

**T**he Plaza Athenee Bangkok and Fin (fabulous is needed), a boutique wine distributor, recently introduced the "Progressive Dining Experience", a new gastronomic concept featuring trendy molecular cuisine served at five different pop-up venues in and around the hotel.

Over the years, the Plaza Athenee Bangkok has become well known for its innovative, surprising and exciting food and wine events which have opened new chapters and new perspectives of modern gastronomy to Bangkok food and wine connoisseurs. The dream team behind this success are the hotel's executive chef Martin Faist and Benjawan Wisootsat, managing director of Fin. The Progressive Dining Experience was their first event of 2011.

Joining them to treat the city's dining aficionados to a new chapter in modern gastronomy of great food and fabulous wines were Daniel Bucher and Axel Herz, two of the leading ground-breaking molecular cuisine and cocktail masters from Le Meridien Hamburg, Germany.

"Molecular gastronomy essentially combines avant-garde culinary art with hard-core food science," said Bucher, winner of Hamburg's prestigious Young Chef of the Year Award. "The values and goals it reflects range from sustainability, health and biodiversity to precision, fun and original flavours and textures."

Embracing the hot "pop-up restaurant" trend, now very popular in Europe and the US, Bucher's creative menu for the evening was served at five unusual places inside and outside the hotel, at places which Bucher said look more like art installations than restaurant.

The trendy "pop-up restaurant" is all about suddenly setting up impromptu restaurants wherever and whenever a chef can find a suitable spot to reach a market, so enjoying creative freedom, lowering overheads and giving diners the chance to experience first-rate food for less.

"I see molecular cooking and pop-up dining as challenges and opportunities — challenging to stay true to the products and opportunity to develop ideas through food," said Bucher. "Ideas that are able to surprise, to amaze, to laugh and even to make you love."

"This event is all about the love to eat, to drink and to enjoy," said Benjawan. "It is an exciting new experience that we try to create for guests who are looking for a little adventure."

The evening started with myriad molecular cocktails created by Herz at the hotel's moody Glaz Bar. The party then segued into Bangkok's first pop-up restaurant experience, orchestrated and personally guided by Bucher.

The first course, Edible Garden, a big salad plate showcasing molecular cuisine cooking techniques, was served at the roof-top garden. The garden salad was decorated with some hard-to-explain ingredients in the form of orange tiny pebbles, white grainy sand and chevy seaweed lookalikes.

The healthy salad was accompanied by 2008 Meersburger Bengel Spatburgunder Weissherbst QbA, Baden. This rose is crisp and fresh but at the same time of a mouthfilling generosity with just a touch of sweetness.

The second course featured oxtail consomme, shrimp bon-bon in lobster foil and tuna praline. They were served at a pop-up kiosk next to the Squash Room. These were fascinating food items which had gone through a delicate molecular preparation process, especially the consomme.

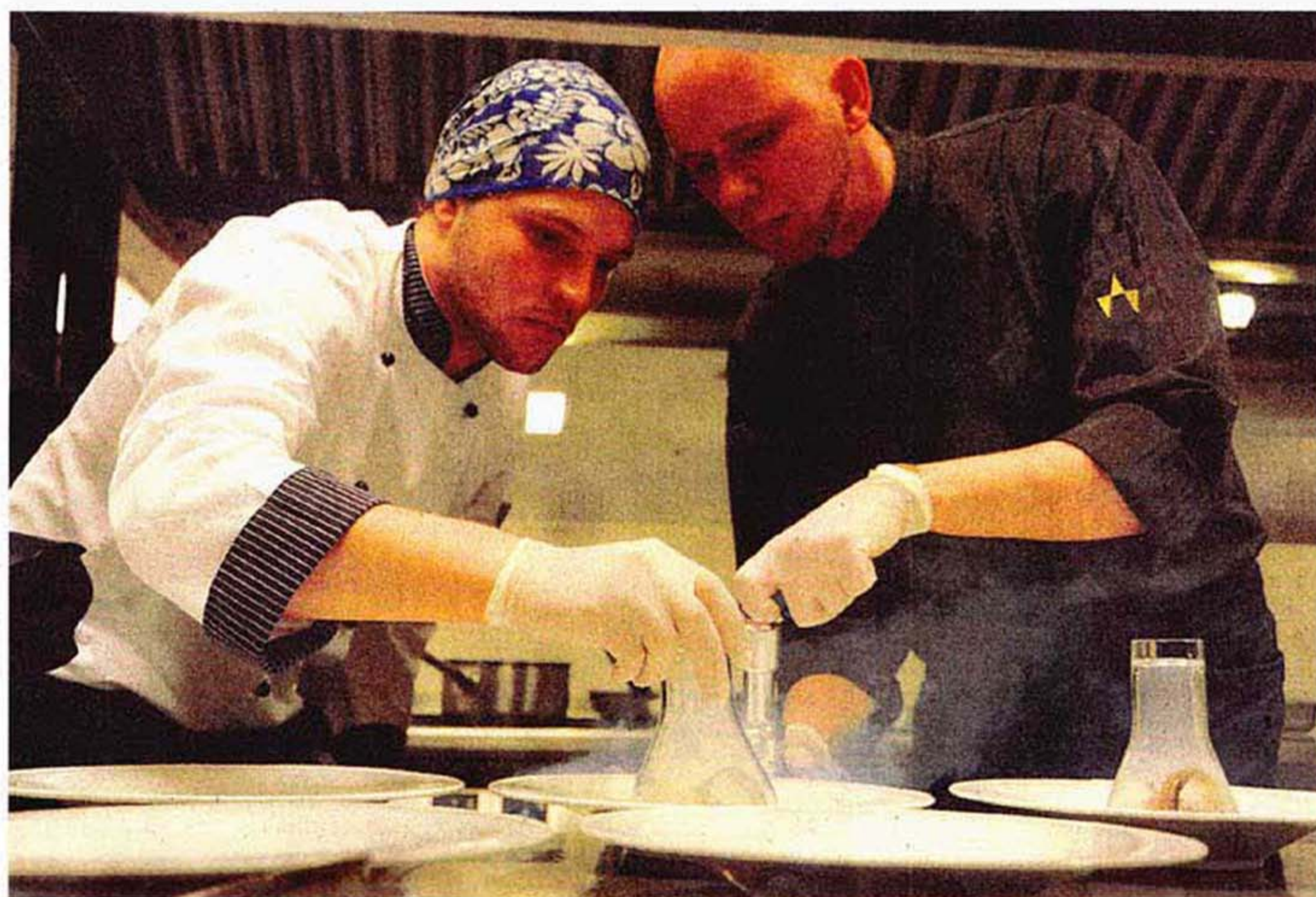
Glass containers of hot oxtail consomme were set before us accompanied by a plastic syringe filled with red and white liquid. The idea was for each of us to inject the liquid into the consomme, and on contact with the hot consomme the liquid would form into narrow lengths like noodles. The curious combination of flavours was delicious, and the process was a fascinating interactive example of molecular cuisine.

