

michael's magic

THE RUBINO BROTHERS RUN TWO OF

Toronto's hottest restaurants: the Asian-inspired Rain, and Luce, which is billed as 'trendy Italian'. Michael, 40, orchestrates the services aspect of the business while his brother Guy, 37, is the creative force in the kitchen. The two also own Mercer Street Productions, which produces *Made to Order*, a reality television cooking series that documents a day (and night) in the life of Rain, starting with guests' requests through to preparations in the kitchen, and up to the final presentation. Guy Hoh meets Michael Rubino in Hong Kong.

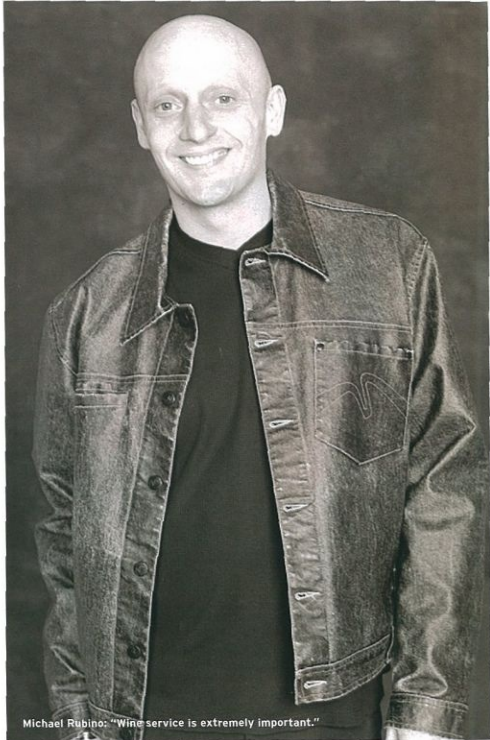
What would you say to someone who wants to start a restaurant business and embark on a career like yours? Everyone is going to tell you, you can't do it and it's a bad idea. If you are passionate and convinced about what you want to do, then do your planning, sort out the financing and give it a try. You could do worse for a career.

Be prepared to work extremely hard. My day commonly starts with helping with the produce mid-morning, and ends at one or two the next morning. This, plus the television series and the upcoming cookbook, consume us completely. Our girlfriends practically never see us!

You are the sommelier and mixologist in *Made to Order*. Do you only do that on television or is that really the case?

Our wine list is written and sourced by me but the staff (two sommeliers in each restaurant) contribute to it too. We make new cocktail combinations at the drop of a hat to suit the mood and menu, like you see on television. Besides the serious business of the night's service, cocktails are always a bit of fun. We love to recommend new and exotic flavours to surprise and please our guests. Sometimes the pleasure on their faces is priceless. In short, I do have a very active hand in the day-to-day operations of the restaurants, as a sommelier, mixologist and much more.

Drink and food pairings are what we strive for. Good drinks are meant to liven up the palate and work in unison with the magic, which is Guy's department. Our staff actually sit for



Michael Rubino: "Wine service is extremely important."

an exam that may last up to two hours, on the current menu, wine list and, food and wine pairings. We insist that they score at least 90 per cent so that they can serve our guests with knowledge and confidence. That is how important food and wine pairing is to us.

What wine styles do you recommend to your guests?

Fruit-forward (as opposed to strongly oaked) wines like pinot and shiraz work better with Asian food. My latest pick is viognier, and as they are ripping out chardonnay vines in California and planting viognier, I applaud it. Guy and I have had too much chardonnay in the last decade.

At Rain, we work with sparkling wines, champagnes and the lighter wines. The philosophy of the restaurant is really to do wine pairings that are interesting and support the Asian themes. We steer clear of the big and bold reds like amarone, cabernet from California and Bordeaux. However, at Luce, the wine list is a little more conventional with Italian reds at the forefront.

When it comes to wine, what are your personal favourites?

We are continually tasting and experimenting so I never have just one favourite. I like a good Italian chianti (sangiovese) with Guy's spaghetti and meatballs. With most Asian food, a sancerre from France or sauvignon blanc from New Zealand would be great. And in my opinion, red pinots for Asian-style meats are the best. Pinot in particular is an elegant wine