



Crazy about cakes

By NAZRI NOOR

Le Meridien Kota Kinabalu's Executive Pastry Chef, Adrian Gan, is a bit of an anomaly in the line, being so young for someone in such an enviable position. Just 30 years old, Adrian is charged with overseeing the production of every single baked good that the hotel's kitchens turn out.

It all sounds like fun and games, but the hotel produces anywhere from 50 to 60 different types of pastries and breads on a daily basis, covering everything from dainty little cakes to perfectly layered croissants. It's a wonder that Adrian is still capable of keeping a cheerful smile on his face at all times.

"I've been in this line for 13 years," shares Adrian of his career background. "I went to school and then did some part-time work in a bakery. After finishing that I went to Singapore and started my career in a very busy hotel." Adrian has since returned to his hometown of Kota Kinabalu to offer his finely-honed skills to the local industry.

Working in a kitchen filled with all sorts of sweets and confections sounds like a dream, but Adrian's daily routine is in fact quite strenuous. "I wake up in the morning around 6am, and then I take some time to check on the internet and find some ideas for the day. At around 7am I go to check on the bakeries and the breakfast line to ensure there are no complaints.

"Then I have to check the event orders, the functions, what is going and what will happen for the whole day. And then I start to do lunch, dinner, and then the function break, rounding, and kitchens. When request for a few special cakes come in, I also work on those." Adrian's work days typically end late, at around 9pm or 10pm.

Adrian insists that his favourite part of his job is the creative freedom it affords him. "I like to start new things. I like to create cakes. I usually don't do normal cakes, not what you normally have. I design cakes according to my mood, my experience, and the culture around me. Sometimes I get a little bit crazy and name the cakes

after my daughter or my staff."

Indeed, Adrian's creativity seems almost boundless. He shares that he creates at least one new pastry every month, and currently has a personal store of about 32 original recipes. Plenty of thought goes into each cake, with thoroughly-conducted research and special attention paid to their names.

All About Green Tea is a green tea lover's dream. Everything about it, from the cake itself to its frosting and even its shaved chocolate topping, is flavoured with the rich taste of green tea. Le Noyer, which means 'walnut tree' in French, is a flourless chocolate cake that is simply stuffed with nuts.

Cheesecake with Nuts Butterscotch is a devilishly delightful dessert. A light baked cheesecake is topped with a mixture of pecan nuts, almonds and walnuts smothered in a sinful butterscotch sauce.

Evelyn's, our personal favourite, offers two layers of white chocolate mousse, with its top layer flavoured with raspberries and the entire pastry filled with blueberries. "The cake is named after my daughter. It's very innocent since it has plenty of white, and she likes pinks," Adrian offers.

What's surprising about all this is that Adrian isn't much of a cake connoisseur himself. "I like to design them and I like to see people enjoy them, but personally I prefer savoury items like cheese and pasta," he says with a smile.

Adrian offers some simple yet very truthful advice for people who aspire to enter his line of work. "Like what I say to my staff, the most important thing is passion. They have to be hardworking, they have to know what they want and go for it. If they're okay today and want to work, and then tomorrow they have a new ambition, then they might as well not try."

Some of Adrian's cake creations are available as dessert items through the Circle Restaurant's buffet. Most can be sampled from the restaurant's pastry counter. For more information, call 088-322222.

