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French culinary basics in six months

By Julie Cabatit-Alegre (The Philippine Star) | Updated October 27, 2016 - 12:00am



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Chef Bruno Tirel, Badjie Trinidad, Liza Morales and chef Vincent Leroux

MANILA, Philippines – Chef Vincent Leroux, program director and master chef of the Institut Culinaire Disciples Escoffier (ICDE), says there are two important things he looks for when interviewing students applying for the CCA-Escoffier French culinary program. "They must have team spirit, and they must have leadership," he says. "Team spirit is very important. You have to respect all the members of your team. If you don't have your dishwasher, you will have to wash the dishes yourself," chef Vincent explains. "You also have to be a leader in the kitchen. Leadership is different from just being a leader."

The Disciples Escoffier is a most prestigious association dedicated to the culinary arts and the transmission of knowledge, counting over 25,000 members — including some of the world's most respected chefs — in 26 countries. The ICDE is its professional culinary school, based in Hong Kong.

CCA (Center for Culinary Arts), the leading culinary education institution in the Philippines, recently partnered with ICDE to launch the groundbreaking CCA-Disciples Escoffier diploma in culinary arts, a six-month program to be conducted under the tutelage of master chefs. Chef Vincent flew in from Hong Kong to welcome the first batch of students and hold some classes at the new world-class kitchen of CCA's satellite campus in Makati.

"I created this program from A to Z. It's the same program that we offer in Hong Kong, and soon in Bangkok also," chef Vincent says. "It's the French basic knowledge, not French cuisine. You can do fusion, you can do what you want. If you have strong basic knowledge, you can do whatever you want later on."

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"Students will learn the fundamentals. You can prepare any recipe and apply the French method of cooking," says chef Bruno Tirel, permanent chef instructor at CCA-ICDE. "What is very important is mastering the use of the fire — the way to grill, the way to sauté, the way to pan-fry or pan-sear. It's very important to master the techniques, the way you manipulate and treat the ingredients. When you master it at the highest level, you can only improve the quality of any food you touch."

"It is an intensive course with a total of 540 hours for six months," says Liza Morales, CCA director for public relations and business development. There will be two permanent master chef instructors, as well as visiting master chefs such as chef Vincent Leroux and master chef Robert Fontana, founder and CEO of Institut Culinaire Disciples Escoffier and chairman of Disciples Escoffier Asia, as well as Michelin-starred chef Christian Tetedoie.

What is different about the program is that there is a very low teacher-to-student ratio.

"In all the standard culinary programs in the Philippines, the students work in groups," Morales explains. "Here in CCA-ICDE, they work as individuals, meaning one station to one person. They don't share. Each student has to do all the recipes. We have 20 stations for 20 students, which is the capacity of the kitchen."

At the end of the program, the students will need to undertake an assessment. "They will be getting a diploma from the French government. That is what is unique about this program. We will be flying in an assessor from France. The students will have to take an assessment exam," Morales explains. "It's not just a lifestyle course for hobbyists. It's a serious program. We need 100 percent commitment here because we want 100 percent passing in the assessment."

Because the ICDE is accredited by the French Ministry of Education and delivers a government-regulated national Diploma in French Cuisine (the Certificat de Fin de Formation en Cuisine Francaise), successful graduates will be presented with certificates recognized by the hospitality and fine dining industry worldwide.

"All these came about because my mom and I have always wanted to study in a culinary school overseas but we didn't have the opportunity at that time," CCA CEO Badjie Guerrero-Trinidad relates. Her mom is none other than Annie Guerrero, the founder and moving spirit behind CCA, which will be celebrating its 20th anniversary in November.

"My mom was already raising a family. After college, I wanted to go to a professional chef's school but I started working and I could not anymore. It's not an easy decision to leave your family to study abroad.

"Now, we encounter a lot of students who don't have the time to commit to a one-year program but they are very serious about their career," Badjie says. "This intensive six-month program is for them. They get the same standard of training and develop their skills as they would abroad. And there is the opportunity for networking with the biggest international organization of the best chefs as well. This is part of a continuous plan of CCA to forge opportunities for our students."

"If you want to work in the F&B industry, this is for you," adds chef Vincent. "If you want to really learn and invest yourself, or even to change your career, you can come. There must be a desire, totally."



CCA-ICDE chef instructor Bruno Tirel with student

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