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4 APERTURE EXHIBITION

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2017.1.2-3.10 上海环球金融中心94楼
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SWFC OBSERVATORY | 2017 SPECIAL PRESENTING
上海环球金融中心观光厅非凡呈现

PAUL ESCHBACH

Thrills, Spills and Knife Skills

By Betty Richardson

After 20 years of cooking, much of it in the Jean Georges restaurants of New York and Shanghai, Three on the Bund's executive head chef Paul Eschbach talks about the grueling times, sacrifices and privileges that truly made him a chef.

What was it like being a chef in New York as intense as people say?

The old saying about New York is accurate: if you can make it there, you can make it anywhere. It's an insane grind. I would wake up every morning dry heaving because I was nervous about how the day would go. Even when I became executive sous chef, you still didn't know what each day entails.

The pay for cooks is terrible across the board. If you don't have financial support from your family, it's virtually impossible. The better the restaurant, the lower the pay. It's a 'teaching' thing - you're paying for the privilege of learning from the best.

Which part of it was particularly grueling?

Tons. I used to get yelled at for "not smiling." Jean-Georges would say, "What's the matter with the guy? That guy is never smiling. I don't trust him." Eventually I'd just smile every time Jean-Georges was in the room.

Things get better though, don't they?

Years ago, one of the hardest jobs I had was at Nougatine [another Jean-Georges restaurant in New York]. I was tasked with weeding out the people who obviously weren't going to make it 'upstairs' [to the Jean Georges kitchen], to make their lives so difficult that they'd quit. I did that for about two years.

It's never personal... If we don't rid them of these bad habits, they're going to take them to Jean Georges where there is an immaculate open kitchen. Shanghai isn't much



different. There's no way a chef fresh from culinary school can work in the open kitchen at Jean Georges; they'd be a mess.

Open kitchens in Shanghai run rampant. They scare me. I don't want to see what's going on in there, and then I'm eating that food. You go to Din Tai Fung on the other hand, and they look dope. They got masks on, they're organized, coordinated and immaculate.

Working in Shanghai isn't the same as New York, so how do you create a climate for excellence here?

We have people like Chef Kelvin at Mercato who just absorb everything around them, who go home and read cookbooks, get online and research what food should be. You can be a fine cook, but if you're not looking at what others are doing, you'll never be creative.

The quality of local chefs is also improving, and they're getting younger thanks to culinary schools

in Shanghai. But then there are standouts. We have one junior cook, and when he cooks, it's sexy. He's wiping down [counters], he's touching everything delicately and deftly; when he cooks he does so with attention and love. He's like a machine. And guess what? The guy speaks no English. It's not about where you're from.

What brings you the most joy in this role?

Seeing my chefs succeed, and watching them grow into the best cooks that they can be.

Mercato (6321 9922), Jean Georges (6321 7733), Chi-Q (6321 6622), Three on The Bund, 3 Zhongshan Dong Yi Lu, by Guangdong Lu 中山东一路3号外滩三号2楼, 近广东路. Nearest metro: Nanjing Dong Lu, 15 mins.