

Marine Room duo's cookbook making waves

Oct 21, 2009
By



Cookbooks come and go, hundreds of them each year, and even the most eventually acclaimed hit the stands with nary a clunk's-worth of resonance and even less fanfare. Such is certainly not the case with "Flying Pans," a sizeable hardcover tome demystifying the worldly fare of one of San Diego's most dynamic and beloved chef tandems - Executive Chef Bernard Guillas and Chef de Cuisine Ron Oliver of La Jolla's venerable Marine Room restaurant.

Over the last 18 months, rumors abounded at every level of San Diego's foodie community, from diners to home cooks to professional chefs, about the tandem's efforts to create a cookbook embodying their signature culinary style. As was to be expected, the buzz created by such a tasty bit of gossip spread like warm butter until a singular query, spoken in many languages, echoed from here to Hong Kong, "When's Bernard and Ron's cookbook coming out?"

For friends, family, fans and food fanatics, the wait is finally over, and the general consensus from the elite and fortunate contingent who have viewed "Flying Pans" in all its glory is that it is a true work of gastronomic art and a thoughtfully crafted tool that was well worth the two-plus-year wait.

The idea to take on this project arose one day in Guillas' office when he and Oliver, both avid travelers, spontaneously began popcorning all the countries they had collectively visited.

The final tally was 48 (and has since risen). Stunned by that high number, Oliver, whose countries accounted for roughly 40 percent of the total, told Guillas, "You should write a cookbook." After all, like Oliver, Guillas' travel style has always been to immerse himself in a land's native culture and soak up cooking techniques and methods for utilizing exotic ingredients. Realizing this shared modus operandi, Guillas replied, "We should write a cookbook."

It was that simple. And how hard could it be? After all, both men are talented culinary craftsmen with well over 1,000 recipes in their repertoire. Picking out a hundred or so, typing them up and compiling them seemed simple enough, especially considering the experienced team they collected to handle the design, photography and marketing for the book. Guillas and Oliver figured that they would be finished within a year.

It wasn't long into the production process that the now fully invested co-authors (and co-publishers) started spotting opportunities to make the book better.

They added a section here, revised the format for ease of use, stuck in an almost neurotically comprehensive conversion chart, which includes a resource guide and substitutions chapter (no small feat when a book includes foreign ingredients from nearly 50 countries), and included stories from their travels to precede each recipe.

The list grew longer and the project grew bigger and more taxing in regards to the duo's time, energy and finances, but they decided early on that, just like with their food, under no circumstances would they sacrifice quality.

The end product from this pursuit, a journey as extensive as the sum of their mutual travels, is a cookbook filled with personal stories every bit as intriguing as the more than 150 enticing one-of-a-kind recipes that make up this masterwork and make it as much a fun read as a useful reference piece.

There's also the exquisite photography, which Batali describes via a jacket-flap endorsement as "food porn," which works in tandem with Guillas and Oliver's easy-to-follow recipe formatting to help readers find their way through to the end of each dish with a clear idea of where they are headed all along.

