



AT THE CHEF'S TABLE WITH

**PAOLO
VITALETTI**

Striving for nothing less than simplicity itself – elegant and classical simplicity – Paolo Vitaletti has managed to make Appia, in just two years, a go-to venue for Roman and Southern Italian food.

BY LARY WALLACE / PHOTOGRAPHY BY MANOO MANOOKULKIJ / FOOD STYLING BY EKARIN YUSUKSOMBOON
CREATIVE DIRECTOR: PEERAPONG PONGPRAPAPAN



What have you prepared for us today?

We have prepared our signature [dishes]. A staple of Roman food is carbonara: pasta, egg, and pecorino cheese. Then we have porchetta. Porchetta is basically a roast – a pig roast. Roman food is straightforward. It's marinated with pepper, rosemary, and garlic, then cooked for four or five hours, until the skin is crispy and it is well-cooked. Another one is veal tartare. We do it because it's very refreshing as a salad. In this case we use local veal, from Pak Chong. We also have parmesan cheese.

Why these dishes?

Because they're traditional. When people see it, they know what it is – they connect with Roman food. I'm from Rome, and I grew up with this food.

What can you tell me about these ingredients?

We always try to get sustainable ingredients. We import a lot of foods from Italy because we need to keep the traditional flavours. We try to work with local farmers, local suppliers, local producers. We try a lot to use foods from natural farmers when we can. The vegetables we use, we try to get from sources in Thailand.

The carbonara's three ingredients are all imported. We even import the eggs, actually – we get these eggs from Tuscany that are very good and flavourful, because they feed the chickens with goat cheese, so they are very buttery inside. These are premium ingredients.

What are your most popular dishes?

Porchetta. It's crispy, it's tender, it's flavourful.

This is your second time in Bangkok. Why did you leave and why did you come back?



Porchetta.



I left because I had another opportunity. I used to work for a five-star hotel. Most of my career, I was working for Four Seasons. Then I came here to Bangkok for seven to eight years, at Shangri-La. Then I had the opportunity to work for another very good five-star company, and I went to China. Then I thought my time was over with hotels – I'd had enough and wanted to open my business. I chose Bangkok because my wife is Thai, and because it's the only place in Asia where you can afford investment, because the real estate is approachable – it's not super-expensive. So that's why I came here.

What do you like about Bangkok?

It's the moment. What's happening here in Bangkok is a big change – from restaurants in hotels to free-standing restaurants. A lot of visitors here recognise the importance of Thai food, and a lot of foreign chefs are coming because they want to invest in this city. So it's starting to be very creative in terms of concept and other forms of creativity.

What's the biggest challenge in being a head chef and running a restaurant?





*Veal tartare with
goat-cheese fondue
and grappa-
marinated pears.*

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The staff. You need to take care of everybody – you need to help them, you need to give support, coach them, understand different problems. That’s why it’s a very intense part of any restaurant operation. But it can be very rewarding when everyone understands the goal you have and the whole team loves what they do.

How did being the son of a butcher influence your approach to cooking?

It affected me a lot. My father used to run a butcher and deli shop. He used to make cold cuts and stuff like that, and sell them. He always taught me to look at the quality – you know, “Eat this one because it’s a better

product.” “Eat the ham close to the bone because there’s more flavour.” I actually started in a totally different field – I was a computer technician. But I didn’t like it, and growing up among food made it an easy choice to become a chef, because I always understood the ingredients and the product and how to handle foods. It was my roots, and they taught me to understand the quality of ingredients.

What would you like to accomplish in your career that you haven’t accomplished already?

Go on vacation...[Laughs.] I’m joking, even if it’s not a joke.

Keep this restaurant alive the way it is. ✱