



PADMA

at *Karma* Samui

Celebrity chef **WILL MYERICK**
holds court at Karma's latest restaurant opening

Will Myerick is by far and away the poster boy for the Australian Super Chef prototype (although he actually comes from Scotland). Rumour has it that he and Gordon Ramsey were brought up Oliver Twist-style in the same Glaswegian poorhouse dreaming of 'hot sausage and mustard' when, - one frosty night - the spirit of Christmas past visited the starving waifs and prophesized that they would both grow up to be super chefs and have all the 'cold jelly and custard' they could eat.



The clear sightlines at Padma enable uninterrupted stunning views over the Gulf of Thailand



Although there probably isn't even a hint of truth in that rumour, both lads eventually flew the coop and made their names in the shaky world of celebrity chef-ing. A number of ingredients go into making a Super Chef. Their businesses reach geographically outside one city and beyond restaurants into other businesses. They are celebrated for their cooking talents and bedazzling, media-savvy ways. They manage large businesses, building brand names and personal wealth unheard of before among chefs. Gordon Ramsey has been described as the most articulate hateful purveyor of four letter words on television whereas Will Myerick comes to the Padma restaurant at the Karma resort Koh Samui, having been described as "the most talented Thai chef in all of Antipodea."

After a stint at the ultra fashionable Fifth Floor restaurant at Harvey Nichols in London, Will headed 'down under' and proceeded to dazzle Oz foodies with his unique style of sophisticated Asian street fare. Longrain in Sydney's hip Surrey Hills took Thai cuisine to a new level thanks to the talents of this young man. Thai Cooking is a heady mix of art, business, and passion, skill and success and Will reveals just how tenuous success is in the whacky restaurant world, and how passionate and motivated these men must be.





You obviously have a strong connection with Thailand. Do you think it's a self-fulfilling prophecy that Antipodeas most famous Thai chef would be re-incarnated in a resort named Karma?

I didn't believe in re-incarnation in my last life so I'm not going to start now. I love being back in The Land of Smiles and am looking forward to traveling to different parts of the kingdom to immerse myself in the various styles of cooking. Hopefully I can create the same vibe here in Karma as I did in Sydney's uber-trendy eating spots. An uncomplicated informal eating experience that brings out the essence of all that is good in Asian street fare and dispenses with the unnecessary frills. Thailand offers a wealth of culinary delights, from the Indian/Burmese influenced spicy curries in the northeast down to the Malay and Indonesian influences in the south. Then of course we have Vietnamese/French dishes along the western borders with a bit of Cambodian and Lao food thrown in for good measure.

They say that in the restaurant business you either sink or swim or you don't, would you agree with that?

Unfortunately I haven't got time for swimming, us celebrity chefs work very long hours you know.

What exactly is Asian street fare?

Basically its Asian peasant-hawker street food brought up to restaurant level.

Is it distinctively Thai.

Not really, nearly every major city in the world has a Chinatown including Bangkok and Chinese cooking has influenced many Asian cooking cultures.

So it's a mélange of pan-Asian fare with a hint of exotic eastern gastronomy.

I prefer to call it street food actually. I don't do the Royal Thai thing with the quaint little vegetable carvings. The local chefs here come to work and put together stuffy restaurant food then go home to their families and cook fantastic meals. I want to learn what it is they cook at home and try and get away from the formalized ritual of restaurant eating. The food should be served as it spits out of the kitchen, not in set courses.

Your hugely successful Jimmy Licks bar in Sydney has been described by reviewers as an exercise in simplicity yet with a reputation for attitude which was staffed by rock star/waiter actors. Do you aim to try and recreate this sophisticated hip, clubby, mover and shaker vibe within a resort environment?

Karma is a beach resort so we hope to create a beach club Ibiza style vibe, a sort of Ku De Ta on speed: pool parties, sunset cocktails, daybeds, chill out tunes and of course fantastic Asian street food.

What about other types of food, Italian jobs or French selections?

No, definitely not. We are creating an image. Although the restaurant is set within Karma resort it is a separate beastie, a branded operation. We want to encourage outside visitors to come to Padma and enjoy the clear sightlines and panoramic sea views around which the resort has been orientated. It's not only a great restaurant it's a dramatic architectural statement built on a landmark location

Foie Gras!

Pardon?

Do you think it's brutal to ram tubes down wee bird's necks and force feed them? Surely one should honour thy bird.

