastern market but also introduced him to his wife, who is originally from the Philippines. At the time, the couple had just become parents. "I told him I couldn't join immediately and it took me a couple of months to accept the role. I had to leave my son with my mother and it was three years before I could bring my family to Dubai." Today, his wife has a job in recruiting.

Four years later, Chef Sanjaya joined Le Meridien. Yes, four years seems to be his sweet spot!

THE CHANGING FACE OF FOOD

The 43-year-old chef looks back on his journey fondly. Trends have come and trends have gone. Over the period, ingredients and tastes as well as working culture have changed and continue to evolve.

"Nowadays, people are heavily into healthy foods. They want gluten-free, dairy-free, low-calorie items. Many people are also moving towards eating more natural kinds of foods. That's a far cry from when I started out, when taste and look were the only determining

factors." His team also makes items to cater to such requests.

Gluten-free baking requires a separate kitchen. Unfortunately, this is not possible at Le Meridien as the demand is too low to set up a separate facility. "We use ingredients that are gluten-free."

Many health-conscious guests also want nutritional information such as protein and carbohydrate content. "We have also started putting nutritional information and calorie count on our products. I think the Dubai health authorities also want that. It's a positive development. While it takes more time for the production of food, it does help you grow as a chef and take into account the nutritional aspect of your creations. There is no reason for health and taste to be mutually exclusive."

Chef Sanjaya tends to favour natural recipes and avoids using too much colour or artificial ingredients in his dishes. "I use natural colour like raspberry powder or saffron. My favourite dish is gluten-free bread, served with strawberry compote, strawberry and cream. Sichuan pepper

adds some spiciness to the sweetness. In my dish, I have used Arla milk, butter, cream and cream cheese."

At Le Meridien, the policy is to make everything fresh for the guests. "We do everything from scratch. So we create our own base ingredients in many cases. Some properties use mostly ready-made items in their dishes but the guests can tell the difference. The trick is to balance ready ingredients with freshly made items."

According to him, creativity is something no pastry chef can afford to lack. Even something as simple as bread can become the centrepiece of a meal if the baker puts his heart and soul into it. "Inspiration can come from anywhere. You just have to look for it instead of seeing your job as something you have to do for a living. If you see cooking as 'just' a job, then the culinary industry is not for you."

The executive pastry chef believes that experimenting with ideas has become much easier nowadays because of the reach of social media and internet. "When I started, we had to beg senior chefs for recipes. Information sharing has become so easy and you can pretty

much learn everything on your own these days."

FUTURE POSITIVE

Looking forward, Chef Sanjaya has faith in the potential of the younger generations. "I want our young chefs to grow and to use competitions to learn techniques. Competitions also teach you speed. When you learn to take negative feedback from judges and use it constructively, it also becomes easier to do that with guests."

When some of his chefs express hesitation about participating in competitions, Chef Sanjaya encourages them to take the plunge despite their reservations. "When I was their age, my colleagues and I worked long hours. We practised and practised until we made perfect." Chef Sanjaya participated in competitions in the early years of his career in Sri Lanka. He also did some competitions in Qatar and participated in Gulfood, where he won two gold and two silver medals.

Although he pushes his chefs to work hard, Chef Sanjaya does not believe in strong-arm tactics or pulling rank. He's not the stereotype angry head chef in the kitchen. "I try not to raise my voice.

There's nothing gentle encouragement cannot achieve."

At home, Chef Sanjaya likes to bake sourdough bread and even indulge in some Sri Lankan cooking. "The aroma of home food is the best aroma in the world. I love it." His now 12-year-old son shares his love for food but has so far shown no inclination to join the culinary industry.

That could well change, when the Sri Lankan chef realises his dream of starting a pastry shop back home, offering pastries and healthy products. He even dreams of launching his own brand of food products.

Does a market exist in Sri Lanka for such items? "We have a pretty vibrant cuisine. Of course, you need some creativity. We are a rice-eating country, so gluten-free products are not a problem. And lentils are a very healthy option for making items. Coconut milk can easily substitute for dairy products. All it requires is some innovation."

The journey so far has been long but satisfying. But the second leg of Chef Sanjaya's journey sounds even more promising.

Fragaria
Hazelnut financier with strawberry basil compote, Szechuan pepper Pavlova, strawberry and cream with almond tuil and cream cheese ice cream

HAZELNUT FINANCIER

Flour t45	18g
Hazelnut powder	100g
Sugar	150g
Lurpak salted butter	50g
Egg white	135g

Method

- ◆ Mix flour and hazelnut powder. Cook the butter to dark brown color (butter noisette). Mix the egg white and sugar

by wooden spatula. Add flour and hazelnut powder to the egg white and mix well. While mixing, add the burned butter to the mix and mix well until well-combined. Rest the mix for 12 hours. Pre-heat the oven to 180°C. Pipe financier mix into the mold. Bake for 15-20 minutes at 180°C.

STRAWBERRY AND BASIL COMPOTE

Fresh strawberries	60g
Fresh basil leaves	3g
Sugar	8g
Pectin NH	5g

Method

- ◆ Wash and cut each strawberry into four. Roughly chop the basil leaves.

Mix sugar, pectin, basil leaves and strawberry together. Cook at a low temperature on a stove until sugar dissolves. Remove from the heat. Pore the compote to a container and cover with cling film. Ensure there is no gap between compote and cling film to avoid moisture build-up.

PAVLOVA SHELL

Egg white	100g
Sugar	100g
Icing sugar	100g
Crushed Szechuan pepper	10g

Method

- ◆ Pre-heat the oven to 90°C. Beat the egg white and sugar into a soft peak

in a planetary mixer by using whisk attachment. Carefully fold the icing sugar to the meringue. Pipe into silicon mold by using a piping bag. Bake for 90 minutes at 90°C. After baking, cool it down to room temperature. Remove from the mold and store in an airtight container until ready for use.

STRAWBERRY AND CREAM

Fresh strawberries	50g
Arla whip cream	50g
Vanilla bean	half pcs
Icing sugar	8g

Method

- ◆ Wash and cut strawberries into small cubes. Whip the cream and icing sugar with scraped vanilla bean to a stiff peak stage.

ALMOND TUILE

Sugar	100g
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Liquid glucose	100g
Nib almond	60g
Water	56g

Method

- ◆ Cook sugar glucose and water to 100°C. Mix nib almonds. Cool down the mix to room temperature and cover it with a cling film. Rest the mix in a chiller for six hours. Remove from the chiller and roll out the tuile in between two-parchment papers by using a rolling pin. Bake at 180°C for 7-9 minutes while the tuile is hot; cut the shape by using a round pastry cutter.

