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## Interviews with the Vegas apprentices

Eric Noland, Travel Editor

### Chat with MIKE JORDAN, chef/owner of Rosemary's Restaurant

Q: What do you feel makes your restaurant distinctive, so as to lure people away from the Strip?

A: I think our food, of course. We consider our food to be on par with anything anywhere else in the city. We're incredibly proud of our service; I think it's as good or better than anything around. Good food, good drink, good service - that's our mantra.

We get a lot of people from the Strip. They pay 50 bucks roundtrip to get out here (by taxi). We know we have to exceed expectations, not just meet them.

Q: Tell us about your time working with Emeril Lagasse.

A: I opened Emeril's New Orleans Fish House (at the MGM Grand), and I was there 2 1/2 years. I was with him total for seven years.

Q: And if people make the trek out to Rosemary's, they're likely to see the chef in the kitch?

A: The chances are pretty good. I take two days off a week.

Q: Which distinguishes your place from the celebrity-chef restaurants on the Strip?


A: Yes, but the majority (of the people in the kitchen), if not all of them, are the top people from their companies.

When I worked for Emeril, everybody was, 'Where's Emeril, where's Emeril, where's Emeril?' They'd walk in, and you could see it in their faces. When time has gone on, people have understood that he can't be there. Not if you have eight restaurants.

Q: Does it go without saying that during all that time with Emeril, you always yearned to have your own place?

A: I have had this dream since I was 21. You want to find out if you're right or you're wrong, and the only way to figure it out is to go get the bank loan.

Q: Your menu is obviously daring. Goat cheese cheesecake?



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A: We want to intrigue people, but we don't want to scare them, by any means. We look at it as a rock-solid flavor combination.

Every dish has a story. The menu is the story of my life. Every dish has a unique quality that comes from somewhere. It's a really personal restaurant.

Q: Pretend a first-timer is coming to Rosemary's, and devise a dinner of signature items, starting with an appetizer.

A: Texas barbecue shrimp. We use Maytag Farms bleu cheese, from Iowa - I'm from Iowa. They're the same people who own Maytag washers and dryers. It's Danish - lighter, mild. Some people say, I don't like bleu cheese, it's too heavy. I say, try this.

Then a wilted spinach salad.

Then rack of lamb - done with black olive mashed.

For dessert, goat cheese cheesecake. I think we make the best creme brulee in the city. Desserts are meant to kind of take you back to childhood a little bit. We don't try to do real constructional kinds of things.

Q: The decor of your restaurant has gotten a lot of acclaim. What was your approach?

A: Food is meant to be comfortable. We talked to the architect, the interior designer. We said, We want this to be comfortable ... and women's bathroom to be beautiful.

Q: You mentioned earlier your strong emphasis on service. What's your philosophy there?

A: We have one mission: Make the guest happy. Our bottom line is, you walk out of our restaurant happy. We give waiters freedom. We have etiquette of service - clear from right, and the wine service is etched in stone - but making someone happy, that's a very esoteric thing.

We make follow-up phone calls to people who dine with us. It's not face-to-face, so they can be perfectly honest with us. And they have told us a lot.

Q: Another plus for your place is that your prices are not as steep as on the Strip?

A: It's only in the last few years that people have started to realize that.

People know they're getting ripped off. I'm not going to charge you \$50 for a piece of salmon. We're off the Strip. There's no way a guy like me can do that and be in business. On the strip, that's what the market will bear.

### **Chat with LAURIE KENDRICK, owner of Table 34 restaurant**

Q: What do you feel makes your restaurant distinctive, so as to lure people away from the Strip?

A: For those people who are really interested in the quality of the food that they eat and are somewhat price-sensitive, our restaurant really fills the bill. Because we serve a local clientele, we haven't inflated any of our prices, especially the wine list.

We serve top-quality food - prime beef, everything's fresh; the freezer only holds ice cream.

Q: What do you feel you can offer that the celebrity-chef restaurants can't?

A: At a lot of these name restaurant, the actual chef who's name is one the menu is never in the kitchen. We're here every day, so there is consistency.

Q: I understand you used to work for Wolfgang Puck on the Strip?

A: I was with Wolfgang for 10 years. I was in management for about half of that - at Postrio in San Francisco, then Chinois and Spago in Las Vegas.

The interesting thing about working for Wolfgang, it was a very innovative company. There were very forward-thinking people. If you had an idea, they were really willing to listen to it. I was with the company during tremendous growth spurt.

I decided it was time to take those achievements into the neighborhood. Having come from the San Francisco environment where there are very good neighborhood restaurants, I felt Las Vegas was ready for that.

Q: What do you serve at Table 34?

A: Contemporary American cuisine. We offer a contemporary spin on comfort food - on the menu (recently) was prime beef tenderloin pot pie. The menu evolves seasonally. The fresh fish and soups change every day.

