

## Chef Robert Vasquez...*a well-traveled set of knives*

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Chef Robert Vasquez has cultivated a diverse repertoire of culinary skills over the past three decades. From prep cook to Executive Chef, Vasquez has spent his career curiously exploring the many business and cultural facets of the food industry.

Chef Vasquez first fell in love with ingredients and recipe development in his mother's kitchen. She was his first culinary instructor and also his first real boss when he began his career as a dishwasher in his family's restaurant where his mother was chef. The flavor profiles he learned under her tutelage remain influential in his cuisine to this day.

His first real break into the culinary world was when he was promoted from Executive Steward to Chef de Cuisine at Marquesa Restaurant, a French fine dining concept at the Scottsdale Princess Resort. With the support of his mentor Chef Cary Neff, Vasquez began diversifying Marquesa's menu to include the newly developing cuisines of Catalan and Tex-Mex. Here Vasquez earned the Five Diamond and Mobile Five Star awards.

When he was tasked with opening the historic Wrigley Mansion in 1991, Chef Neff recruited Vasquez to take the helm as Chef du Cuisine. Vasquez continued his innovative signature style, creating dishes with influences from French, Italian, (Southern) Mexican, Asian, and Spanish cuisines.

Because of his superior performances at both la Marquesa and the Wrigley Mansion, Vasquez was tapped on multiple occasions to be a global ambassador for Southwest cuisine beginning with some time spent in the island of Bermuda. In 1992, Vasquez travelled to Beijing to spend a year working with Master German Chef Peter Shaumberg in the opening of China's first Tex-Mex restaurant. While there, Vasquez was named Best New Chef in Asia. Shortly thereafter, Vasquez spent another year in Asia. This time he was in Singapore consulting for Westin Hotels and Swiss Master Chef Otto Weible, guiding the opening of Raffles City Southwest Cuisine.

Upon returning stateside, Vasquez was named as Executive Chef of the Citidel, a historic property in Scottsdale, Arizona. Housing three distinct restaurants, the Citidel received multiple awards during Vasquez's tenure including Top 10 Inns in the Nation and Best Southwest Restaurant in Arizona.

Vasquez went on to receive the Four Star and Golden Sceptre awards as Executive Chef of a French Restaurant in Coronado Island, California. He then led the culinary division as Executive Chef in the reopening of the Grand Colonial Hotel, listed as one of the Top 100 Historical Hotels in the US.

In 2001, Chef Vasquez bid farewell to the Southwest and landed in the deep South. Here in the culinary mecca of New Orleans, Vasquez continued adding to his diverse skill set by mastering classic Creole and Cajun flavors as Banquet Chef of the famous Fairmont Hotel and as Executive Chef of two historic locations on the Northshore, Artesia in Abita Springs and the Lake House in Old Mandeville.

Vasquez's culinary curiosity also led him to spend some time in the retail side of the food industry. As a member of Whole Foods' leadership team, he developed recipes, created retail display and food programs, and assisted in the setup and opening of new stores across the region. During that time, Vasquez was able to gain a unique education in organic, healthy products and to develop a deep understanding the production and processing of meat and cheese products.

Today, Chef Vasquez draws on his vast restaurant, catering, and retail experience to helm his own company, Opal Basil. Based in Old Mandeville, Opal Basil is an established catering company featuring a line of clean and healthy prepared foods marketed as Vivé...a fresh approach to food fitness. Vivé products are Paleo-friendly and provide "high quality food fuel" for busy, health-conscious clients.

Additionally, Chef Robert and his wife, Lindsey (an experienced restaurant manager and event organizer), are set to open their first restaurant in March 2014. Located at the Trailhead in Old Mandeville, Opal Basil on the Trace will feature dishes indicative of Vasquez's innovation and experience. Dubbed South-by-Southwest cuisine, Opal Basil on the Trace's menu is comprised of the flavors and ingredients traditional to the South but prepared with the flare and freshness of a Southwest kitchen.

Chef Vasquez invites everyone to taste how delicious healthy can be with his Vivé meal options and looks forward to dazzling local taste buds at Opal Basil on the Trace this spring.

**[www.opalbasil.com](http://www.opalbasil.com)**

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