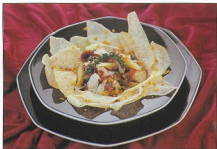


Creativity Is The Password For This Multi-Talented Chef

By Tom Aikins

DINING



Warm salad of octopus with new potatoes, roasted garlic and knacker.

Although cooking is, in its own right, considered to be a creative expression, some chefs need even more of an outlet to satisfy themselves creatively. Such a chef is Alex Neumayr of the Central Plaza Hotel who put aside an early fascination with art and became a chef instead because of the creative possibilities he saw in the profession.

It wasn't his first choice, however. A career in art would have been more to his liking but his more pragmatic parents urged him to consider another field and food eventually won out. That doesn't mean that his early artistic tendencies have been forgotten. Far from it. In addition to the creative outlet that food preparation has provided, the chef has been painting regularly for years now.

So a career that began 19 years ago as a 16 year old apprentice has provided the chef with the opportunity to indulge in his creative talents in one field while studying and practicing his craft in another. He's also been able to indulge in another passion as well — travel.

As soon as his three-year apprenticeship ended, Chef Neumayr left his native town near Salzburg, Austria and went to Munich, Germany for his first cooking job. Since then he's travelled around much of the

world, sometimes as part of his profession and at others just as a tourist, although a slightly unorthodox one. He's backpacked in Egypt before, as an example, as well as Iran, Vanuatu in Papua, New Guinea, and seems to prefer destinations off the normal beaten path.

Between his job and personal travel, he's been to such places as Tel Aviv, Guam, Hawaii, Australia, Los Angeles and, of course Southeast Asia, where he travelled extensively before moving here for work for the first time about seven years ago.

Assorted seafood set on multicolored vegetable purées.



It was while in Los Angeles that he spent the most time in learning the art of painting, taking lessons several times a week while working at the same time. And it was during his first stint in Hawaii, on the island of Maui, that he pursued his art career professionally for the first and, up to now, only time. Painting and putting on his own exhibitions at local galleries resulted in the sale of some paintings but he didn't make enough money to make it worthwhile. He returned to cooking full-time and painting part-time which has allowed him to explore his creative interests and keep a roof over his head at the same time.

Actually, he's doing a little better than that, having risen to the position of Executive Chef at a major five-star hotel in Bangkok. It was a long process of slowly rising up the ladder through a number of different postings to finally reach his current position, which is actually his second term at the Central Plaza. His first was as the Executive Sous Chef when he arrived here from his first Asian job in Hong Kong five and a half years ago.

After two years in Bangkok, he was offered the Executive Chef post at the then-new Chiang Mai Westin Hotel. After two years there, he moved back to the Central Plaza, this time as Executive Chef, which he's been doing for the last year and a half.

Although the duties of an Executive Chef keep him from doing a lot in the