CREAM CHEESE ICE CREAM

Arla cream cheese	225g
Water	130g
Sugar	100g
Atomized glucose	15g
Arla milk powder	15g
Stabilizer	4g

Method

- ◆ Boil the water, sugar, milk powder and stabilizer. Remove from the heat. Emulsify the milk mixture with the cream cheese by using a handheld blender to a homogenous mix. Churn the mix in an ice cream machine. Store in a freezer until ready to use.

Assemble

- ◆ Place the financier on the plate. Spoon out strawberry compote around the financier.
- ◆ Fill Pavlova shell with a mix of vanilla cream and fresh strawberries. Place on top of the financier.
- ◆ Place the almond tuile on the Pavlova.
- ◆ Scoop a quenelle of cream cheese ice cream. Decorate with fried basil leaves and meringue.



MISSION POSSIBLE

Chef Kushan Perera, Executive Sous Chef, St. Regis Saadiyat Island has had a rich and steady culinary career that worked in his favour because of his love for the craft and a front-row view of the hospitality sector from an early age. Here's his story



“I am fortunate to be blessed with a good family around me,” is Chef Kushan Perera’s instant response when we ask him about his younger years. The Executive Sous Chef at St. Regis Saadiyat Island Resort in Abu Dhabi says he grew up in a humble middle-class background. “My father always supported both my sister and me. He would give us the freedom to think and make calculated decisions during our growing years in Sri Lanka,” he says.

Today, Chef Kushan and his sister are both well-settled with their respective families in Dubai. While his sister chose to be a banker, chef Kushan always knew that food is his calling.

“My love for food started early. I grew up living in a hotel as my father was a hotelier. He was given a villa in the same resort. I saw it all as a young boy...the theatre happening in front of my eyes.”

He says he clearly remembers seeing the hustle and bustle of the kitchens. The way chefs were clambering and pushing out food on a busy service. “I wanted to be a part of that buzz and excitement.”

This experience is what led him to decide against taking the traditional route of becoming a doctor, accountant or



My love for food started early. I grew up living in a hotel as my father was a hotelier. He was given a villa in the same resort. I saw it all as a young boy...the theatre happening in front of my eyes

engineer. “I had to follow the food route,” he says with a smile that shows he has no regret taking the decision.

While his father enjoys retirement in Sri Lanka with his mother, after giving 35 solid years to the hospitality sector, Chef Kushan has taken it on to himself to keep the Perera name shining bright in the burgeoning industry.

“I remember visiting my catering college for the first time. It was the whole look, the buzz, the uniform, and smell of the

kitchens that really made me feel, ‘Yes – this is the career for me.’”

Chef Kushan completed a three-year culinary diploma from Ceylon Hotel School to join Wornels Reef Hotel. This luxury beach resort in the south of Sri Lanka was a big deal back in the nineties. Its multiple culinary accolades include the Best Culinary Team at the country’s Culinary Art Competition.

He recalls how on his first day at work his head chef asked him to clean an entire section. “This was my first assignment and in my mind the kitchen was spotless.” The learning from this anecdote he says is that when one first enters a culinary career, the person has to have an open mind. It must be set to listen and learn.

“I treated my workplace like a university. To this date I possess some of the scratch books in which I took notes during my early days. I would recommend any young chef reading this article to make notes as this would come handy.”

Chef Kushan was lucky to work with some good chefs who invested in him and monitored his work constructively. Chefs with whom he continues to keep in touch.

He says, “I am extremely privileged to have been able to work under Chef Guru Gamini Wettewa, who has developed so many talented chefs.”

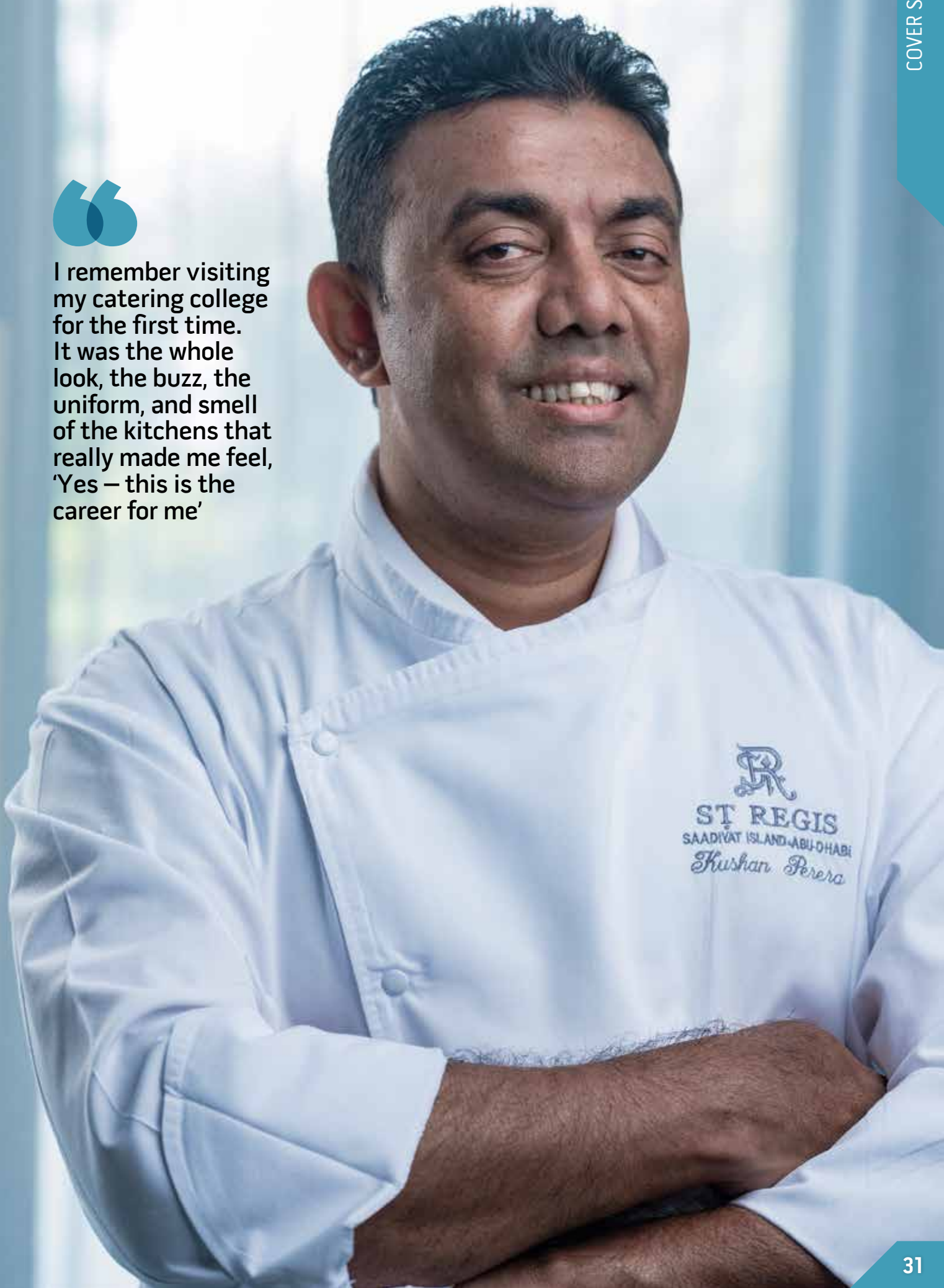
Another reason Wornels Reef Hotel is close to Chef Kushan’s heart is that this is where he met Renuka, his life partner and mother to his children.

