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Heart of Hawaii

Tom Muromoto Shares the Magic of Authentic Hawaiian Cuisine

By Bonnie Carroll

The Island of Maui became a favorite haunt of mine in the late 70's and has continued through the years to beckon me back. In 1979, Longi's was the hot restaurant venue in Lahaina and the Lahaina Health Food store provided great sprout sandwiches for picnic lunches at the seashore.

Today, the food scene on Maui has reached a pinnacle of style and quality that respectfully holds its own with the best of cities in the continental United States. From James McDonald's Pacific O' to a bevy of executive chefs like Executive Chef Jon Benson of the Hyatt Regency Maui Resort & Spa, Bart Umidi of the Westin Maui, John Zaner of the Ritz-Carlton at Kapalua, Bryan Ashlock of the Sheraton

Maui, Michael Gallagher of Napili Kai Beach Resort, Thomas Muromoto of Ka'anapali Beach Hotel, Tom Selman of Sansai Seafood Restaurant, Alex Stanislaw of the

Plantation House Restaurant, John Ellman of Penne Pasta Café, Dean Louis of Café Sauvage, and Bobby Masters of Hula Grill. The annual Maui Chef's event, a fundraiser sponsored by the Kaanapali Beach Resort Association and the Hyatt Regency Maui Hotel,

attracts a collection of extremely talented island chefs, who are passionate about what they do and excited to help local charities, while also incorporating island produce and fresh seafood in the flavorful dishes they create. Among this milieu of extraordinary culinary island stars is Thomas Muromoto, Executive Chef at the Kaanapali Beach Hotel. This historic and traditionally Hawaiian hotel features a walking garden and tour filled

with samples and legend tales of plants, and foods used to prepare feasts for the Hawaiian kings, who lived at Lahaina when it was the capital of the kingdom of Hawaii in the time of King Kamehameha III. Many of the historic recipes prepared with these plants and foods continue to be served by chef Muromoto today.

According to Chef Muromoto, the huge and I mean huge, kitchen at the hotel is about to be renovated after many years and will become a more compact working area.

After doing chef interviews in kitchens the size of a closet in the past, I was delighted with this enormous culinary venue. As Chef Muromoto prepared and explained each step of the items he was creating, we took photos as he gave me the background on the Hawaiian origins of the food items and spices on his table.



During my day in the kitchen with Chef Muromoto, I learned the history of poi, how it grows and the work required to grind it down to prepare the pasty substance that

accompanies many favorite Hawaiian dishes. No Hawaiian Lu'au celebration would be complete without this authentic side dish that visitors associate with local food lore. It is at the heart of Muromoto's genuine island food experience preserved in the

Kulaiwi, "native land cuisine", a diet that was traditionally believed to nurture wellness. The Kulaiwi diet is high in wholesome starches (complex carbohydrates), low in fat and moderate in protein.

Chef Muromoto demonstrated the preparation of Lau Lau, a fish specialty cooked and served in large Ti (a member of the lily family that grows 3' to 10') and Taro leaves, filled with Opakapaka fillet,



ginger root, Roma tomatoes, herbs, Maui onions, cilantro, green onions, Hawaiian sea salt and soy sauce. This dish is wrapped like a gift, tied with ribbon, and is perfectly steamed. Chef prefers to use Moi fish for



the recipe. Moi is currently a very popular island fish that Tom enjoys serving. "Moi is a fish that has a mild flavor and lends itself easily to a variety of preparation styles, which appeals to hotel guests," says Chef Muromoto.

The Ka'anapali Beach Hotel staff are known for their desire to keep the true Hawaiian heritage of their island alive, and the natural charm of the venue, along with the relaxed atmosphere and true Hawaiian dishes on their menu more than guarantee the fruition of this goal. For people wishing to replicate the Hawaii their parents and grandparents experienced for the first time, when they got off a Matson Line cruise ship in the 30s and 40s', this hotel can provide that pure and totally disarming experience.

Natural spices indigenous to the island include flavorful root ginger, which is used freely by chefs in salads, entrees and desserts, not to mention hot and cold tea drinks. The availability of fresh fruits, including an abundance of pineapple, guava, mangos, bananas, and more provide so many choices for chefs to include in designing signature dishes and unique menu items. A favorite potato on Maui is purple in color and lends not only a unique taste for entrée side dishes, but also adds unique color to the dish.

Edible flowers are used freely by chefs as an eye pleaser, and although I have never quite

gotten into eating flowers, I do love the beauty and attractive splashes of color they add to the artistic design of plates. Hawaiian drinks, including the popular Mai Tai and Maui Sunrise, are adorned with

local flowers, and are readily available at all the popular island bars. If you are a wine connoisseur, you will be quite pleased with the availability and selection of outstanding and rare wines at restaurants and fine dining rooms in the hotels.

The hotel garden area surrounds a

courtyard with a giant checker game that is played with huge coconuts, as well as a charming outside restaurant overlooking the hotel pool, where the chef and hotel staff joined me to enjoy the delicious results of Chef's labors. All the beach hotels are located just steps away from the stylish Kaanapali Beach shopping Center, which offers designer shopping at Chanel or Gucci, as well as a collection of shops featuring beautiful artwork and jewelry memorabilia, as well the hottest in beach apparel.

The oceanfront walk lining the many hotels on Ka'anapali Beach, situated on a three mile crescent of exquisite white sand beach, provides a panoramic ocean view for guests taking vigorous morning walks or leisurely evening strolls. This path is also a restaurant "yellow brick road," leading to many of the best dining venues on Maui. To plan your next vacation go to www.kaanapaliresort.com. Aloha!



LAU LAU OPAKAPAKA

(Fresh Island Snapper Wrapped In Taro Leaves)

Preparation For Dish (per serving)

- 2 Ti leaves, large
- 3 Oz. Taro Leaves, large, no stem (6-8 leaves)
- 6 Oz. Opakapaku Fillet (no bones) (or Moi)
- 1 TBL Fresh Ginger Root, julienne (optional)
- ¼ Cup Sweet Maui Onion, julienne
- ¼ Cup Roma Tomatoes
- 1 Tsp. Cilantro, Chopped
- 1 Tsp. Green Onion, Chopped
- Pinch Hawaiian sea salt (optional)
- 1 TBL Soy Sauce

Lau Lau Preparation

Steps:

- 1) Slit stem of ti-leaf on bottom
- 2) Place ti leaves in bowl and lay Taro leaf on top at center
- 3) Place Opakapaka or Moi fillet on Taro leaf.
- 4) Place ginger, onion, tomato and cilantro on fish
- 5) Sprinkle a little Hawaiian salt and pour soy sauce over.
- 6) Grab all ends of ti leaves and wrap ingredients into a pouch
- 7) Place in any type of steamer for 15 minutes
- 8) Open pouch by cutting area tied into a knot

Special information:

For special dietary needs salt and soy sauce can be omitted and replaced with other natural flavorings

Other tips:

- 1) Spinach may be used in place of Taro leaves
- 2) Add julienne strips of prosciutto with herbs over fish for more flavoring
- 3) Pour hot peanut oil and soy over fish as it completes steaming
- 4) Use a creamy herb risotto in the pouch with the fish and taro/spinach leaves.