

# Gourmet Week at Peppino's

By NAZRI NOOR

Fans of food may have noticed a fine series of events scheduled at Shangri-La's Tanjung Aru Resort and Spa, a line of dinners featuring excellent chefs from all over the world, simply named Gourmet Week. The first of these dinners transpired last Thursday evening, showcasing the talents of one Chef Carmelo Greco, part-owner and chef at Frankfurt's Michelin-star rated Osteria Enoteca.

It would be inaccurate to say that the food was good, as it was, in actuality, tremendously delicious. Kota Kinabalu rarely plays host to such incredibly skilful culinary talent, and Thursday's group of gourmets and wine lovers at the resort's Peppino Italian restaurant unanimously agreed on the unutterably excellent quality of that evening's fare.

Assisted in the kitchen by Peppino's own Chef Rosario Seminatore, Chef Carmelo presented a deceptively simple selection of Italian dishes that held delightful surprises for the diners. A carpaccio of veal and beef tenderloin with tender greens and sparse shavings of parmesan cheese started off the menu, the veal itself arriving in an unusually substantial serving, sandwiched between the greens and the wonderfully seasoned beef.

The second course was an instant hit: ravioli filled with cheese fondue and sautéed with beef bacon. Served on a plate dusted very generously with grated parmesan cheese, the ravioli sounds so basic, yet the murmurs of approval and bright, ecstatic faces sitting about Peppino's tables easily justified the dish's incredible qualities.

Massimo Pastura, one of the evening's special guests and the actual winemaker from Cascina La Ghersa (which supplied the wines served with each course), shared his approval during a short visit to the kitchen. "It's just ravioli filled with cheese, but it's made so well. It's simple, classic Italian home-cooking."

The sensorial experience continued with the next two courses, pan fried tuna in a bed of mashed celery and parsley jus, seared just perfectly and lightly crusted with pepper, and milk lamb stewed in Vignassa Barbera (one of Massimo Pastura's fine reds) and served with polenta and hints of porcini mushroom.

Dessert came in the form of an oblong of chocolate mousse, coated in even more dark chocolate, simply named Sorpresa al cioccolato, Italian for "chocolate surprise". The sur-

prise: cubes of fruit-flavoured Turkish delight tucked away within the folds of the finely-made confection.

In fact, the entire night was filled with surprises. Massimo happens to be a talented pianist, and he showed off his skills at singing and playing the piano for Peppino's guests. For dessert, Massimo made a special announcement, performing Ray Charles' "Georgia On My Mind" as the chocolate surprise and its accompanying Giorgia Moscato d'Asti was served. Giorgia itself is beautiful, lacking the heavy syrupy taste found in most sweet wines and instead offering a fresh, light and fruity flavour.

"What's incredible about Moscato d'Asti is that the grape is made from tastes exactly like the wine itself," explained Daniele Giovo, himself a wine exporter and one of the three individuals instrumental to the execution of the special event, the others being Daniel Michalski, Shangri-La's decidedly charming director of food and beverage, and Meng Tan, the director of Sabah's Winecellars and organiser of some of the most memorable parties in recent hospitality history.

Carmelo Greco may be a new name to Sabah, but in Germany, the chef is a shining star. Originally from Italy, Chef Carmelo worked in a number of fine Italian restaurants before moving to Frankfurt to open his own restaurant with a partner.

Osteria Enoteca was awarded a Michelin star in 1996, considered one of the highest honours a restaurant can possibly receive, as laid down by the Michelin Red Guide, one of the most trusted authorities on Europe's hotels and restaurants.

Obtaining and keeping a Michelin star is no simple task, and what Michelin gives, it can also very easily take away. Chef Carmelo received a pleasant surprise at the end of his night, learning via SMS that Osteria Enoteca had successfully maintained its Michelin rating for the 13th year running, receiving word from a colleague who had attended a press conference where it was announced.

There have rarely been gourmet offerings of this calibre in Kota Kinabalu, and one never knows when such an opportunity will ever come again. Gourmet Week ends tonight at Peppino Italian Restaurant. For more information, call Shangri-La's Tanjung Aru Resort and Spa at 088-327901.



Kitchen confidential (clockwise from top): Chef Carmelo Greco, Director of Sabah's Winecellars, Meng Tan, Peppino's Chef Rosario Seminatore, Massimo Pastura, and Shangri-la's Director of Food and Beverage, Daniel Michalski (sitting).



Gourmet guests (from left): Jasmine Chen, Rosita, Bruno, Fuad Ahmad and Daniel.



Sitting pretty (from left): Gary Teng, Massimo, Meng, Daniel, and Daniele Giovo (sitting).