His first overseas opportunity was at the Forte Grand Abu Dhabi (since changed to Le Royal Meridian). “I was selected to join a well-established kitchen team at the Al Fanar Fine Dining revolving restaurant as Chef de Parte.” A job he did so well, he soon became the Chef in-charge. He, however, credits this career growth to Chef Patrick Bischoff, his first Executive Chef. “I consider him a mentor; he spotted





I remember visiting my catering college for the first time. It was the whole look, the buzz, the uniform, and smell of the kitchens that really made me feel, 'Yes – this is the career for me'



my potential and invested his time in me. I still call him occasionally for advice.”

He returned to Sri Lanka to join the Grand Oriental Hotel, a historical property once inhabited by a Dutch Governor. “This was my first senior role. I worked here as an Executive Sous Chef and was able to move closer to home.”

This was also a historical moment as Chef Kushan’s grandfather and father had both worked in the same property. “I was the 3rd generation to work in the same hotel which was a great story to the Hotel.”

In 2001 his former employer in Abu Dhabi approached him to rejoin the hotel as a Sous Chef under the new ownership of Le Royal Meridien. This was perfect timing as he was newly married to Renuka. “I saw this as a great opportunity to travel back to the Gulf with her and to start a family together,” he says.

Looking back, he says this was his best decision. Abu Dhabi has become a second home to his family over these past two decades.

After rejoining the property, he used his past knowledge – and his time away – to come up with ways to improve and add new revenue streams. He was soon promoted to Executive Sous Chef. He was part of the reopening team in 2004



I have seen the most talented chefs grow too fast, too quickly and then fail; as they do not have the required skills to cope with financials or how to manage people under them

and was assigned to open the hotels.

Talking about his time there he says, “We as a hotel won many accolades. I have great memories and we had lots of fun and built some great friendships.” He believes that staying loyal to one place gives one the consistency and platform one needs to grow. “This is what I would take from my experience.”

When he finally reached a crossroad looking for his next chapter, opportunity came knocking at the door. He grabbed the opportunity to be part of the pre-opening team at his current employer St Regis Saadiyat Island Resort.

“It was the right time to move. This is not only a great property but a fantastic hotel chain to work for. I was headhunted for the position by the then Culinary Director Chef Daniel Nuss. When we met the first time, we connected right away. We have been best of friends since,” he says.

For a chef, working for St. Regis is like a child going to his favourite toy store to play. This is how Chef Kushan puts it. “We have made our working environment a faculty of art. What it means is that our chefs are always learning to take dishes to greater levels through a collaborative approach. We believe that there is always room to improve and innovate our cooking styles and dishes.”

St. Regis has 376 guest bedrooms including 76 suites and six food & beverage outlets – Olea (Mediterranean), Sontaya (South Eastern), Buddha-Bar Beach, The Drawing Room, Manhattan Bar and Lounge, The Library, and a 96,000 sq ft event space for up to 2,400 guests.

The hotel hosts a lot of heads of state, dignitaries and well know celebrities who come with a big entourage and long lists of riders. The kitchen is the engine room of the hotel where the magic happens. Chef Kushan says that they aspire to reach perfection and precise detail to provide the best experience to their guests.

Chef Kushan is currently leading the entire kitchen brigade since the departure of the Culinary Director some months ago. “We cannot wait to get through this pandemic to bring back normalcy into our guests and teams’ lives,” he says.

The resort successfully hosted the Mumbai Indians cricket team for over 16 weeks during the IPL 2020 series. Chef Kushan’s team of chefs had to work in a bubble due to Covid 19. “The chefs lived in the hotel to support the team 24/7,” he says with pride.

When not at work, Chef Kushan helps in his capacity as a Worldchefs-certified



Chef Kushan with his wife Renuka, daughter Anuki and son Anuk



We have made our working environment a faculty of art. What it means is that our chefs are always learning to take dishes to greater levels through a collaborative approach



culinary judge. He saw his culinary life come a full circle when he joined the panel of judges at The Culinary Art Food Expo in 2019. "I began my medal-winning streak at this very competition in 1997."

He is also a senior member of the Emirates Culinary Guild (ECG) and has recently been tasked with added responsibility. In his new role he is helping organize the Worldchefs Congress in Abu Dhabi next year.

He has had experience with the Guild's activities for years now. This includes mentoring juniors who have since successfully competed at international competitions including Global Chef, Culinary World Cup and Culinary Olympics. Being a marshal at the La Cuisine du SIAL Abu Dhabi since 2010, working alongside Chef Alan Pedge, Chef Peter de Kauwe and Chef Raghu Pillai.

Being a part of the UAE entourage



for Worldchefs Congress & Expo in Greece and in Malaysia. Supporting the Guinness World Record for most varieties on desserts on display in 2019. Chef in charge for a world finalist at the Global Chef Challenge 2018 and mentor to a world finalist at the Global Chef Challenge 2016.

"All of this would have been a pipedream had it not been for the support, trust and guidance of Chef Uwe Micheel and the senior leadership of the ECG," he says of his amazing experience working for the industry.

