



# STRATTA'S SPHERE

WITH THE WORLD GOURMET SUMMIT JUST AROUND THE CORNER, JULIA HAWES ASKS VISITING MASTERCHEF ALESSANDRO STRATTA WHAT'S IN STORE FOR SINGAPORE GOURMETS.

**Chef Stratta, please could you tell us a little about your culinary background?**

I was born as a fifth-generation hotelier.

I began my career at 15 as a dishwasher in a steakhouse in Connecticut called Manero's. Then worked at the Westlake Plaza Hotel in Southern California as a cook, and later at the Beverly Hills Hotel as a cook.

After graduating from college, I went to the California Culinary Academy where I graduated with honours. During that time I also worked as a pastry cook at the Stanford Court Hotel with Chef Jim Dodge from 1984 to 85.

From there, I received a *stage* at the Hotel de Paris' Louis XV restaurant. What began as a two-month *stage* ended up being my full time job for over two years, in 1986 and 87.

From there Chef Alain Ducasse suggested I work for a friend of his at Le Cirque in New York. I worked there with Daniel Boulud in 1988 and 89. Meeting a guest at the restaurant, I was introduced to Mr. Charles Keating at the end of 1998 and he offered me a post as Executive Chef of Mary Elaine's – the fine-dining room at the New Phoenician, where I worked for two years, then to be promoted to Executive Chef of the hotel at 29. After my stint as Executive Chef, I returned to Mary Elaine's and stayed

there from 1996 to 1998.

In August of 1998, I was offered a restaurant by casino mogul, Steve Wynn. I accepted the job as Chef of Renoir and was there until 2004.

In April of 2005, I was given charge of restaurant Alex at Wynn Las Vegas and have now been here almost one year.

**What or who was your greatest influence in becoming a chef?**

Alain Ducasse, Daniel Boloud, Jim Dodge and Franck Cerutti.

**Can you tell us about your passion for Riviera Cuisine and how it originated?**

It is the cuisine that represents both French and Italian Rivieras, focusing on seasonal ingredients, olive oil, vegetables and seafood. I fell in love with it during my tenure living on the French Riviera.

**What are your favourite flavours and ingredients?**

Olive oil, sea salt and fresh fish.

**Where do you get your inspiration?**

Food history, classic cuisine and the season's best ingredients.

**Do you have a food philosophy?**

Make the ingredients the star, they should taste like they are supposed to taste. Simple is not always easy.

**How do you decide what to put on your menu?**

Seasonality of product and signature year-round dishes.

Bearing in mind Singapore will be a casino town in the not-too-distant future, is it a different experience heading up a restaurant in a casino compared to one in a hotel or an independent restaurant? And if so, why?

The advantages of working in a casino are; a captive audience; people feeling adventurous; and consistent business levels and financial support from big corporations/owners.

**What are you looking forward to most about travelling to Singapore for the World Gourmet Summit?**

I participated a few years ago and found the Singapore community's enthusiasm towards progressive cuisine palpable.

**For those diners lucky enough to taste your food during the World Gourmet Summit what do you hope they will take away with them?**

Simple cooking is the way to go!

Would you share with *Expat* readers the recipe for a favourite dish at Alex, or the recipe for a signature dish that you will be preparing for the World Gourmet Summit?

**SHORT RIB OF BEEF WITH POTATO GNOCCHI, RED WINE AND CANDIED SHALLOTS (SERVES 4)**

**For the braised ribs:**

- 4 short rib sides
- 100ml olive oil
- 1 medium white onion (diced)
- 1 medium carrot (peeled and diced)
- ½ head of garlic (cut in half)
- 10 sprigs fresh thyme
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 grams black peppercorns
- 75ml red wine vinegar
- 750ml cabernet sauvignon
- 8l rich chicken stock

Heat a tilt skillet to full heat and add half the oil. Allow the oil to smoke and add the short ribs. Colour well on all sides and cook until brown. Remove the ribs from the pan and degrease. Add the remaining oil and sweat the vegetables and aromats until lightly coloured. Add the ribs back in and deglaze with the vinegar. Reduce to dry and add the wine. Reduce the wine by half and add the stock. Bring to a full boil and simmer, covered, for five hours, or until meat is very tender. Remove the ribs and strain the stock. Chill the meat and cut into three ounce rectangles, serve two per person. Allow the stock to cool and remove all of the excess fat that rises to the surface. Place in a saucepot and reduce to sauce consistency. Strain and keep warm. Remove one litre of the stock and save for warming up the ribs for serving.

**For the Gnocchi:**

- 8 Idaho potatoes (80 count)
- 1 egg
- ¾ to 1 cup all purpose flour
- ½ tsp. fine sea salt
- 1 cup coarse sea salt

Pre-heat a convection oven to 190°C. Rinse and dry the potatoes well and place them on a small baking sheet with a layer of the coarse sea salt. This will draw any excess moisture from the potatoes. Bake the potatoes for 45-50 minutes, or until the potatoes are thoroughly cooked.