Accompanying the soup beautifully was the 2009 Gaba do XII Godello from Valdeorras, Spain. The wine displays a light straw colour, and enticing aromas of mineral, spices, spring flowers, citrus

## A new chapter in MODERN gastronomy

An exciting experience is on offer for food and wine aficionados who are looking for a little adventure

STORY: PRAPAI KRAISORNKOVI



**Above:** Visiting chef Daniel Bucher and Axel Herz working on the smoked poached trout.

**Left:** Concocting oxtail consomme with liquid noodles.

**Below:** The curious dessert, served in the pop-up, -24 freezer room.

and almonds and has a vibrant acidity, with a clean, lengthy finish.

The third course, smoked poached trout was served at the pop-up, long dining table in the hotel's Crystal hall kitchen. The highlight was the smoking technique done on the spot. A good sized perfectly poached trout was laid on a bed of squid ink jelly, topped with fresh fish roe and decorated with a piece of curly crispy fish skin, before being smoked using the upside-down glass container. The result was one "interesting delicious" dish that harmonised satisfyingly with the velvety sumptuousness of the wine — the full-bodied 2005 M Spatburgunder Pinot Noir, Schneider, Pfalz, Germany.

The fourth course, barley risotto, was served at a pop-up, open-air kiosk by the Wireless roadside in front of the hotel. This was a light, lovely dish with barley slowly cooked with diced carrot and shitake mushrooms. The dish was matched with an impressive red wine, a Fred Loimer's 2008 Fred Zweigelt from Austria.

The fifth, a curious dessert, was served in the -24 degree freezer room. Prepared under two different temperatures, the two sorbet-style dessert balls, one warm



and one cold, were served on a bed of sweet papaya and small pieces of other fruits, giving out a rich and good balanced flavour. This creative dessert was accompanied by a full-bodied 2005 M Spatburgunder Pinot Noir.

The evening ended in the hotel's luxury suite where a big tin of imitation "caviar" was served with an excellent after-dinner 2008 MR Mountain Wine from Telmo Rodriguez, Spain. Made of 100% moscatel, it was a lively drink with plenty of honeyed citrus and tropical fruits.

However, the true surprising finale was a little adventure into the bathroom to taste all the personalised bathroom amenities — toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner, foam cleanser, lotion, soap, sea sponges and more. They were all specially created with food and fruit ingredients in the form of gel, liquid, emulsion, mousse and gel.

"This is one of our inventive culinary adventures to offer Bangkok something new and modern, in terms of food, cooking techniques, outstanding wines and unique dining venues," said Giuseppe Fornillo, the hotel's executive assistant manager.

"The dishes might not be on our menu yet, but certainly the techniques, venues and expertise remain and we can make full use of them to give highest satisfaction to our demanding guests."



**Left:** The pop-up, long dining table in the Crystal hall kitchen.

**Below:** The dream team, (back row, from left), Giuseppe Fornillo, the hotel's executive assistant manager; executive chef Martin Faist; Axel Herz; chef Daniel Bucher; and The Reflexions' chef Thibaut Chiumenti. Front row from left are Benjawan Wisootsat, managing director of Fin, and Choo Leng Goh, general manager of the Plaza Athenee Bangkok.



Edible Garden, a salad plate showcasing molecular cuisine cooking techniques.