Talking about young chef development he says, "It is our responsibility towards the hospitality industry to train chefs well and ensure that we have invested what we can for them to grow. I was fortunate to have a lot of great mentors throughout my career. I try and emulate how I was trained, mentored and coached. If you see a weakness in someone, you should identify it and work on it until it becomes a strength.

His advice to young chefs is that you don't need to be a chef to cook. But if one does choose this path, be prepared to work hard, get plenty of hands-on experience in a professional kitchen and work long hours. "Run a marathon and pace yourself before you become a Head Chef. There is no point reaching the top of your career, when you do not have the business acumen or managerial skills to cope," he says, adding, "I have seen the most talented chefs grow too fast, too quickly and then fail; as they do not have the required skills to cope with financials or how to manage people under them."

When he is not working, he loves going home to his wife and kids. "Renuka is now a full-time homemaker and the goalkeeper of our family. I cannot thank her enough for supporting me throughout my career and putting in the hours to look after our two children," says Chef Kushan.

His daughter Anuki is 17 and studying bioscience while his son Anuk is 13 and studying in school. "It is important to have a balanced life and one must spend quality time with your family. Sometimes, I do feel guilty thinking about whether I have done enough."

As these unprecedented times make it challenging to predict the future, Chef Kushan believes in looking at short term goals rather than long term plans. "We have a very good Executive Management team, who are working hard at restarting full operations. I am very happy in my current role and in being a part of the St. Regis family and Marriott International."

Chef Kushan's Medal Tally

- ◆ 3 Bronze and 1 Silver Medal at the 2003 Emirates Salon Culinnaire
- ◆ 2 Bronze and 1 Silver Medal at the 2002 Emirates Salon Culinnaire
- ◆ 1 Bronze at the 2001 Emirates Salon Culinnaire
- ◆ 1 Bronze in 1997 at the Culinary Art Competition, Sri Lanka
- ◆ 1st Place at the 1997 Black Box Completion, Sri Lanka

As Skipper of the St Regis Culinary Team

- ◆ Best in class for a category – 2016 at La Cuisine du SIAL
- ◆ 6 medals with 1 gold, 1 silver, 4 bronze and 2 merits.
- ◆ Best Arabic Chef – 2015 at La Cuisine du SIAL
- ◆ Hotel with the highest number of medals in the U.A.E.
- ◆ 43 medals with 2 gold, 13 silver, 17 bronze and 11 merits
- ◆ Best Cuisinier – 2015 at Salon Culinnaire
- ◆ (Five Course Gourmet Dinner Menu with highest marks in the category and Meat Practical Cookery)
- ◆ 3 Gold, 2 Silver and 2 Bronze medals
- ◆ Best Cuisinier- 2014 at La Cuisine du SIAL
- ◆ Winner Boecker Best Hygiene for 2014
- ◆ 23 medals with 5 gold, 7 silver, 11 bronze and 3 merits
- ◆ 2013 La Cuisine du SIAL
- ◆ 31 medals with 8 gold, 14 silver, 9 bronze and 3 merits

Leading the Le Royal Meridien Hotel Culinary Team

- ◆ 2011 at La Cuisine du SIAL 1 Gold and 3 Silver medals



It is our responsibility towards the hospitality industry to train chefs well and ensure that we have invested what we can for them to grow



Nestlé
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DIFFERENT STROKES

Chef **Suraji Sivasdas** is a shy guy. On the other hand, Chef **Ronnie Sicat** is an extroverted charmer. But when it comes to putting up a spectacular show, both promise to do their employer Waldorf Astoria Dubai Palm Jumeirah proud at the Golden Chef's Hat Award. Who are the awesome twosome and what do they have for us this month?

SURAJI SIVADAS

He's the typical strong, silent type. Not that it matters much. Chef Suraji Sivasdas's delicious dishes speak volumes about his talent.

The demi chef de partie at Waldorf

Astoria believes in the strength of the slow and steady in winning the race. At the Golden Hat Chef's Award contest, he will merge the spiciness of his creativity with subtle western flavours as he goes about trying to delight the judges with a dream main course.

Born and raised in the south Indian state of Kerala, Chef Suraji reflects the calmness of the backwaters of one of the most celebrated tourist destinations of the country. Ask the 26-year-old how he ended up as a culinnaire, and he says, "My brother is a successful chef. He is now



SURAJI SIVADAS



RONNIE M. SICAT



an executive chef in Australia. So I just followed in his footsteps.”

When he finished high school, Chef Suraji’s brother encouraged him to take up hotel management studies. “I went to Munnar Catering College. It’s a well-known institute and it has a branch in Dubai too.”

After completing his three-year degree in hotel management, catering technology and tourism, an ambitious Chef Suraji set out on his career path. He joined the Sheraton Grand Hotel in Bangalore as a trainee and then moved a year later to Le Meridien in Cochin as a Commis. “Four years ago, I came to Dubai,” he continues.

Although Chef Suraji’s initial training had been in Indian cuisine, he diversified into grills and Italian cuisine in his job at Waldorf Astoria. Joining the hotel as a Commis, he won several promotions and is now a chef de partie. “When cooking, I enjoy grills the most. But there are guests who also request Indian food sometimes.”

For the competition, he has whipped up a pan-seared Australian lamb rack, served with aubergine and hazelnut puree, babyroots, fresh garden vegetables and lamb jus. “I marinated the lamb rack with olive oil, salt and pepper and then pan-seared it with butter, thyme, rosemary and garlic. It’s a colourful dish and reflects the diversity of Dubai.”

Chef Suraji has participated in competitions before, even winning a silver medal. He also hopes to participate in the Salon Culinaire next month.

As for the long term, his dream is to be a head chef at a Michelin-star restaurant someday.

Good things come to those who deserve them. And Chef Suraji sure does!

RONNIE M. SICAT

Chef Ronnie Sicat is the perfect foil to his teammate. While Chef Suraji is shy, Chef Ronnie is bursting with energy and enthusiasm. The pastry commis chef from Waldorf Astoria is determined to

win the hearts and minds of the judges with his desserts and his charm.

The 28-year-old originally hails from the Philippines. “I work in the main kitchen and I do the production and preparation for all outlets, including buffet lunch and dinner, a-la-carte and room service,” he explains when you ask him about his job. Quite an all-rounder, Chef Ronnie helps out in servicing the three restaurants at the venue and assists in the banqueting services.

“I even make wedding cakes and do plating for afternoon tea.”