Q: What do you consider the signature dishes of Table 34?

A: Grilled rack of pork with chipotle mashed potatoes is one. If we're out of it, it's a huge deal. Also, our house-smoked salmon appetizer. We start with the fish whole, then it's brined for

2 1/2 days and cold-smoked.

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**Chat with TODD CLORE,  
chef-owner of Todd's Unique  
Dining**

Q: What do you feel makes your place distinctive, so as to lure people away from the Strip?

A: No. 1 is I offer the same quality of ingredients because I came from the Strip, but in about a 30-percent discount in price because I'm local. I don't have these big companies backing me for a 30-dollar entree. My wine list is very affordable.

I probably more attention to detail here than on most of these mega properties. I cook, my wife manages the front; we try to give every guest a lot of personal attention.

Q: I guess that having your own place really frees you up, too?

A: I'm a very spontaneous kind of guy. If feel i want to cook something spicy, I cook it. If cold outside and I want to braise something, that's what I do.

For me, corporate environment didn't work. I tell the story that to change menu when strawberries go out of season, by time you get all the vice presidents to sign off on it, strawberries are back in season.

People are shocked, but I don't have salmon (in January), don't have halibut (in January) because it's not in season. I'm not going to serve something frozen. It's in season six months a year. I'm bringing (fish) from Australia and New Zealand (at that time of year), because they're in season.

Q: You mentioned your wine list earlier. What's your general philosophy there?

A: I don't sell Kendall Jackson. I could sell boatloads of it, but I don't believe they put quality first, so I refuse to do it. I have wines that might not be familiar to people, but they got on list because we tried it and thought, This is a great wine. It gives us a lot of credibility with our clients, because they come to trust us.

We have a lot of wines by the glass. We're very wine-friendly. On Wednesdays, we have a no-corkage night. People say, I have a bottle of this. I tell them, Send me a little taste of something. Then I think, What goes with this? And I cook something to match it.

Q: At the celebrity chef restaurants on the Strip, your chance of seeing the chefs is nil ...

A: Or less.

I try to say hello to every table every night. Since I'm the one who cooked it, I'm going to take it personally if they don't like something. You get direct feedback, absolutely. If they don't like something, guess what? We don't have it tomorrow.

Q: You certainly have an odd name for a restaurant. What's the genesis of that?

A: My style of cooking has always been just a little bit different. I trained with classical French chefs here in the u.s. for many, many years. I did classical french food. (But) because I'm so spontaneous, I want to eat Mexican food one night, then Thai the next, then Americana, then I want spicy again. So that's what my cooking is like.

I didn't want to say Italian restaurant, American, fusion, California - which people in Las Vegas hate. I didn't want to be labeled.

It's about what I do, what I've always done. The spicing, the flavors go back and evolved from years of what I've been doing.

Q: Pretend a first-timer is coming to Todd's Unique, and devise a dinner of signature items, starting with an appetizer.

A: We'd start with the goat cheese won ton. It's a French ingredient with a Chinese style and Indian spices - coriander, cumin, cartamum. For the shell, I use a wrapper that's only used in Hong Kong dim sum. It's super-thin, and flash-fried. The sauce is made with fresh raspberries, vinegar and basil. You sit there and think, Wow, this is really weird, all these spices, with raspberries and basil, but together it's unbelievable.

For the main course, a seafood item, it would be the center-cut ahi tuna, seared, with Japanese spice powder. It's served on top of wasabi mashed potatoes, with a soy-garlic-butter sauce. I use sushi-quality fish. And it's not like a sushi place, where you get a small piece, a sixteenth of inch thick. I've got six ounces of tuna on my plate.

If they wanted meat instead, it would be the short rib. The customers are most irritated when I don't have it. What do is, I take bones out, roll it, like jelly roll. It's rolled up and tied - it looks like filet mignon. I cook that 7-9 hours with carmelized onions and carrots. And I serve that on top of jalapeno mashed potatoes, and top that whole mound with frizzled onions - crispy, fried white onions. If you ever order that dish, you will come back in a week to have it again.

Q: Could you run down your background?

A: I was at Bally's nine years. I ran the Hotel Laguna for six years; I was executive of the whole property. My boss said, I want you to put me on the culinary map.

My French training was at Domain Chandon in napa valley. I was in L.A. for a year with Roy Yamaguchi, before he had Roy's and got world-famous. We were at 385 North on La Cienega.

Then I was at L'Orangerie. I was the only american in a French-speaking kitchen. It was

an interesting 2 1/2 years. We would go through 10 pounds of white truffles in a two-month period. This was the mid-'80s, and they were \$1,500 a pound then. I'm telling you, they were on everything.

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