



abacá's Jason Hyatt

# Chef on Top

By Agnes M. Abrau

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**J**ason Hyatt knows good food. The chef from the US is at the center of yet another busy dinner service — cooking for guests and manning the kitchen.

Hyatt arrived in Cebu already brimming with the knowledge and experience to run a fine dining establishment. A graduate of the New England Culinary Institute in Montpelier, Vermont, USA, Hyatt completed his education and apprenticeship at the Mark Hotel in New York City and the Four Seasons Hotel in Philadelphia. After stints in France, Los Angeles and Hong Kong he felt ready to open his own place.

Now that he is both an entrepreneur and chef, Hyatt's behind-the-scenes efforts — while preparing to launch the buzz-worthy opening of an exclusive high-end boutique resort — are continuing to pay off and allowing him to see life from a different perspective.

## WORTH THE DRIVE

abacá, his special project, has been enticing diners to their 70-seat restaurant located at Punta Engano, Mactan Island, Cebu for almost 2 years.

"People drive for 45 minutes to come here, Cebu in general has been extremely supportive of our restaurant and resort, in no way did any of my partners nor myself expect such a positive response," he says matter-of-factly. For one who is intimately aware of the discerning diner's palate, Hyatt candidly explains how he feels they have one of the best restaurants in the country, adding "I have to believe we're the best because if I don't, how could I possibly instill those values in our staff? How can they achieve greatness and be proud of what they have achieved? I believe most chefs are a peculiar breed... high-strung, cocky, intense and most importantly proud of what we do," he states. His personal philosophy on food is: "Just keep it simple and don't mess with the product too much... use proper technique and the rest will fall in place"

## PRIVATE ESCAPE

abacá Boutique Resort is a multi-million peso investment, a business venture between the Hyatts, Jason and Anna, and their Hong Kong based partners — Marc and Jeny Compagnon. Jason, along with resort manager Glenn, take care of the overall operation of the resort while Anna handles marketing and PR. Jeny is completely responsible for the interiors of the resort while Marc acts as spiritual leader and advisor in mapping out their venture's future.

The entire resort sticks firmly to providing absolute privacy in a pampered environment. Guests are completely surrounded by lush foliage and unobstructed oceanfront views — the epitome of a private escape.

abacá's rates may be at a premium, but then guests do get what they pay for. The boutique resort features only nine rooms for accommodations — there are six deluxe suites and three pool villas equipped with all the modern amenities, including Wi-Fi. Each suite has its own personal butler service, a private terrace and other luxuries. The resort's architecture and décor gracefully complement its surroundings. The rooms, ranging from 600 to 1000-square feet, highlight a design concept they like to refer to as "contemporary Filipino heritage" with natural yet ethnic touches dominated by earthy tones of wood and stone.

## ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY FRIENDLY

To adhere to environmental principles, the resort invested in a sewage recycling plant that recycles water for their expansive gardens. They also use desalinated filtered reverse osmosis water sourced from a local water company.

A generous friend of the community, the resort also donates used oil to the barangay for re-use. Moreover, approximately 15 percent of its staff is from the host barangay in Punta Engano. Hyatt explains that they decided to keep staffing as local as possible early on.

How does a boutique resort survive in an industry crowded with giant competitors? Hyatt has vaulted past his first hurdle with the success of abacá restaurant, and once the resort opens in full swing, exclusivity, privacy and ambiance will be its singular appeal.