In total, he has been with the property for seven years, taking a year off to work at the Regent Seven Seas Explorer/Voyager as assistant pastry chef. “That environment didn’t suit me much. So I came back here.”

Growing up in Laguna in the Philippines, Chef Ronnie was surrounded by resorts and hotels as a child. “My grandmother is an excellent baker. She made cakes,

pastries, wedding cakes. The butter cake she made was absolutely delicious!" It was an everyday normal for a young Chef Ronnie to help her trim the cake or smooth the icing. After high school, he thought of enrolling for a culinary course. But at his mother's insistence, he signed up instead for the degree course in hotel and restaurants management. "It was a four-year course at the Laguna State Polytechnic University."

Chef Ronnie made his competitions debut while studying. He even went to Manila to compete in an inter-varsity championship. "I won it! There were students from more than 20 universities competing."

Along the way, Chef Ronnie realised that pastry was his calling. However, due to his lack of experience, his first job was in housekeeping. "I started my career with Waldorf Astoria. For eight months, I was in housekeeping. Then they gave me a chance in the pastry kitchen and here I am!"

For the latest competition, Chef Ronnie has made cocoa meringue, served with hibiscus-infused panna cotta and raspberry compote. "It's beautiful, it's fresh and it's simple."

Over the next decade, the enterprising chef wants to learn whatever he can, so he can open his own cafe or pastry shop in the Philippines in the future. "I want to



work more with French pastries because the range is so wide."

Needless to say, his large extended family has great faith in his abilities. "I have my cousins and my uncles

here and we meet often. But they are mostly teachers. I am the only professional chef."

We're sure Chef Ronnie has a thing or two to teach them about the good life.

Pan seared Australian lamb rack, aubergine and hazelnut puree, babyroots, fresh garden vegetables and lamb jus

LAMB

Australian Lamb rack	1 full rack
Extra virgin olive oil	50 ml
Salt	2 gm
Pepper	2 gm
Rosemary	1 stem

Thyme	1 stem
Garlic	1 clove
Butter	5 gm

Method

- ◆ Marinate the lamb rack with olive oil, salt and pepper
- ◆ Heat a thick bottomed pan with olive oil. Deglaze with butter and thyme
- ◆ Sear the lamb rack and seal the lamb with rosemary, garlic and butter
- ◆ Cook at 58°C for 40 minutes in sous vide
- ◆ After sous vide, sear again with butter and garlic

- ◆ Serve with aubergine hazel nut puree and root vegetables with lamb jus

AUBERGINE AND HAZELNUT PUREE

Aubergine	200 gm
Hazelnut	50 gm
Extra virgin Olive oil	25 ml
Butter	20 gm
Onion	10 gm
Garlic	5 gm
Balsamic vinegar	2 ml
Salt	1 tsp
Pepper	1 tsp



Coco Meringue with Hibiscus Infused Panna Cotta and Raspberry Compote served with Hibiscus Aero Square

HIBISCUS INFUSED PANNA COTTA

Milk	250gr
Cream	250gr
Docello Panna Cotta Powder	75gr
Dried Hibiscus flower	50gr

Method

- ◆ Boil the milk and Hibiscus. Turn off the heat and cover with plastic film for 10 minutes, strain the hibiscus and add cream. Bring to boil and add the panna cotta powder. Fill into the silicone mold and freeze.

HIBISCUS RASPBERRY JELLY

Hibiscus tea/juice	90 gr
Sugar	135gr
glucose	45gr
Raspberry puree	225gr
Gelatine	25gr

Method

- ◆ Bloom gelatin in ice cold water. In a pan boil hibiscus tea/juice, puree, sugar and glucose then add the gelatin, mix and boil for 2-3 minutes. Transfer into flat sheet pan and refrigerate until it sets.

COCO MERINGUE

Egg whites	140gr
Icing sugar	250gr
Lemon Juice	1tsp
Maggi Coconut powder	1tbsp
Coconut desiccated	1tbsp

Method

- ◆ Whisk Egg white until soft peak then gradually add icing sugar. Continue whisking until stiff peak, add lemon juice, lastly fold coconut powder. Pipe into sphere silicone mold, sprinkle with desiccated coconut and bake in a pre-heated oven at 90°C for an hour.

MARINATED RASPBERRY

Fresh Raspberry	200gr
Lemon Juice	2tbsp
Chopped mint leaves	10gr
Lemon zest	1pc
Sugar syrup	1tbsp

Method

- ◆ Grill the aubergine with salt, pepper and olive oil. Peel and chop
- ◆ Toast the hazelnut
- ◆ Heat the pan and add olive oil. Sauté the garlic, onion and add seasoning
- ◆ Add chopped aubergine hazelnut and balsamic vinegar. Make a fine puree

BUTTER TOASTED BABY ROOTS AND VEGETABLES

Baby carrot	20 gm
Baby root	20 gm
Broccoli	20 gm
Cauliflower	20 gm
Butter	5 gm
Salt	To taste

Method

- ◆ Boil the water and blanch the roots and vegetables
- ◆ Heat the pan and add butter
- ◆ Sauté the vegetables with seasoning

LAMB JUS

Lamb bone	150 gm
Onion	30 gm
Tomato	20 gm
Carrot	20 gm
Garlic	5 gm
Olive oil	10 ml
Butter	10 gm
Chef demi glace	5 gm
Maggi vegetable stock	1 ltr

Method

- ◆ Roast the lamb bones in 220°C for 15 minutes
- ◆ Heat the pan with olive oil. Add garlic, onion and carrot until it turns lightly brown
- ◆ Put the roasted lamb bones and pour the Maggi vegetables stock in the mixture
- ◆ Simmer for 45 minutes with demi-glace and finish with butter when served
- ◆ Serve lamb rack with aubergine hazelnut puree, baby roots, fresh vegetables and lamb jus.



Method

- ◆ Mix all together and refrigerate.

WHITE CHOCOLATE HIBISCUS ALMOND BISCUITS

Icing sugar	180gr
Flour T45	70gr
Almond powder	70gr
Hibiscus powder	100gr
Egg whites	150gr
Baking powder	6gr
White Chocolate (Melted)	50gr
Butter (Melted)	50gr

Method

- ◆ In a stand mixer with paddle attachment combine icing sugar, flour, almond powder, hibiscus powder, baking powder and egg whites. Mix until well incorporated and gradually add the melted butter and chocolate. Spread on a flat sheet baking pan and

bake in a pre-heated oven at 170°C for 14 minutes.

