

Featured Chef: Lee Hillson

Written by Interview by Melissa Larsen

Featured Chef Lee Hillson of T.Cook's at the Royal Palms Resort and Spa in Scottsdale.



Photography by Jackie Mercandetti

How did you get your start in the restaurant business?

When I was knee-high to a grasshopper in Australia, my parents would always have friends over. My brother Stuart and I were always in the kitchen watching people cook (he soon got bored then I was by myself). That sparked my interest. Then, in England, my first job was washing dishes at a local cafe when I was 13. At about 15, I went to a restaurant next door and washed dishes but was also allowed to do roast potatoes on Sundays.

What is your favorite Valley restaurant, besides your own?

I actually have a few. Elements, Tarbell's, Zinc Bistro, [Pizzeria] Bianco, Los Dos Melinos, Senior Taco in Mesa, Oregon's—I'm all over the shop.

What is your favorite dish at your restaurant?

Hard choice for me. Probably a choice between the slow-roasted lamb stuffed with a rosemary mousse, the monkfish with a Moroccan-style shrimp stew, or the pasta Carbonara.

What is the most memorable meal you've ever had?

I'm not very decisive—again, I have a few. Restaurant Alex at the Wynn in Vegas, Guy Savoy, again in Vegas, or this small place overlooking the harbor in Livorno, Italy with friends and family (What could be better?) I had some killer pasta with clams and octopus and a whole fish that was just roasted with a few tomatoes on it and lemon.

If you could have anyone visit your restaurant, who would it be?

I'm a diehard Bon Jovi fan so that's one or Nicole Kidman, but I'd probably trip over my tongue if I met her. Stunning lady.

Name three ingredients that you have at home at all times.

Olive oil, garlic and fleur de sel.

What is your favorite bottle of wine or cocktail?

Gin and tonic, baby (with a lemon, not lime)! Saturday night is horror movies and G&T's until the early hours. That's how I unwind from a long week.

What do you like to do in your free time?

I like to read, go to the gym (trying to get in shape other than round), love movies and play on my PS3 a little (FYI I suck at Rock Band).