

inviting ideas

# Creative chef likes pleasing guests



RUTH MOSSOK JOHNSTON

In the hustle and bustle of the Dearborn Ritz-Carlton kitchen, lies talent, precision, and interest in pleasing guests that dine at the Ritz. Executive Chef Christian Alunno runs a tight ship. On board is well known Master Chef Ed Janos, Executive Sous Chef John Emerson, and Grill Room Sous Chef, Robert Hindley.

Starting out "on the line" (the food line, that is) at the Ritz-Carlton in Naples, Fla. Hindley has been with the Ritz-Carlton Corp. for just over 11 years. He began cooking at age 14 when he went to work at Deerfield Academy, in Massachusetts, and worked summers on Martha's Vineyard. After finding several fine chefs as mentors, and loads of on the job training, he is now responsible for the Grill Room breakfast, buffet and lunch, room service and plated meals

during his day shift.

"I feel stagnant, if I'm not creating something," said Hindley with a smile that could melt an ice sculpture. And create, he does - this energetic 31-year-old, not only puts in long days at the Ritz, but he also finds time to be an adviser for the Food Management Committee Brightlight Technical Center for Inter-City High School kids learning culinary arts, and teaches juggling for Ann Arbor Public Schools.

What does Sous Chef Hindley enjoy most about doing food for a living? "I like to do fruits and vegetables, I look at them like flowers," said Hindley as he puts the final touch on a gorgeous papaya flower garnish for the buffet table. "I also like to do soups and healthy things - making healthy foods taste better!"

Creativity is the key here. Hindley has a grandfather who is a chef, and a background in summer stock theater, ceramics and watercolors - this is a chef whose background interplays with his fine ability to cook.

The following recipe is served as a "special" on the Ritz-Carlton Menu - try it at home, or there, it's absolutely delicious.

This vegetarian dish is perfect for a luncheon or dinner entree, if doing as an appetizer, cut down the portion size.

## VEGETABLE AND POLENTA LASAGNA

Yield: 4 servings

- 1 medium sized green zucchini, sliced 1/4 inch on bias and grilled
- 1 medium sized yellow squash, sliced 1/4 inch on bias and grilled
- 1 eggplant, peeled and sliced 1/4 inch, and grilled
- 1 large red pepper, roasted, peeled, and cut in julienne strips
- 1/4 pound fresh spinach
- 16 pieces, shiitaki mushrooms
- 2 tablespoons Balsamic vinegar
- 1/2 Spanish onion, sliced thin and dredged in seasoned flour (added salt and pepper) and deep fried
- 8 pieces - Polenta circles\*

Mustard sauce\*\*

Sliced and grilled French bread  
Salt and pepper to taste (go light on the salt)

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

\*POLENTA:

- 1 tablespoon shallots, chopped fine
- 1 tablespoon garlic cloves, chopped fine
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 1/2 pound cornmeal
- 5 cups chicken stock
- 2 egg yolks
- 2/3 cup Parmesan cheese, grated

Sauté the shallots and garlic in the butter until they are translucent. Add the stock and bring to a boil.

Add the cornmeal in a stream, stirring constantly until it has all been added. Simmer the mixture for 45 minutes, stirring often. When done, it should pull away from the sides of the pot.

Remove the pot from the heat and blend in the egg yolks, Parmesan cheese and seasoning.

Pour the polenta onto a greased sheet pan and refrigerate until very firm.

Cut into desired shapes (circles work well). Pan-fry the polenta in olive oil until golden brown on each side.

## \*\* COLD MUSTARD SAUCE:

- 1 1/2 cups mayonnaise
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1/3 cup Dijon mustard
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon fresh thyme, minced
- 1/4 cup water

Blend all ingredients in medium sized bowl, and refrigerate.

## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:

1. Put mustard sauce in a squirt bottle and make lines (drizzle) with sauce on the bottom of each serving plate.
2. Place two pan-fried polenta pieces in the center of each plate.
3. In a large skillet; sauté mushrooms, grilled green and yellow squash, eggplant, roasted red pepper, and spinach. When done, add balsamic vinegar, salt and pepper.
4. Stack the vegetables on top of the polenta and garnish with crispy onions. Serve with grilled French bread.

Ruth Mossok Johnston is an author and food columnist who lives in Franklin. To leave a Voice Mail message for Ruth, dial (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1902.

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