RASPBERRY HIBISCUS COMPOTE

Fresh Raspberry	200gr
Hibiscus tea/juice	50gr
Lemon Juice	10gr
Sugar	50gr
Lemon skin	1pc

Method

- ◆ In a pan boil the hibiscus juice/tea, lemon juice, sugar and lemon skin then add fresh raspberries. Cook for 2-3 minutes. Pour into a small sphere silicone mold and freeze.

HIBISCUS AERO SQUARE

White chocolate	250gr
Vegetable oil	120gr
Hibiscus powder	10gr
Raspberry Powder	20gr

Method

- ◆ Mix all Ingredients in a bowl and melt using bain-marie method. Mix until well incorporated. Temper the mixture and pour into siphon with 3 charge. Put into a plastic container and place to vacuum machine. Wait until it rises then switch off. Refrigerate until it sets.

ITALIAN MERINGUE

Egg whites	175gr
Sugar (1)	350gr
Water	120gr
Sugar (2)	120gr

Method

- ◆ Boil water and sugar (2) till it reaches 118°C. Whisk egg whites till soft peak and gradually add the sugar (1) and slowly add the cooked sugar. Continue whisking until stiff peak.

Pomi بومي



The tomato revolution
from Italy

A trademark, a territory and its people: how a pride of Italy is born.

It all began in 1982, when a company in the province of Parma who had specialized in processing tomatoes since the beginning of the century, and whose presence in the market dates back to the first half of the nineteenth century, applied for the first time ever, new production technologies for the packaging of Pomi tomato sauce.

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JOY ON WHEELS

Chef **Alhassan Ali Alfalasi** is a dreamer. But unlike you and me, he possesses the magic touch that can turn a dream into reality. Just like the concept he developed for a course at The Emirates Academy of Hotel Management transformed into a food truck serving the best stuffed cookies in town, almost overnight. What's more, the budding pastry entrepreneur hopes to illustrate the rich heritage of Emirati cuisine through an encyclopaedia. Meet the marvel...

March 2021 Gulf Gourmet

You're on a leisurely stroll around the neighbourhood as the late afternoon sky readies to fade into a balmy evening.

It has been a while since you ate lunch and you're getting somewhat peckish. Wouldn't a snack be a nice idea before you head home? Only the effort of stepping into a restaurant, placing an order and doing the whole, elaborate dining dance seems like a bit too much work.

Then, just before your gastronomic disappointment hits home, your sensitive nose detects the promise of something delicious wafting through the air. A few steps ahead, there seem to be a bunch of people milling about around what looks like a colourful vehicle serving a snack or two for the hungry pedestrian...or a not-so-hungry hedonist.

Welcome to the world of food trucks.

The much-celebrated concept, a culinary



A friend of mine and I came up with the idea last year. We opened in the Al Habtoor winter garden, which was planned to be around for a week during Christmas but then we decided to continue it until the end of March

mainstay of cities as diverse as Berlin and Budapest in Europe to New York in the U.S. to Mumbai and Bangkok in Asia,

is fast becoming fashionable in Dubai.

Fuelling the transition of culinary culture are motivated entrepreneurs like Alhassan Ali Alfalasi. The 26-year-old, a student of business administration and hospitality management at The Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management, has set up a pop-up food truck called 'Stuffed: Cookies and More'. He hopes to turn into a regular feature of the Dubai cityscape.

Serving cookies, brownies and pastries, the food truck is a collaboration between Chef Alhassan and a local business called Secret Brew. The truck and its offerings might fast become Dubai's worst-kept sweet secret.

"A friend of mine and I came up with the idea last year. We opened in the Al Habtoor winter garden, which was planned to be around for a week during Christmas but then we decided to





Chef Michael Kitts moved me into the pastry kitchen while training. He also encouraged me to participate in the 2019 international cake icing competition in Kolkata, India



March 2021 Gulf Gourmet



continue it until the end of March,” says the young entrepreneur with a cheerful and proud smile.

A SLOW START

It is a culmination of a slow but steady journey that is still not past its first leg.

Chef Alhassan credits Chef Michael Kitts

and Chef Helen Morris of The Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management with giving him the encouragement and opportunity he needed to turn his love for cooking into a profession. “I grew up in a family where everyone enjoys cooking. We are a bunch of great cooks but no professional chefs. So a passion for food was never the problem. But

it was Chef Michael who moved me into the pastry kitchen while training. He also encouraged me to participate in the 2019 international cake icing competition in Kolkata, India. That kind of sealed the deal.”

Beating out around 35 competitors from all over the world, Chef Alhassan



won the top honour at the contest. To think, he nearly didn't go into pastry because it felt much like a 'chemistry experiment' where every substance has to be measured exactly and added with great attention.

"One mistake can ruin the whole dish. I thought the hot kitchen was easier

because you could hide or fix your mistake easily."

That was back then.

After six weeks of training with Chef Michael, the budding chef had a complete change of heart...and attitude. "I will admit that there were

ups and downs, but he kept me going. I learnt to hold the standards high and pay attention to details. And also the importance of team work."

Although he is enjoying the process of sharpening his entrepreneurial knives, Chef Alhassan insists that the kitchen remains, and will remain, his first love.

"I'm not someone who can sit in an office chair the whole day. I like doing a lot of different things. I don't mind working from sunrise to sunset and beyond if needed. Whenever I leave the kitchen for the day, I want to leave with a sense of tremendous satisfaction."

FROM BLUEPRINT TO BUSINESS

The lessons that Chef Alhassan learnt during a project at the Emirates Academy are what he applied to the food truck business. "We had an option to choose either a marketing course or to create our own dining concept. Obviously, I chose the latter because it felt more exciting." The team was given a budget of AED 2,000 to design the concept.

"We had to do everything from creating the interior design for the restaurant to setting up the team within this budget. At first, I thought it was impossible!" A phone call to a friend turned into a quick meeting to create a brand, an idea and to put together recipes. This friend – who happened to be an experienced pastry chef at a Jumeirah property – shared his expertise with Chef Alhassan.

"He gave me cookie recipes that he had created some 13 years ago when he was working in London. So we created the concept and we did some research on the market and preferences here. Palates vary from one country to another. So the recipes had to be adapted."

Later, the concept turned into reality when his friend got a food truck. "He called me and asked if I wanted to collaborate with him on this. I said yes and asked when he would like to open it. He said: 'tomorrow!'"

