

Keen & Able



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Michael (left) and Guy Rubino

THE REPUTATION OF A FINE ESTABLISHMENT IS BUILT NOT ONLY ON SUPERIOR CUISINE BUT ALSO BORNE ON THE BACK OF EXCELLENT SERVICE. PERHAPS NO ONE UNDERSTANDS THIS SYNERGY BETTER THAN THE RUBINO BROTHERS WHO HAVE NOT ONLY BEEN ACCLAIMED FOR THEIR TWO RESTAURANTS IN TORONTO, CANADA BUT ALSO FOR THEIR RIVETING MADE TO ORDER TELEVISION SERIES.

Growing up in a close-knit Italian community in Canada, Michael and Guy Rubino developed their passion of food early. While Guy went on to become a chef, Michael took a small detour, graduating from Wilfrid Laurier University with an honours bachelors degree in business administration and dabbling in the world of finance before being drawn irresistibly back to culinary fold. "When you start making cheese and curing your own meats at the age of seven, you kind of know which way your life is headed," quipped Guy.

They have taken their love for dining and wining one step further, creating a team to produce *Made To Order*, sharing with the world their daily trials and tribulations in running a kitchen as well as creating special menus catering to requests such as sealing a business deal and marriage proposals. When asked where they find the time to run two restaurants, the deadpan reply was, "We don't sleep much."

Their first enterprise began in 1987 when Michael convinced Guy to partner him in opening Gourmet Greens. "I offered him visions of grandeur and once he accepted there was no turning back," recollected Michael. The high-end café and catering company flourished and when the business was running itself, Guy took off to advance his culinary career, working in iconic restaurants such as Nobu and Mesa Grill in New York. He then came back armed with newfound knowledge which translated into success at ZooM Caffè and Bar which the brothers opened.

The brothers have so far started five restaurants together and are currently running Rain and Luce which are ranked amongst the best fine dining establishments in Toronto, Canada. Rain, which began operations in 2001, serves up Guy's take on Asian cuisine. Why would an Italian chef cook Asian cuisine? "I am fascinated with their technique," explained Guy, "There is a balance of sweet, sour and spiciness. It is also very philosophic and historical; there is a clear definition of the method to the madness." 'Ultra chic' is the oft used description for its interior which features waterfall walls and backlit bar designed by ARIDO Designers of the Year II by IV. This neat package of exceptional cuisine created by Guy, excellent service dished out by Michael and the elegant dining atmosphere garnered them the AAA Four Diamond Award in 2004.

While creating Rain and running its daily operations, the brothers began talking to Food Network Canada, pitching the idea of a television show which shed some insight into what happens in a high-end restaurant. These talks materialised in the form of their production company Mercer Street Films and the riveting *Made To Order* series debuted in 2003 making them a household name not only in North America but also in Asia when it premiered on Discovery Travel and Living channel earlier this year.

It's heartening to know that with showbiz being showbiz and that the series illustrates how the brothers let their ingenuity run with customised menus, they have not sold out on cuisine and hospitality principles. When asked what he would do should a diner request for a dish composing of sea urchin and ice cream for example, Guy replied that he, "would ask them what sort of drugs they are on and advise them to let me come up with something that made sense." Neither is Michael, the 'Master of Hospitality', impressed with rowdy and rude guests that would disrupt other patrons and would not hesitate to throw them out on the streets.



With the roaring success of Rain, they launched Luce in 2004, an Italian restaurant "because I am one and my parents would disown me if I opened another restaurant that was not," Guy said. The cuisine and wines on the menu are drawn from all regions of Italy with everything, from pasta, bread and desserts made from scratch.

While the two restaurants are just across a road from each other, they feature polar styles of cuisine, something which Guy was worried about initially since he was to head both kitchens. "I thought that it would be mind-boggling to think up dishes for each restaurant, but on the contrary, I find the different cuisines and styles keep my mind sharper and force me naturally to dig deep for creativity. It also gives me



putting in the final touches

a break from each so I don't get as bored easily," he shared. If he experiences a culinary mind block, he looks to markets, farmers and breeders for inspiration. "They are the real driving force behind this business. Without them I am nothing!"

Michael and Guy stay clear of sibling rivalry by recognising their own strengths and weaknesses and appreciating what each brings to the table. Guy has the final say on the culinary side of the restaurant while Michael handles the front of house functions. "We keep our roles defined and they are clearly different. When disputes cross paths, we sometimes argue but we have always said that the day we stop arguing is the day we should sell the restaurants because that means we do not care anymore," Michael said. They're content with their own roles in making their businesses work and when questioned if they would trade places with each other, Guy quipped, "It depends on whether we want to go bankrupt fast."

And therein lies the recipe for their success: Take two Italian brothers, mix in a large dose of creativity, add a strict adherence for hospitality principles with equal parts of culinary skill and a dash of panache. Smother mixture with mutual respect. Serves all. KT



the kitchen at Rain restaurant

In Made to Order, Michael and Guy Rubino think up menus to suit a situation. CW asks them to come up some advice for that certain special moment.

A first date...

Get your date to help you prepare, you get to know a lot about someone when you see how they work, it would also be a great ice breaker for conversation. Keep the menu simple cook something you *have* cooked before and do it well. Experiment on your own for the next date.

A marriage proposal...

Probably a series of smaller courses so that you can pick the appropriate time to pop the question or even decide whether or not you want to proceed. A short quick meal might fly by before you get the chance.

A break-up...

The complete antithesis to the above. Get in, eat quickly and get out as fast as you can and move on with your life.