

THE ART OF GOOD LIVING

WINE & DINE

october 2007



MUGHAL ECSTASY

colossal wonders in north india

OUT OF THIS WORLD

spain's
culinary stars

GRAPES APART

wines from boutique
spanish bodegas

\$5.00
RM 2.00

LEXICON



customised service where she will work with hosts on the particulars of the party, whether it is a cocktail party with 500 or a dinner party for 12. A full set up is provided—from designer glassware to themed menus—so that hosts can just concentrate on having fun.

Saying that home entertaining and private dining have always been a preferred outlet in western homes, Barrie observes that with the rising affluence of Singaporeans, more and more people are enticed by the idea of offering a different and memorable dining experience other than those provided in restaurants. She adds, "Dining at someone else's home is always more relaxed, guests are inclined to feel more at ease, and hosts have more control over how the event progresses." She also believes that more and more discerning diners are looking for an exclusive experience, something that cannot be offered in a public space. "When dining in a private setting—whether at home or in a rented space—the experience tends to be more memorable; the mood, the flavours, the environment are all catered solely for the one event."

As a self-taught chef, the Melbournian boasts a light and fresh cooking style that reflects southern European cuisine. Some of the items on Barrie's menu include slow-cooked veal cheeks with truffle mash, grilled black cod with baby spinach, and homemade roasted pumpkin ravioli with pinenuts. She uses organic produce where applicable and infuses her dishes with gourmet products sourced from the best purveyors from all over the world. Saying that food is a big part of her formative years, Barrie counts her grandparents and father as inspirations for her career as a chef as well as a party organiser, "I remember throwing summer parties for my little friends in the garden as young as three years of age!"

While regular chefs are known to provide impressive meals with the latest 'it' (read costly) ingredient all plated elaborately in signature tableware, private chefs provide something less extravagant but no less palatable when it comes to dining with a difference. The personalised services and effort put into planning an exclusive party is what prizes caterers over chefs. As Barrie explains, "One thing chefs do not quite understand about catering is we never have the luxury of having state of the art equipment on site to create and plate—we have to be very versatile and flexible without compromising the dishes served."

Hostess Karen Goh explains why she prefers engaging private dining caterers to throw her parties: "You can always rely on event organisers to provide all the fittings of a first class restaurant, but it is more than that. The service and food are all unique to my party alone. All my guests know that they will never get the same experience elsewhere." ❖

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PRIVATE DINING CHEF EXTRAORDINAIRE

For a prolific celebrity chef in Latin America, Donato de Santis is rather humble and self-deprecating. Visiting Singapore for the Ninth Annual New World of Food and Wine Festival at The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore in August, the energetic Italian showcased his talent by way of his exuberant Italian-accented cuisine inspired by local Argentinean produce.

While the chef is known more for his cooking shows and award-winning cookbook, titled *Donato per Bambini*, he would rather potter around the small private outfit in Buenos Aires he owns with his wife, Micaela. Saying that the outlet allows him to dish out creative menus on a daily basis, de Santis harbours an interesting *curriculum vitae*, of which includes a six-year stint as the late fashion mogul Gianni Versace's personal chef.

"It was an honour working for Gianni," the affable chef proclaims, "I was allowed to practise my creativity and, at the same time, was allowed free reign to devise daily menus for the family."

Disclosing that the Versaces love dining outdoors in their Miami palazzo, de Santis spent his days whipping up sumptuous meals—from simple and healthy dishes to elaborate multi-course feasts. Because the Versaces would entertain Hollywood stars in their home, de Santis was able to rub shoulders with A-listers such as Sylvester Stallone, Jack Nicholson and Bruce Willis.

"At first I was very star struck; it was unbelievable to be in the presence of all these famous people! I was actually very honoured that they enjoyed my food."

After working at the Versace palazzo for six years, de Santis travelled to Argentina and fell in love with Buenos Aires, "The vibe in this city is amazing; it is like Milan, but the people are more 'real'. It is an exciting place, but somehow a little more relaxed."

This is also where he met his wife and business partner Micaela. They started their private dining outfit Da Donato Cucina Paradiso in 2000 in a climate where private dining was almost unheard of. Their reason for operating on such an intimate scale is straightforward; Micaela explains, "We had our daughters and wanted the freedom to work only when we wanted to, so we decided to start a private dining business."

The cosy house that the de Santis use as their private dining room is their former live-in home. They say that the best thing about operating an exclusive venue is that every meal they offer is different. According to de Santis, meals are catered for specific parties and are themed according to their customer's suggestions. He explains, "We can have a large dinner party with 30 or more guests, where we play music and stay on into the morning; and on other days, we'd set up the house with romantic candles just for two people."

There is no menu at Cucina Paradiso (which translates to 'cuisine of paradise'). De Santis draws up a different menu on a daily basis. "It is an experience for them. And the best thing is that they don't have to worry about the cooking and the washing up."