

Calgary's Chefs

Chef in Profile: **Michael Dekker**

Restaurant:

Balance Lounge and Eatery

Recently voted one of Enroute Magazine's Top 25 Hot Spots for 2008, Balance Lounge and Eatery has managed to pull off a lofty spot in Calgary's top restaurants with its unique menu and cocktails offerings despite being on the restaurant scene for only a few months.

Located on the corner of 14th Street and 16th Avenue SW, just off trendy 17th Avenue, Balance has an unassuming look from the outside and simple contemporary furnishings inside. Owner Karam Badrudin seems to reflect the name of his restaurant, a balance between shrewd businessman, energy and someone who knows how to enjoy life.

Part of Balance's success may be Badrudin's desire to get things right from the start. Hiring consulting chef Michael Dekker has proven to be a very smart decision.

Dekker started working in the kitchens of Earls Restaurants as a dishwasher when he was 14 years old. Once he realized he wanted to be a chef, he went back to SAIT for training and left with top honours and a few scholarships and bursaries in tow. Seven years later Dekker joined one of America's premiere culinary consulting firms, Elizabeth Blau and Associates, as a consulting chef, a prestigious position and one that Dekker still enjoys immensely.

Just back from winning silver at the 2008 international competition of the Meilleur Jeune Commis Rotisseur in Paris, Dekker's creativity shows up in Balance's menu. Unique dishes such as blackened pork tenderloin with red wine emulsion and spiced Alberta beef steak with chipotle syrup sound very tempting. Dekker's signature dish, lobster grilled cheese with tomato soup shooter, is enough to draw anyone in for a taste.

"The people I've worked with have influenced my cooking style," says Dekker. "One in particular was an Austrian who used a lot of Asian and world flavours in his cooking and the other chef was a Welshman. I learned there are two sides to every dish; it's a philosophy I use in a lot of my cooking."

As a consulting chef, Dekker helps design appealing dishes and beverages. He enjoys using a variety of ingredients in unique ways to create his dishes but always comes back to the basics.

"I like good, tasty, simple food," he says. "I also like to use local ingredients and I really like cooking with fresh mushrooms from B.C."

The restaurant's success may also be due its dynamic people working there. Dekker points out that it's a great team with Badrudin at the helm and chef Jeremy Simms in the kitchen. Pulling together is something they've done from day one apparently.



L-R: Karam Badrudin, owner of Balance, and consulting chef Michael Dekker

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"The night before the grand opening party, one of the mirrors above the bar was improperly installed and it fell and shattered on all the glassware below," Dekker laughs. "But we got it cleaned up just in time and the grand opening went off without another hitch."

In his spare time Dekker enjoys golf, culinary travel and sharing his passion for cooking with friends. And as for the future, his goals are simple.

"We hope to expand and have more venues," says Dekker, "and make a name for ourselves in Calgary." 