Not one to be fazed easily, Chef Alhassan got busy for the next 24 hours turning his business concept PDF file into a real, breathing business. In between calls to print logos and create packaging, the truck parked itself at the opening venue. "People were wondering why it had not opened yet. I managed to get 600



I'm not someone who can sit in an office chair the whole day. I like doing a lot of different things. I don't mind working from sunrise to sunset and beyond if needed

cookies on the first day. The concept is cookies with a stuffing that oozes out when you bite into it. We started with three basic flavours – chocolate chip, Nutella and peanut butter. We ran out of stock within three hours."

The food truck took off so well, that it seemed to be a shame to shut it down when the winter garden closed. So Chef Alhassan didn't. "It's growing every day. I didn't actually expect people to drive an hour from Abu Dhabi or Fujairah but they do. They tell us that they drove all the way just to taste our pastry cookies and brownies. It's such a great feeling."

The food truck will close temporarily at the end of March. Chef Alhassan plans to supply to coffee shops and restaurants until he can take it on full-time after graduating next year. "When we started, my day was this for three weeks – wake up, bake cookies, have lunch with family, go to Al Habtoor, sell cookies, come back and sleep." So it would be good to take a break from it for a bit.

The young chef is grateful for his family's support. His sister runs the Instagram account where orders are placed, his aunt keeps the kitchen ready and helps him while baking, and his parents lend emotional and financial support.

"Some of my cousins have experience in the F&B industry. They own restaurants and coffee shops and they helped me with the packaging. Another is a graphic designer who created the logo."

A RICH HERITAGE

The Emirati chef is proud of his country's gastronomic heritage. That's why he tries to use local ingredients wherever possible. "On the side, I am also doing research on Emirati cuisine and its history. Into the recipes and the techniques used, how the dishes were influenced by other countries, etc." Someday, Chef Alhassan plans to create an encyclopaedia on Emirati cuisine. He intends to cover the solid depths of the cuisine – from how food was preserved without fridge to how animals were slaughtered and how the meats were kept edible and tasty for a long time.

Even though Dubai is an eclectic hub of gastronomy, there are few Emirati chefs in circulation. Chef Alhassan believes that it is the fear of failure that prevents many talented Emiratis from taking the risk of launching a culinary business.

"Emirati people are worried about how the community would see them. But what I experienced when I stood behind the counter of my food truck was that many Emiratis were happy to support me and were proud of me. They said they were proud that an Emirati was making what they considered the best brownies in a city with so many expat chefs."

In the near future, Chef Alhassan dreams of scaling the business up. If he can turn it into a successful franchise, that would even help financially support his plans to publicize Emirati cuisine. "A professional kitchen needs expensive equipment and good quality ingredients. I don't want to depend on a regular job to get my income. So let's see how things pan out eventually."

For our own sake and the sake of our taste buds, we would love to see this enterprising young man succeed.



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Chef Srijanthi Natraj

UAE chef wins silver at YOUNG CHEF OLYMPIAD

UAE's Srijanthi Natraj from ICCA Dubai has won the silver prize at the 7th International Young Chef Olympiad (YCO). She has also bagged the title for Best Chicken Dish. Her modern interpretation

of Chicken Saluna, a classic Emirati favourite, helped her get the accolade.

YCO 2021 is being called the world's biggest virtual culinary battle. The eight-day event saw participants from 100

countries across six continents and 24 time zones. It was organized by London's International Hospitality Council (IHC) in association with the International Institute of Hotel Management (IIHM).

"I am glad to be able to represent the UAE in this competition. These are elevated version of dishes that are staples of this region. And I am grateful to my mentor Chef Vrushali," said Srijanthi.

The competition saw two rounds. The first divided competitors into virtual breakout rooms based on time zones. Each competitor had to create three dishes in two-and-a-half hours. Srijanthi created her modern version of Chicken Saluna as the main dish. Her appetiser was a vegetarian Baba Ganoush with a twist and chocolate éclair was her dessert.

Round two was the finale which saw the top 10 participants compete for the title. Her two dishes – Chicken Consomme



UAE country judge Chef Uwe Micheel



YCO 2021 is being called the world's biggest virtual culinary battle. The eight-day event saw participants from 100 countries across six continents and 24 time zones.



and St Honore Gateau – helped her clinch the Silver medal.

As the competition was held and judged online, each country had a Country Judge for a fair and accurate evaluation of taste, temperature, flavours, consistency, and standards prescribed,



all critical aspects in culinary which couldn't be experienced online.

For the UAE, Chef Uwe Micheel – Vice President WorldChefs and President, Emirates Culinary Guild – was the Country Judge. Chef Vrushali Jadhav, Chef Instructor, ICCA Dubai was the

Team Mentor, who helped pave the way for this achievement.