Our own visceral revulsion at the prospect of having tubes stuck down our throats may have to do with the fact we have a gag reflex; Birds don't have a gag reflex so it's not as cruel as it seems.

California 'Guberbator' Arnie Schwarzenegger has banned the production and sale of Foie Gras from the year 2012. There are even certain states in America which are considering banning live lobsters in restaurants. American domination of world politics is already an accepted phenomena and the "If your not with us your against us", veiled threat might spill over into our dietary habits. Do you think this American political correctness with affect the international food industry and we will all have to become lentil-eating tree huggers?

I refuse to have that tripe pushed down my throat; line fishing can actually be far crueler. Food rules lead to food police and that leads to gray mush on a paper plate. If we made rules about what we are allowed to eat and what is forbidden, the world would be a pretty dull place.

On a final note how do you feel about the fact that in the wake of London Town being chosen as the venue for the 2012 Olympics there have been numerous outpourings from European chefs (mainly French) lambasting the British food industry and calling into question the capabilities of Albion's finest. What say ye?

I think it's a cheap shot. The standard of restaurants in London far surpasses that of other many other major European cities, maybe even Paris itself. It reminds of an old joke we used to use to poke fun at the French chefs working in London: What did the mayor of Paris say to the visiting army as they entered the city?

Table for 100,000 M'sieur



Mixing it up!

Cocktail bartending used to be about hunky bartenders juggling bottles, maraschino cherries and fruit salads but things have changed dramatically. Tom Cruise eat your heart out, there's a new sheriff in town and his name is Grant Collins. He shot to fame past another 999 contestants by thinking on his feet during a 2000 contest for UK Barman of the Year, when he invented a Sapphire Martini with ten ingredients, including gin and lime cordial. Collins has since concluded that fewer ingredients make for a superior cocktail.

Signature cocktails at Samui and Jimbaran



His hip Zander Bar won him the UK Bar Manager of the Year title the same year. It is reputedly the world's longest bar and can be seen from the moon. Charmed by Australia, he took over the Water Bar at the W Hotel in 2001, winning the Sydney Morning Herald's Bar of the Year within five months. Chosen for the Australian liquor industry's Bar Manager of the Year award in 2002, his Water Bar was awarded the best cocktail list for 2003. As a slew of professional recognitions came his way, Collins set up his international Bar Solutions consultancy. Today, his clients include luxury liquor brands like Moët-Hennessy and Belvedere vodka.

Up to their knees in 'Spit Roast Marys' - tomatoes grilled not shaken- Grant and his team member Max took the bar-staff of Karma Samui through the paces of a very intense training session. "There is a lot more preparation necessary these days and a method to balancing the taste and knowing how flavours work together. Bartending and cooking are getting to be fairly similar. The bar I recently opened in Sydney has two guys coming in three times a week, for four hours just to prepare the mise en place, only for the bar, not the kitchen".

This Spit-roasted Mary packs a punch



Grant had been approached by Karma's owner John Spence to discuss the concept and evolution of Karma. "John wanted a mission statement, a branded operation. He has the pulse of the market and is often a trendsetter. He realized that so many so called five-star hotels and restaurants are offering 1 star beverage. It seems that people invest more time, money and energy into the light fittings and furniture than they do in the drinks. John didn't want bells and whistles he wanted world class quality drinks and service in keeping with his world class resorts.

