

COOKING UP A STORM



A NEW ORGANISATION FOR MACAU CHEFS IS LEADING A CAMPAIGN TO PUT THE CITY'S UNDOUBTED CULINARY PROWESS ON THE MAP. THEIR STRATEGY IS SIMPLE, FOOD AS A COMPLIMENT TO BUSINESS

by **Sandra Gomes**

THE newly formed Macau Culinary Association has called for culinary experts to work hand in hand with those who organise trade and industry conventions and fares.

Their aim is to use "live cooking" to boost Macau's culinary profile while at the same time serving up some top-notch fare for international delegates.

Association president Raimund Pichlmaier said: "Most conventions are made for specific economic purposes, sometimes they like to incorporate the hotel and restaurant industry but not cooking competitions or cooking seminars. They are not interested in cooking live like we are," he said.

Another executive member of the association, executive pastry chef at the Mandarin Oriental, Herve Lemonon, adds: "Live cooking is also a way to promote each hotel or restaurant, but it is not always seen this way. The business of catering or food industry runs independently of the conventions, as a service alone without focus. There can be a marriage, but it is still necessary to examine all the angles. We will keep the door open and soon will see what happens. More communication is needed so the goal can be achieved."

Born in Macau

Born in March this year, the association aims to promote the art of cooking and professional chefs in Macau. The 110 professional chefs signed up, regularly swap recipes, suggestions, opinions or knowledge to that end.

The aim is not simply to promote cooking done in Macau but to provide training for its members who come from a wide range of different nationalities.

As a member of the World Chef Association and the Global Association of Chefs Society - an organisation which has more than two million members around the world, the Macau Culinary Association aims to make a noise about what's going on food-wise in the MSAR.

"Promoting the brand" are the watchwords and also participation in overseas competitions like their sister association in Hong Kong.

"Macau is not on the culinary map. People do not know much about Macau, only gambling. So we have to expose and prove ourselves but it will be a long journey," admits Hungarian chef Pichlmaier.

According to the Macau Government Tourist Office, the convention industry, (MICE), has become more important in

Macau recently. Comparing 2007 to 2006, reveals an eight percent increase in the total number of international events hosted here.

Association meetings and corporate events are eating a bigger share of the pie and the figures also show the number of participants is on the rise. Macau's economic growth, MICE included, has definitely influenced the culinary sector.

"We have more and more sophisticated restaurants, higher standards, and I hope things continue in this way. Even the smaller restaurants are more sophisticated, the level of menus and cooking have all been lifted," says Pichlmaier.

More to be done

Despite this, the association is well aware that much more needs to be done.

At next year's Wine and Gourmet 2009 they will try to improve competition among young chefs from Macau with live cooking, while promoting the restaurants where they work.

Christophe Duvernois, executive pastry chef at the Macau Tower and executive member of the association, has been here 20 years and has followed the changes.

"Macau is a tourist destination, more open to the market, but gamblers and professionals are not focused.

There are a lot of new chefs around the world and we must keep up to speed with the industry. There is a challenge and the association wants to meet it," he says.

The objectives for the next two years have been plotted. They want to give more training for chefs and look for more opportunities for chefs, such as new events or competitions, says Duvernois.

Wine and Gourmet 2008 was the first to be held in Macau and has gone a long way to raising the city's culinary profile. All the major players, including Mandarin Oriental, Crown, Sands, Venetian, Wynn, Four Season, MGM, Macau Tower and the Bistrot restaurant, took part and the association considers the objectives were achieved.

For next year, the goal is to host live competitions showcasing different foods.

The association also plans to set up a team of chefs to represent Macau in overseas competitions.

To that end they are keen to get sponsorship: "Before people give financial support they have to know the brand, that's why competitions are very important. It's to make business," Herve concluded. ■