

## Featured Chef: Lee Hillson

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**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, Oregano'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).