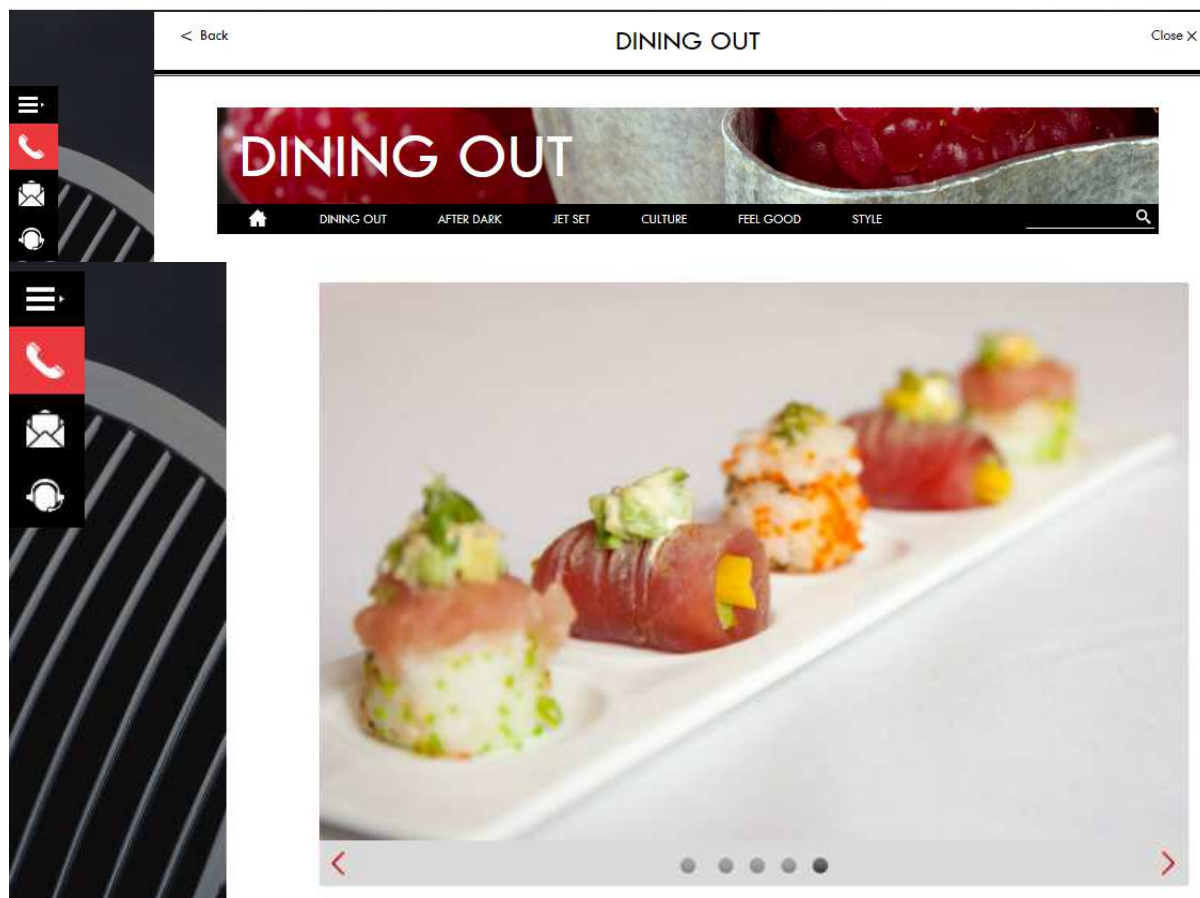


Quintessentially Lifestyle interview feature – Ian Pengelley, Mango Tree and Pan Chai – 19th May 2014



IAN PENGELLEY, THE PAN-ASIAN FREE-SPIRIT

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Beginning his culinary journey at the young age of 15, Ian Pengelley lives and breathes exquisite cultural cuisine. With the majority of his childhood spent in Hong Kong, Pengelley embarked upon his gastronomic tour of Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and China before returning to the heart of London to share his passion for the Orient.

