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## TRUE TO HIS HERITAGE

Macau's António Restaurant welcomes its new chef, David Abreu; despite it being his first major appointment, the Waterside Inn alumnus certainly presents a promising future.

**I**llustrious careers have to start from somewhere, and Portuguese native David Abreu seems to have all the right components. The young upstart first entered the culinary world at age 15, attending a professional culinary school near his hometown of Ribatejo and working his way through the restaurant industry. Though he started as a humble waiter, he eventually worked in the kitchens of several luxury hotels, including the SANA Malhoa Hotel, the Grande Real Villa Italia Hotel & Spa, and the Four Seasons Hotel Ritz Lisbon.

Abreu's claim to fame however, is the two years spent at three-Michelin-starred Waterside Inn, where he was under the mentorship of legendary British chef Alain Roux. Along with a year spent at the Four Seasons Hotel Hampshire, Abreu's time in the UK helped expand his knowledge base of fine European cooking, adding to his expertise in his native cuisine.

The move to Macau plays to his strengths. Abreu's new appointment at the helm of António, an award-winning Michelin guide restaurant in the historic Taipa Village of Macau marks a return to familiarity. With the restaurant's reputation within the Portuguese fine-dining scene in Macau, and Abreu's own experience with some of the best kitchens in the world, the potential is palpable.

**You spent most of your time working in the Portuguese dining scene; why the shift to the UK?**

There comes a time in every young chef's life that you ask yourself; what next? At the time I went through a quarter-life crisis

almost, and I contemplated a change in environment. It made a lot of sense at the time – I had no attachments, no girlfriend, and no children – and I craved for an adventure, especially one that would help me grow as a chef.

I was at the Four Seasons in Lisbon when I went through this, and I told my head chef about this decision that I was contemplating. He was very understanding and told me that he would look out for potential opportunities for me. As luck would have it, the very next day he called me into his office and told me that the Four Seasons Hampshire was looking for someone to join the team. I felt that the English country side was a far enough departure from what I was used to, so I took up the offer. I haven't looked back since.

**How has your time at the Waterside Inn influenced the way you approach food?**

It was always a dream of mine to eventually work in a Michelin-starred kitchen; so when the opportunity to join the Waterside Inn came up, how could I say no? The experience

I got was life changing. It was a constant learning curve, and I found myself having to grow each day. You really have to perform at the highest level possible and give nothing less than 100 percent. I lived and breathed the kitchen there. I would even say I learned more in my two years there than I would have in 10 years elsewhere.



Cosy dining at António Restaurant



Steak with roasted potatoes, Portuguese smoked ham and fried egg



Roasted suckling pig



Marinated sardines on corn bread toast

**How then, would you describe your culinary philosophy?**

I wouldn't call it my own philosophy, per se. Especially now in the age of information, I think most tend to develop theirs based on certain chefs they know of or have worked with

before. We build our identity based on those that came before us. Nonetheless, there are three things that I cannot compromise on: cleanliness, teamwork and love. A clean environment helps give a clear mind, and one can really focus on the flavours and dishes that one plates. Ultimately, without teamwork and love, a kitchen can never truly serve up exceptional cuisine.

**As a Portuguese native, how do you intend to approach your role in António?**

I really like being in Taipa Village as it feels exactly like a slice of Lisbon, even down to the street lamps, buildings and architecture. That being said, Macau does have its own brand of gastronomy, mixing some Portuguese influence with the Chinese base.

As such, I feel like I have a responsibility almost, with António, to be a culinary ambassador to my country by giving the most authentic experience of Portuguese food to the people of Macau.

**And how do you intend to do that?**

I am currently sticking purely to very traditional dishes; despite my stints in other styles of European cuisine, I believe traditional Portuguese flavours are timeless. I want to uphold these dishes by staying true to their flavour profiles. The signature dishes that I am bringing to António reflects this, including the Mirandesa (a Portuguese specialty veal loin), Slow Roasted Suckling Pig, and Portuguese Seafood Rice. These legacy dishes, I believe, will help to cement Portuguese fine dining in Macau.

**It's your first big role in a restaurant. How has the experience been so far, and what's next for the team?**

While António has been on the guide for 11 years running, I've already experienced what it's like being in a three-starred kitchen. The personal pressure itself isn't too daunting. What's definitely been a challenge is having to manage my own team of talented chefs. I find that it's really easy to become overly independent in such a role. Often, because we are so passionate about cooking, it's hard to take a step back and let your staff do their job. It's always too easy to want to jump in and intervene and say 'I want it done this way'. Ultimately, trust and respect is what makes a cohesive team, and I have learnt to do the same for my staff. We are really focused on the level of care we take with our food, and to bring a certain mindset to the kitchen. When we take care of that, the fruit of our labour will definitely show, stars or otherwise. ☺



António-style seafood rice