

## Executive Chef Rolf Nettesheim Appeals To Discerning Boomers' Tastes



Rolf Nettesheim

When discerning boomer residents are your only customers, how does a chef please their palates while attracting and maintaining their business?

Rolf Nettesheim of The Palace at Weston has risen to this challenge. As the executive chef for south Florida's first luxury, resort active adult community, Chef Nettesheim tackles creating a menu and dining room that competes with area restaurants, yet appeals to boomer residents.

With over 25 years of culinary experience in all aspects of kitchen and food service, he handles the day-to-day operations of the community's gourmet kitchen, which serves The Palace Grille, the onsite restaurant open exclusively to residents and their guests.

According to Helen Shaham, president of The Palace Management Group, owners and developers of The Palace at Weston, the management team worked closely with Chef Nettesheim from the inception to completion of the kitchen and restaurant, which officially opened in late 2007.

"He requested state-of-the-art equipment and stainless steel cookware," recalled Shaham. "We designed the kitchen to maximize space and efficiency."

Chef Nettesheim's personal touches and standard of excellence is also evident in other areas: beautiful and timeless white china imported from England-based Dudson and storage racks designed to keep spices away from the heat in order to preserve their flavor.

"We use large, 13-inch plates for both main course salads and entrees," said Chef Nettesheim. "The white background provides great contrast, appealing to both the left and right side of the brain. You have to cater to all senses to be a successful chef."

A native of Cologne, Germany, Chef Nettesheim believes he was born to cook. As a child, he was exposed to classic cuisine working alongside his uncle in the family's restaurant. The succulent smells and tastes created by his uncle inspired him to dedicate his life to the world of fine dining.

He honed his skills in classical French and Italian cooking while acquiring more formal training at Garmisch Parten Kitchen, the exclusive European cooking school in the Bavarian mountains.

Prior to moving to Miami in 1989, he earned his master's degree as an executive chef and worked in Italy, Belgium and France.

Chef Nettesheim's ability to merge fusion cuisine with inspired favorites has become a huge draw for The Palace Grille. As word spread around the active-adult community which begin occupancy in October, 2007, the number of diners has increased steadily.

"It's essential to bring the wonderfulness of the earth to the flavor of the food," said Chef Nettesheim, who believes that the highest quality ingredients contribute to uniqueness of flavor.

"Even the simplest substitutions can have a significant impact on taste. For example, we use sea salt versus regular salt for a bolder and more savory taste."

The menu, developed over a year ago, includes Maine Lobster with field greens, a resident-favorite comprised of shitake mushrooms, crispy garlic chips and spicy lemon vinaigrette.

Another new salad adaptation is the vegetarian Israeli Chop-Chop, a mosaic of vine-ripened tomatoes, European cucumbers, Bermuda onions, hearts of palm, celery, bell peppers, nicoise olives, fresh dill and roasted garlic citrus vinaigrette.

Large plates and open flame grille entrees may include Chilean sea bass with mango salata on black bean mash, fire roasted red pepper couli and plantain chips; Muscovy duck with gingered plum glaze paired with pear-filled cranberry compote; and penne ala vodka tossed with imported prosciutto and peas.

Entrees are not solely devoted to the extravagant. Standbys and traditional favorites such as meatloaf and spaghetti and meatballs, share space on the menu with a presentation of organic roasted chicken with wild mushroom ragout, sweet potato mash and buttered jumbo asparagus.

Extremely conscientious of boomers' health concerns, Nettesheim strives for low-fat and low-sodium opportunities so residents don't need to be burdened with a myriad of questions regarding food preparation.

Demanding, active adults who are used to requesting numerous changes to accommodate their palates such as "hold the oil, salt and butter" or "substitute this for that," find the dining experience at The Palace Grille more relaxing as Chef Nettesheim has anticipated their requests.

Chef Nettesheim, who also practices magic and was named Magician of the Year in 1992, also follows his rule of using only the freshest and finest ingredients in The Palace Grille's desserts. The community's chocolate confections are created from the Gran Cru line, the pinnacle of chocolates. The Madagascar, Maracaibo and Arriba varieties are intense in flavor and come from the rare Criollo cacao bean, produced in only a few exotic locales across the globe.

In addition to providing exceptional meals, Chef Nettesheim ensures residents and their guests have an impeccable dining experience.

"There has to be consistency and balance...from the ambiance, to the service, to the food," he said. "The Palace Grille must attract repeat diners who also want to 'wow' their friends and relatives who will validate their decision to move to The Palace at Weston."