



Pure Passion

for Good Food
and Good Wines

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Alex Ewald is home and back in the kitchen at her Cruz Bay restaurant, La Tapa, and her legion of fans are taking advantage of her latest turn in the kitchen.

“You can get stuck here, but I don’t,” says Alex, who was born in Germany and spent her childhood between her father’s restaurants in Hamburg, Germany, and with her mother in the South of France (Basque Country), where she later helped a friend open a restaurant.

On her travels with her “personal wine educator” Christopher Jones, Alex also seeks out wines from around the world — such as Montes from Chile, Daniel Schuster from New Zealand, Jean-Luc Colombo from France and Shafer Wines from California.

“There is a story behind every wine and it’s an important part of understanding cuisines from around the world,” she explains.

“People don’t understand how a chef/owner can be traveling as much as I do,” admits Alex, who has spent the past 16 years on St. John with regular séjours around the world.

“Good leadership is the key and allows me to step away, travel and see La Tapa from a different perspective,” Alex explains. “Everyone needs to know when to be a good leader or a good follower. Both are equally important for a successful team. I try to be both.”

“Right now I’m cooking again,” Alex says — although she concedes she is not actively looking for a new cook. “I never look. It always happens at the right moment for the right reasons.”

In the meantime, Alex has a few changes in mind for her signature restaurant, which is fairly unique in offering a daily changing menu revolving around a few favorite appetizers and main courses.

“It’s easier for me to change my menu every night,” she adds. “It’s like having a palette of colors; the choices come naturally and create the piece.”

Previous Page: La Tapa’s Prince Edward Island mussels sautéing in white wine, fresh herbs, leeks, lemon and a touch of cream.

This Page: La Tapa chef/owner Alex Ewald finishes slicing duck breast.



Which is not to say some customers won't miss a favorite dish when it's off the menu — for a night or for a while.

"I'm going to discontinue filet for a while to explore new cuts of meats," Alex says of one of La Tapa's most popular entrées. "And to offer guests a challenge."

"Now, I'm more into common cuts, simple home cooking," adds Alex. "Whether it's Nouvelle, Asian or whatever, you can cook good food with anything, just like you can make art with anything."

"I think more and more the trend is towards simplicity — putting an accent on one piece — and using local fresh products," says Alex.

Strangely enough, Alex, who just returned in September from the International Chefs Congress in New York City, says the "talk" about dining trends confirmed what she has been doing at La Tapa for years — simplicity.

Alex's dining concept earned her recognition in 2002 when she was featured on Starchefs.com — the "insiders" culinary guide.

Now, Alex is enjoying the creativity that springs from her 15-hour work days — although she misses the regular hikes and swims which are an important part of her active island life.

"It's easy for me," Alex admits of her latest stint in the kitchen — even with La Tapa's ever-changing menu.

Unique Style

Alex doesn't try to explain the unique style of La Tapa.

"The reason people come here is because they know they get a good meal — it's tasty," explains Alex. "The atmosphere is great and they get a good meal."

"You could have a plate of La Tapa food at Subway, but it wouldn't taste the same," she adds, surrounded by the ever-funkier mix of furniture and decor of La Tapa.

"It almost makes you feel at home — and that's what makes the food taste twice as good," Alex says. "I think people look for that."

"La Tapa has elegance," notes Alex. "Dressed up or not,



Top: Josephine's Greens salad.

Bottom: An intimate table at La Tapa awaits diners.



Top: Confit of cherry tomatoes.

Bottom: Chef Alex Ewald at her stove.





people fit in with the decor.”

A consummate professional, Alex requires her staff to place equal importance on the integrity of the food as well as consistent and enthusiastic service by paying attention to details — from the kitchen to the front of the house.

“The most important thing about my restaurant is the people who work here,” says Alex. “Every person brings unique gifts and by giving them responsibilities that reflect those gifts we create that which is La Tapa.”

“It (La Tapa) is a strong tree with deep roots,” explains Alex. “All my employees branch out and though they may leave La Tapa eventually they always have a piece of it with them. I encourage my employees to learn and grow even if that draws them away from La Tapa. This reputation helps me bring in new and strong replacements.”

Simply Elegant Meals

A true world traveler, Alex has big ideas on how to generate simply elegant meals. While the menu changes nightly, certain items find themselves repeated due to steady demand.

The combination of worldly flavors from Europe, to the delicate, rich tastes of South America, all under La Tapa’s Caribbean roof, epitomizes the international diversity of foods in the 21st century.

La Tapa’s menu begins with a flutter of first courses with full-bodied flavors enticing diners to branch out from their comfort zone, and an elegant presentation which assures satisfaction.

The cheese board features cheeses traditionally served throughout France as “plateau du fromages” which will grab any diner’s attention. Served with a truffled honey, walnut fig cake and membrillo, no matter which three cheeses you select, you are sure to be rewarded with a symphony of taste.

Prince Edward Island mussels steamed in white wine,

(Top) A custom built wine rack fits into an existing window alcove; (Center) Fresh mint is crushed with ice for mojitos; (Bottom) Ewald’s unique decor includes a corner display of gold lamé platform shoes and a bodice light fixture.

Next Page (Top): A colorful complement of seafood, vegetables and herbs in Ewald’s paella. (Bottom): Ewald with cooks Jean Paul “J.P.” Liberatore, center, and Alan McManus.

herbs, garlic, lemon and cream — a local favorite — remains one of the star items on the menu though the goat cheese encrusted with cashews over mixed greens also wins high favor with repeat diners.

Entrées like rack of lamb and braised short ribs served with sage burgundy jus appeal to the carnivores while local-caught fish such as mahi mahi, wahoo, yellowtail snapper and tuna “Basquaise” grab the seafood lover’s attention. Sauces and presentation change nightly.

Each menu item delivers expert seasoning and sauce pairing that imbues every dish with a unique and powerful personality — just like Alex. [SJM](#)

