

Sharing a Love of Food

This Fort Lauderdale chef wants to get teens into the kitchen

by Chelle Koster Walton

When he was a teenager, Chef Dean Max cooked alongside his grandfather, a chef on the Jersey Shore. Now he hopes to give teens with culinary aspirations the same opportunity.

"I was fortunate enough to gain guidance and insight into the industry at an early age, which is the objective of my Culinary Camp," said Max, cookbook author and executive chef of 3030 Ocean, the cutting-edge fine-dining space at Marriott Harbour Beach Resort in Fort Lauderdale. Max opened the restaurant in December 2000, and since then has gone on to open two

Chef Dean Max carefully selects the ingredients he will work with, from fruits and vegetables (below) to seafood such as this large crab (right).



other Marriott-line restaurants in Columbus, Ohio, and Baltimore, Maryland.

"I have so many parents that ask if their child should go to culinary school and where," says Max, explaining his decision to launch Culinary Camp at the resort in summer 2008. "Many of them have kids who see [cooking's] popularity on TV and really love to cook. So they want to get in it, and I always tell them to take a few years and go and apprentice with a great chef from their area and see where it goes. So this would be a real look into the actual day-to-day of a chef and the good parts and hard parts. I think it would give them a realistic view.

"I want them to understand that I didn't jump from being a chef to writing a cookbook overnight," said Chef Max. "There were many steps involved, which I hope to give them a glimpse of. I will help them develop their own recipes so they understand how using their own talent can be developed."

As author of *A Life by the Sea* and one of South Florida's foremost seafood experts, Chef Max was recently named to the Florida Department of Agriculture's Seafood and Aquaculture Advisory Committee.

"There's something about the water which is magical to me," Max reflects in the introduction to his cookbook, released in April 2000. "My love of food is fed from the fond memories of smells and tastes of my childhood."

He calls the book "a two-year labor of



love aimed at demystifying seafood." It demonstrates his ability to teach his craft and share his expertise. He spent part of 2006 on a national book tour with *Sur la Table*, a high-end chain of food retail stores that regularly hosts culinary authors such as Wolfgang Puck.

Chef Max's food experience began in his Florida birthplace of Stuart at the hands of his father, a produce broker. From him, his grandfather, and later experience growing up on a Virginia farm, Max soon developed an early appreciation for freshness and food interaction. "I had my own jalapeño patch when I was nine!" said Max.

The now 40-year-old chef's impressive résumé includes stints as executive chef at Brasserie Savoy in San Francisco; Gerard's Place in Washington, DC; Ritz-Carltons in Pentagon City, Virginia, and Atlanta; Mumbo Jumbo in Atlanta; and most recently Woodside in Brentwood, California, a restaurant he also owned. The James Beard Foundation recognized

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHEF DEAN MAX

Chef Max as a “Great Regional Chef of America.” *Gourmet Magazine* has called his modern American cuisine “stylish” and “tongue-tingling.”

“Modern cuisine embraces a dedication to simplicity, freshness, and intensity of flavor,” says Max, espousing his philosophy de cuisine. “My cuisine relies more on balancing flavors than on heavy spicing, so finding the best ingredients available is a must.

“This is the key to cooking and how we develop young cooks. We teach the importance of balance—using crunchiness, saltiness, acidity. This is the center of understanding a perfect dish.”

To illustrate, he uses an example from a specialty he prepares at 3030 Ocean. “We might have something as simple as our signature snapper dish. We take a Florida red snapper, sautéed, and balance it with a creamy boniato puree. Boniato is a Central American yam—not too sweet and more nutty in flavor. This adds creamy richness, and we add grilled green onions for texture and earthy onion flavor, then use a sauce of carrot juice reduced with orange juice, garlic, cumin and puree it with virgin olive oil to get a

An enticing presentation sets the stage for Australian Barramundi with crispy potato, cucumber, and oyster sauce.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHEF DEAN MAX

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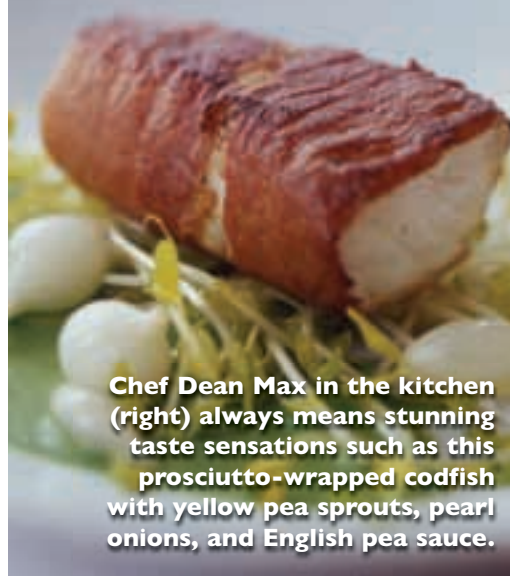
Daniel Marvin Thompson
Formerly of The End Resort








PROFILE



Chef Dean Max in the kitchen (right) always means stunning taste sensations such as this prosciutto-wrapped codfish with yellow pea sprouts, pearl onions, and English pea sauce.



very healthy and tasty sauce that matches perfect with the other ingredients.”

Seafood is a natural for Chef Max and his restaurant's location overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. His other two restaurants, located in Renaissance hotels, adapt also to regional flavors and fresh ingredients. Last year he opened Latitude 41 in Ohio, where he returns to his farm-boy roots.

“The concept is based around local farm fresh ingredients. We have amazing small growers for cheese, beef, bison, tomatoes, heirloom vegetables—it's amazing!” he said. “The concept is modern American cuisine all based around quality product—from all-natural to organic.”

Last summer he was preparing to open Water Table Restaurant in Baltimore. It too will overlook the sea. “I grew up on the Eastern Shore and I love to be back there creating wonderful Chesapeake cuisine,” says Chef Max.

During the six-day Culinary Camp next summer, young up-and-coming cooking enthusiasts, ages sixteen through eighteen, will learn everything from working with vendors to planning and executing a menu under the tutelage of Chef Max. Intense daily camp activities will incorporate visits to local merchants, including a fish farm, seafood purveyors, produce market, and meat warehouse; an introduction to the restaurant ordering system and elements of cost control; menu development and preparation; and other behind-the-scenes rituals of restaurant operation.

After surviving the heat of the kitchen, newly trained young chefs will prepare a six-course dinner for their parents. Students and their families will stay at the resort as part of a learning vacation package.

Chef Max will limit the class to eight students, whom he personally will select from applicants based on candidates' references, past cooking experience, and an essay detailing their commitment to the culinary profession. Graduates receive a certificate of completion and a personal letter of recommendation from Chef Max.

Running three restaurants and juggling the life of a celebrated cookbook author, one has to wonder where Chef Max has time and energy to fit in a culinary camp. For teens no less! Is he up to the challenge?

“I think it will be easy,” he counters. “By this time kids are serious about their upcoming careers and want to learn as much as they can. I am definitely looking forward to doing it this summer and in years to come.”

For information on applying for Chef Max's Culinary Camp, call the Marriott's Personal Vacation Planners at 800-628-4462. 🌴

Cuisine & Travel Editor Chelle Koster Walton began her love affair with fresh food reluctantly—arising summers at 6 a.m. to harvest strawberries, raspberries, corn, green beans, and more from her family's half-acre garden in Iowa.