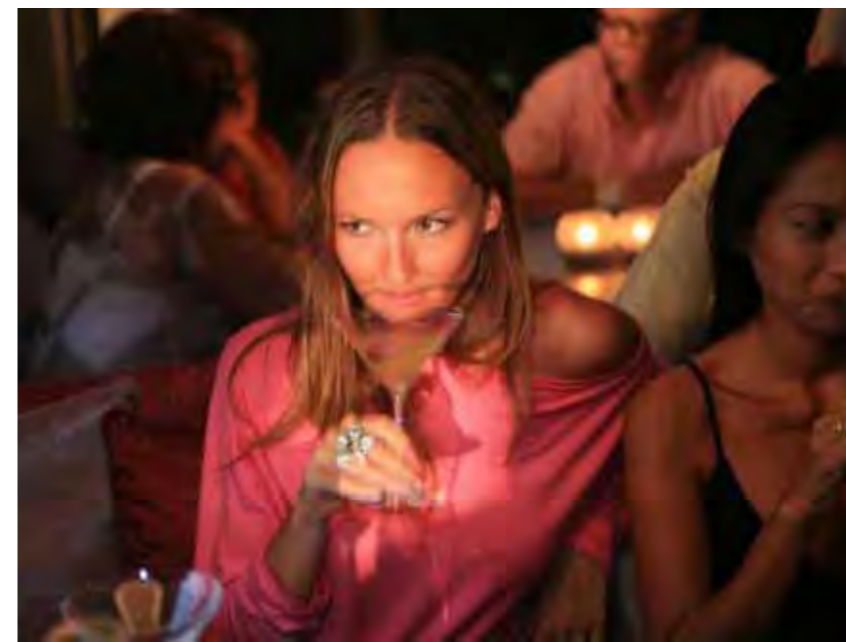
As Collins takes Karma staff through a crash course on cocktails, we encounter a brave new world. Of Molecular Mixology, for one, taking off from the Molecular Gastronomy trend set by Michelin-starred restaurants like Berkshire's

Fat Duck, which serves oysters and passion-fruit jelly, tobacco sorbet, or spice bread ice-cream and crab syrup, all based on scientific principles.

How does this extend to cocktails? Collins serves up an array of options, based on kitchen principles. Such as vanilla air foam based on egg whites and gelatine on a pineapple or passion-fruit cocktail. Or a whisky sour topped with passion-fruit foam. Or gin and tonic lozenges. Or even liquid nitrogen martinis that flow straight into the blood system.

What's a perfect cocktail bar experience about? Collins evokes it vividly. The ambience should be perfect, the lighting just right. The cocktails should be consistently creative, tailor-made to the individual customer. And there should be a positive, friendly interface between the mixologist and the drinker.





What, one wonders, is a mixologist?

With a huge grin, Collins replies, "Two friends of mine set up the Met Bar at The Metropolitan at Park Lane, London, in 1993. It was a cool cocktail bar, where each private member was charged 10,000 sterling. It became the haunt of the rich and the famous, including Madonna. Its cocktails were created by mixologists. Now, the term has spread to the rest of the world."

Frankly, people are trying to find the right term. To me, a mixologist is a bartender who looks outside the bar but in the kitchen as well. People are still grappling with a definition. A bartender is one who just turns up to do the job. A mixologist is a professional cocktail bartender who is head and shoulders above the bourgeoisie. Therein lies the world of a difference. What separates a mixologist from a bartender?

There is a drive that they lack. The internet or any other resource is always available. All that bartenders and aspirants have to do is copy it and add it into their repertoire.

Most bartenders do not want to know hundreds of recipes or delve deeper into the history of gin and vodka. They do not really care and that is what shuts them out of the clique. Sometimes it is the individual's responsibility and drive but could also be the prerogative of the bar manager to cite the bartender and help him transcend to the next level. Bartending is a grown up job that needs to be taken seriously. Those who do, graduate to the level of mixology.

What else does the master mixologist have up his sleeve? Always the entertainer he lays on a humour-laced Power point alcohol presentation. We savvy up to vodka wisdom. That vodka is 70 per cent purest artesian water. That the original formula used in Poland in the 10th century or so was more fit for scouring pots and pans than for mixing cocktails with. That the average Pole consumes a litre of vodka daily, which led to thousands of deaths by cirrhosis a century ago. Then Collins deftly mixes a gimlet, a Cosmopolitan, and a series of invented cocktails in a jiffy. While shaking it all to perfection, he shares lore about their origins, the secrets of a good cocktail, and how to lend a local dash to mixing drinks. Such as sake-based cocktails in Japan. Or how barbecued tomatoes with celery salt can add flair to a Bloody Mary.

What does the uber-bartender like to do on his night off we ponder?

"I like to relax with a decent pint of lager, a packet of crisps and a game of darts. Its not easy being the worlds leading mixologist, the groupies wear me out. I could tell you a few cocktails, I kid you not".

On a final note does Mr Mixology believe that the first cocktails were a deliberate fusion of various exotic ingredients of perhaps just a fortunate accident? 'I don't know if its true or not but I was one told that 'Fruit Punch' was a gay boxer and that the first ever cocktail was made by a mischievous alter boy, hence the song "Who put the Benzedrine in Father Murphy's Ovaltine".