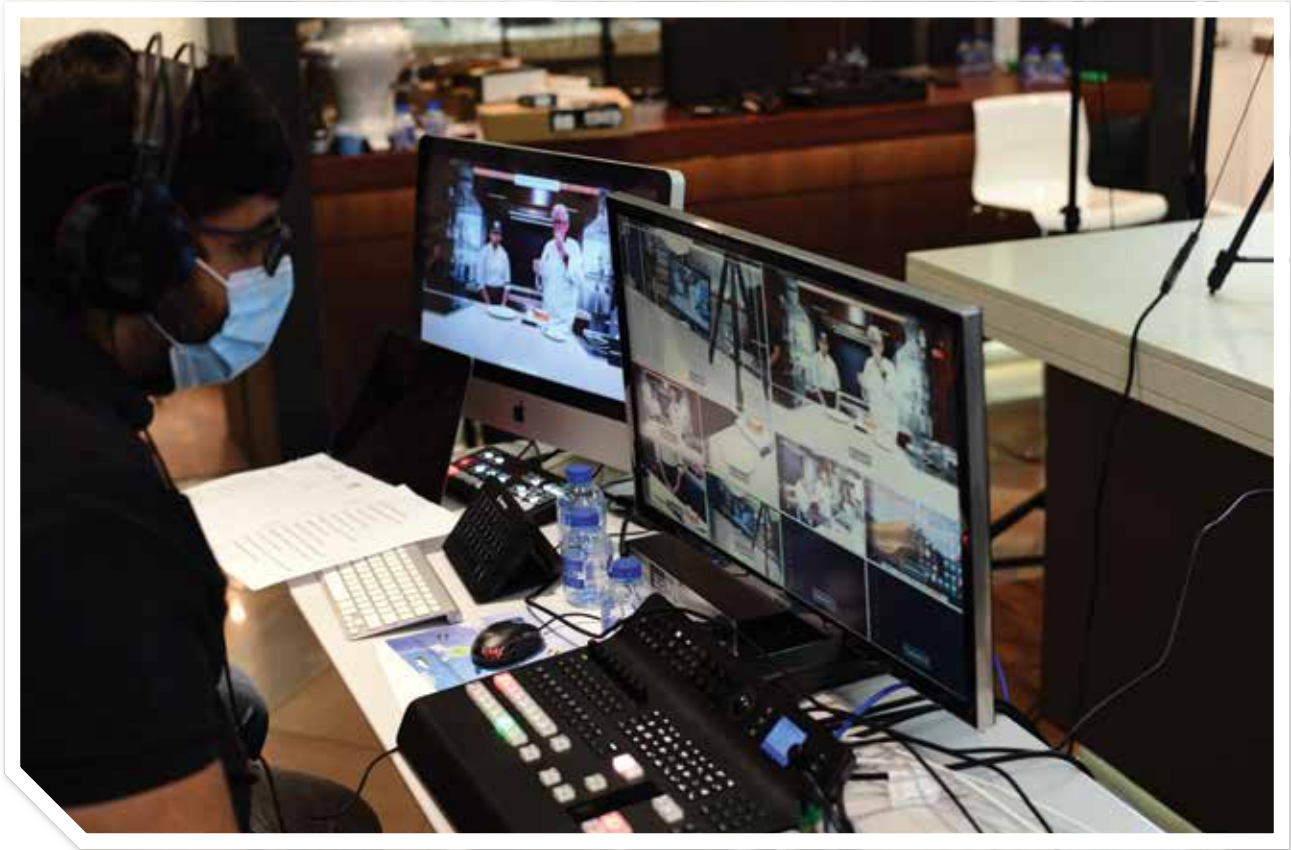
Srijaenthi, is a double Diploma graduate in Cookery and Baking & Patisserie from ICCA Dubai. She also holds a Bachelor's degree in Hot Kitchen and Hospitality Management from CIA, Singapore.



Chef Srijaenthi's St Honore Gateau







Chef Srijaenthi's Chicken Consomme



March 2021 **Gulf Gourmet**

newmembers



Syed Masood, Director of Sales, Bakemart FZ LLC, Pascal Neau, Master Baker, Bakemart FZ LLC and Alexandre Treffle, General Manager, Bakemart FZ LLC receiving Emirates Culinary Guild Membership certificate from ECG President Chef Uwe Michel

Baking is not just a business at Bakemart, it is an inexhaustible passion that motivates and inspires us to outdo our previous achievements and raise the bar for ourselves and the industry. Today **Bakemart** has a strong presence in the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Bahrain in addition to a registered office in the United Kingdom. The commitment to better the best is shared by our workforce which numbers over 800 and comes from different parts of the world. The world-class manufacturing facilities, envied by the rest of the industry, are now complemented by a rapidly advancing retail division through exclusive Bakemart Plus outlets and ventures in association with like-minded partners.



Bakemart LLC is proud to take fresh bakery production concept to the next level by introducing a wide range of frozen breads, frozen cakes & pastries, etc. in this region. Today, markets are obsessed by the rising demand for convenience food products, to save time and efforts in the hectic schedules of our busy chefs. The Frozen Bakery Products market is considered to be one of the fastest-growing segments of frozen

food marketplace due to the growing trend towards ready-to-bake, thaw and serve or par baked frozen products. Starting from fast food restaurants to retail chains all have benefited from this range of products as they can now readily thaw frozen bakery products, bake the par baked items with minutes or prepare fresh items using frozen dough. Furthermore, extended shelf life facilitates easy availability whenever required and they can secure stocks during seasonal requirement. Owing to these benefits of frozen bakery products, there is an expansion in the demands for these products and the market is witnessing significant growth in current and the forecast period. And Bakemart LLC is leading the trend in the region.



Raphaël Saxod, Managing Director receiving Emirates Culinary Guild Membership certificate from ECG President Chef Uwe Micheel

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I wish to join the Emirates Culinary Guild. I have read the ECG Constitution and By-laws. I agree to be bound by the requirements of the constitution. If elected, I promise to support the Guild and its endeavors, to the best of my abilities.

Signed:.....

Proposed By: Sig:.....

Seconded By: Sig:.....

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- Corporate Member Dhs. 20,000 per year

B.S. MOTIVATION GET OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE

“Get out of your comfort zone”, this has been said by everyone from managers to friends. Most of us even say it to others.

I have been guilty of this too. I say guilty because it a sabotaging B.S. (Belief System). It reeks of fear and anxiety like you're in a war zone.

Every species loves its comfort zones. This includes humans. Without this, we will not feel safe and secure. Excessive stress could have a negative impact and lead to disease, depression and beyond.

Here are three random examples

1. When you are exercising in a gym, you build a workout plan. At a steady

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- and comfortable pace, you improve your stamina and resilience.
2. Some people are naturally introverted and love to be by themselves and prefer not to create a splash in public.
3. The average body temperature is around 98.6°F to be in a pleasant or comfortable state.

Now imagine this B.S. of getting out of your comfort zone

- ◆ At the gym, your personal trainer asks you to lift 200kgs. With great

enthusiasm, try and you hurt yourself.

A sensible personal trainer would help you build yourself by starting with smaller weights. This will 'expand' your comfort zone.

- ◆ If the introvert is forced to go to a party full of strangers all by himself the person could end up being more introverted. But if the person went with someone they knew, it could ease him into socializing.
- ◆ To climb Mountain Everest, you first acclimatize yourself physically (emotionally and mentally) to the environment. Here too you have to learn to 'expand' your comfort zone.

EXPAND your comfort zone.

Expand (stretch) your comfort zone on a regular basis. Do something every day that makes you slightly uncomfortable thus you can easily return to your comfort zone for safety and security. Take a small risk every day that is not physically, mentally or emotionally damaging you or anyone else. When you do this, your comfort zone will expand, and you will feel more powerful.

One might say that both mean one and the same thing. But does it? The words we use have a powerful effect on the ones we are advising. It is the difference between torturing oneself to achieve something vs taking a sustained approach with smaller steps to make yourself comfortable to do more than you could do when you started out.

Rohit Bassi is a corporate trainer and TedX speaker, who specializes in getting employees to perform better at work. You can reach him at rohit@in-learning.com





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