

Dueling Chefs at Metro Restaurant?

By Linda U. Foley

One would think that two chefs are one too many in any kitchen. At Metro Restaurant in Lafayette, however, the exception is the rule.

Here, the ingredients for a successful, youthful chef team are one Paul Liao, the fish expert, combined with one Jason Low, the meat lover.

Apart from sharing an Asian heritage—which explains menu items such as Misoyaki Black Cod with scallion rice cake—they share similar previous career paths; Paul worked at Merrill Lynch and Jason, at Schwab. Having turned in their respective id badges, they turned to developing their palettes and gustatory hands-on skills.

Paul followed in the luminary footsteps of “Bam” Emeril and attended the Johnson & Wales University in Rhode Island. “Eventually, it was the awesome fresh produce,” Paul says, that brought him back to California. In addition, European kitchens, having lived in Switzerland and Austria, also influenced his approach to food. His restaurant experience includes working at Aqua in San Francisco. Then, family reeled him back to the East Bay.

Paul and Jason’s paths did not cross until they began to work at Metro, nearly a year ago.

Jason took a slightly different route to becoming a chef, going directly from corporate to restaurant work at Jardinière in San Francisco,



Jason Low and Paul Liao

applying an inherent cooking talent with lessons learned at his mother’s “apron.”

Jason and Paul agree that, while they are not always in blissful accord, they both enjoy the challenges as well as the immediacy and satisfaction of seeing their menus turn into culinary and artistic manifestations.

Metro brings urban sophistication to the neighborhood thanks to owners Erika, who is Asian/German, and husband/sommelier Jack Moore, who has worked with Wolfgang Puck and Thomas Keller. Combining their Asian/Metropolitan tastes with these young innovative chefs is then not surprising.

Their mothers’ kitchens influenced both chefs and the family feeling continues in the structure of the chefs with the owners. The atmosphere between them is pleasant, warm, unhurried and supportive. Menu ideas are a joint venture and “as a family” they are determined

to make Metro the best place for anyone to come to no matter the occasion, group size, or time of day. Each of their faces is animated as they speak of developing Metro into THE place for people to come even if just for coffee or drink on the patio.

This restaurant recognizes its “savvy clientele” and what it seeks. To that end, the newly developed brunch for Saturday/Sunday is already under way and well received, featuring jazz with local saxophonist Matt Morrish. A book signing for Michael Gyulai of *Midnight in Rome* is planned and in the offing are ideas for a local “produce exchange” on the patio, hosting fundraisers and fashion shows.

While the two chefs model is rare, it is a successful approach at Metro. With these two chefs turning out well-done dish time after time, can Michelin recognition be far behind?