

Calgary's Chefs

Chef in Profile: Rick Chuk

Restaurant: Le Villa Restaurant

When most restaurant owners think of location, they think of downtown. But in Calgary, downtown real estate is at premium and patrons and staff may have trouble finding parking. Le Villa Restaurant, which offers French, Italian and Asian fusion cuisine, is one of those restaurants that have bucked the trend with much success.

Rick Chuk, executive chef and owner of Le Villa, kept parking issues in mind when he was looking for a location for his restaurant. Chuk worked as chef for 17 years at the popular Buchanan's Restaurant where some days he couldn't park in his reserved spot at the restaurant. When the chef can't get to his kitchen, you've got a problem.

Le Villa opened its doors three years ago at its present location at West Market Square where Chuk found the perfect location for his restaurant. And it just happened to have convenient parking all around it.

"I was looking for a restaurant and I didn't have a particular location," says Chuk. "My friend told me this place was for sale and when I walked in I felt the warmth right away and thought, that's it; I want to buy it!"

The restaurant is unique in that it offers both an intimate indoor seating area and a more open seating area in its inviting sunroom. Both feature large stone fireplaces that make Le Villa a very romantic place to dine.

Chuk, who has 31 years in the restaurant industry, knows what it takes to make his restaurant successful. Since its opening in 2005, Le Villa has nearly doubled its business every year with almost 90 per cent of his customers being regulars and keeps winning awards for its excellent menu.

Chuk points out that the restaurant's success may lie in the fact that many of his staff members have been with the restaurant since opening day.

"It's almost like a family here; we have a good foundation of staff with some of the people having been here for four or

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five years." He smiles citing that a few of the staff stayed on to work for Le Villa when it replaced the previous restaurant at this location.

But Chuk expects a high standard for his restaurant. High



Chef Rick Chuk

quality of service and food are top priority; something he learned early working at one of the large famous hotels in Hong Kong when he was only 18 years old.

"I'm very strict but if you know what you're doing then you will love it here," he says. "I treat them well."

The restaurant's lunch and dinner menus offer a variety of mouth-watering dishes including focaccia-crust halibut and coquille St. Jacques with the house specialty being steaks, something they do very well, says Chuk, inviting anyone to come taste for themselves.

Probably the most unique item at Le Villa is its outstanding bottled water menu, ranging from San Pellegrino mineral water to a bottle of Limited Edition Bling H2O water sporting a cork and studded with Swarovski crystals. This is one bottle you'll want to reuse, laughs Chuk. **BIC**