Once cooked, cut them in half, lengthwise, and scoop out pulp into a potato ricer. Dust a clean surface with a small amount of flour and rice the pulp onto the floured surface. Make a "well" in the pulp and add the egg to the warm potato pulp and begin to incorporate the flour, a ¼ cup at a time, while not overworking the dough. It is important that the dough remain warm throughout the process. Add the rest of the flour and incorporate all but three tablespoons until dough is smooth.

Once dough is smooth, cut off, with a pastry scraper, a quarter of the dough. Flour a clean and even surface lightly and roll the dough into a 2cm cylinder (about 60cm long), and then cut into 2.5cm pieces. Repeat with the rest of the dough.

Roll the dough over the back of a floured fork, or use a butter curler, to make the gnocchi. (This creates grooves in the gnocchi that will help the sauce cling to them) and reserve at room temperature up to 6 hours in a dry room.

**For the Candied Shallots:**

- 20 large shallots
- 3 tbs. honey
- 6 tbs. sherry vinegar
- 3 cups port wine
- 3 tbs. olive oil
- To taste salt and pepper

Heat a sauté pan over medium heat and add the oil. Allow oil to smoke and add the peeled shallots. Sauté and lightly colour evenly. Season and add honey. Caramelize and deglaze with vinegar. Reduce dry, simmering and add the port wine. Simmer and reduce to a syrup and shallots are thoroughly tender. Add the glazed shallots to the short ribs and sauce.

**For the Butter sauce:**

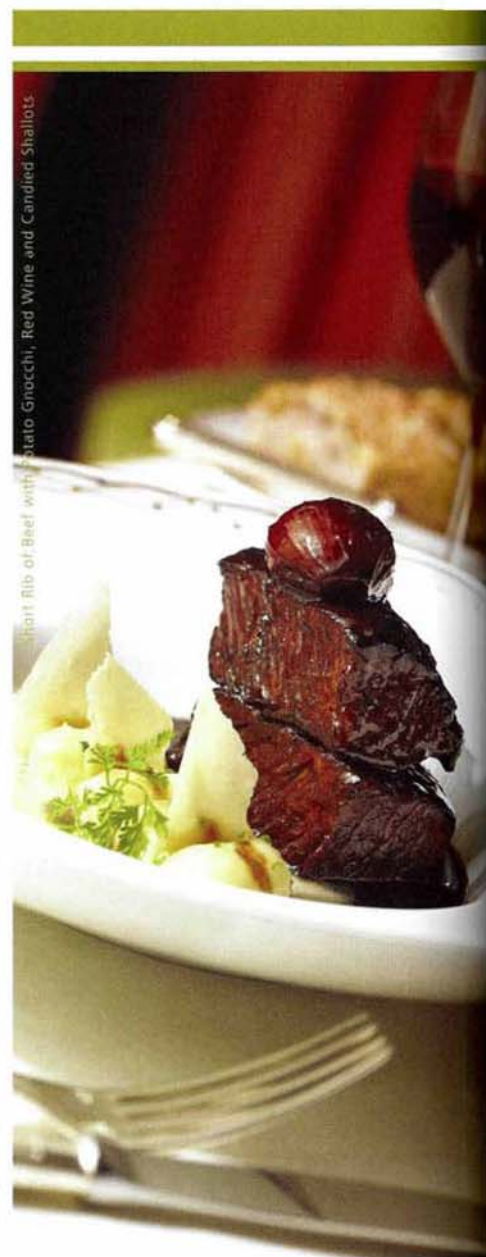
- ½ cup minced shallots
- 1 bunch thyme
- 1 cup dry white vermouth
- 1 cup chicken stock
- 1 tbs. heavy cream
- 1 ½ tbs. sweet butter
- ½ cup grated Parmigiano cheese
- 4 tbs. minced Chives
- To taste salt and pepper

Sweat the shallots in a tablespoon of butter and add the thyme, deglaze with the vermouth and reduce to dry, add the chicken stock and reduce to one tablespoon. Add the cream and simmer, pull off the heat and incorporate the butter in small pieces until smooth. Strain through a fine sieve and season. Finish with the cheese and chives moments before serving.

**For the garnish:**

- 20 grams shaved Parmigiano cheese
- 4 chervil sprigs

To present the dish warm the ribs in the cooking juice and then glaze in the reduced sauce. Cook the gnocchi in simmering, salted water and glaze them in the butter sauce, adding the cheese and chives. Slice the steak into thin slices and serve.



Short Rib of Beef with Potato Gnocchi, Red Wine and Candied Shallots