*Taking Britain's culinary scene by storm, Pengelley is now the executive chef at a **Nozomi** - a trendy, new-style Japanese establishment in Knightsbridge, and the consultant chef at Belgravia's award-winning Thai venue, **Mango Tree**. The establishment has also made a permanent stopover at Harrods' legendary food hall, along with **Pan-Chai**, boasting dishes that are as free-spirited as the creator himself.*

Quintessentially Insider sat down with this Pan-Asian savant to discover a little bit more about his ethnic-inspired lifestyle...

Q: Was a chef's hat always in your future?

IAN: No, not at all - I never wanted to be a chef. Following in the footsteps of the rest of my family, I reluctantly joined the army, eventually leaving at the age of 15 to become a kitchen porter in a 1-star country club in Northampton. One day, the chef fired someone in the kitchen, turned to me and said 'Ginger, you're cooking!' – and from then on, I just loved it.

Q: What inspired you to tackle the realm of Pan-Asian cooking?

IAN: When I was 20, someone called me to ask if I would like to go to Hong Kong. Two weeks later, I was there and I fell in love with the city and all of its flavours. I spent around eight or nine years in Hong Kong, working in Chinese hotels, Japanese restaurants, and I even lived with a Thai family for six months - provoking my love for chilli and Thai cooking. When I came back, I worked in New York and Sydney, but I stuck to Asian techniques. During my time in Sydney, I grasped the concept of Pan-Asian food, which embraces the plethora of Thai, Chinese, Vietnamese and Japanese food, all under one roof.

Q: How do you stay current on the newest trends globally?

IAN: I go out a lot, I visit many restaurants, and all I really do is eat. I just got back from Tokyo as Mango Tree and Pan Chai frequently send me out on research and development trips – they recently sent me to Hong Kong as well, where we ate in 15 restaurants within 9 days! You stay current by trying out new places, reading the relevant magazines and discovering the eager, young, up-and-coming chefs who are filled with new ideas.

Q: What would you say is your most innovative, out-of-the-box dish?

IAN: Pan-Chai is really great for the sort of thing; we do different £150 platters of food and an array of smoky sashimi which I would say is a must-try. At Mango Tree we also do fun things, on one special occasion we made the menu into an origami bird cage with fine print that had to be read with little magnifying glasses – it was exciting!

Q: You're constantly coming up with new ideas for the fusion of flavours – such as your signature hollowed out pineapple filled with spicy red Thai curry. What is your creation process?

IAN: When you go to Thailand and see a dish that looks nice and tastes great, you contemplate how you can make it more elegant and creative. You constantly read magazines, research new combinations, speak to fellow chefs, maybe steal some ideas – dare I say that! You have got to keep yourself out there and aware at all times, you never know when inspiration will strike. Sometimes at Mango Tree, I go downstairs and tell the sous-chefs that I want four new dishes from them by next week – and they come up with some great ideas.

Q: How Westernised do you think the Thai food in the UK is?

IAN: They say that you don't get proper Thai food out of Thailand, but I disagree. Yes, we do have to tone it down a little bit here as many people cannot handle the extreme spices and chillies, but I try to make every dish here as authentic as you can have it. We call it 'fine-dining Thai' – it is slightly more refined and elegant but the authenticity of the dish remains.

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Q: What can we expect to see next? Will you ever venture towards a cuisine out of the Orient?

IAN: I am staying with Asian food for now. I do cook other cuisines such as Iranian, French, Mexican and a bit of Indian – which I love. There are a few things in the mix, as I said, I have just been to Tokyo to check out some new ideas but my passion is Thai food – so hopefully I will be sent to discover some new flavours in Thailand soon. I am getting better and better at Pan-Asian cooking, and I have many new ideas, so watch the Mango tree and Pan-Chai space!

Malika Hemnani