



Executive chef Jeff Sommer, right, talks with Wild Roast manager Redeana Crane at Wildhorse Resort & Casino on Wednesday in Mission. Sommer likes to visit all of the restaurants every morning at the casino.

CHEF: Will help design five new eateries when the resort expands

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Professionally, he started at the bottom. After a gig as busboy at age 16, he moved to the kitchen, peeling carrots, and worked his way up. He found an established chef, Chuck Schuster, who agreed to mentor the teenager. Sommer stayed with Schuster for four years.

He enlisted in the Army as a mechanic during the Gulf War to earn money for tuition to the Culinary Institute of America, which Sommer calls “the Harvard of culinary schools.” He met his wife of 24 years, Cherrieanna, at the institute. Until moving to Pendleton, she worked as head baker at a New Orleans’ bakery called Bittersweet Confections, known for its wedding cakes. The couple, who splits the cooking at home, has a grown son and daughter.

During Sommer’s first visit to Wildhorse, he found himself intrigued with the idea of becoming the head chef. He would oversee the resort’s existing five venues (Plateau, Hot Rock Cafe, Traditions Dining, Wild Roast Coffee & Deli and the Wildhorse Sports Bar), plus he would help design five more eateries that will come with a planned expansion of the resort.

Sommer said he connected with Wildhorse leaders and their vision. In his first 90 days as executive chef, Sommer worked at establishing routines and goals. He walks the property each morning, checking in with managers and employees at each eatery. He spends time in his



Executive chef Jeff Sommer looks over some new designs for soup dishes in his office Wednesday at Wildhorse Resort & Casino in Mission.

little office off the main kitchen, going over menus and pricing. He improves procedures for plating and presentation and works on upgrading sanitation practices to match his clean freak standards. He cultivates his own culinary vision for the place, such as procuring as much local food as possible from area farmers and growing herbs

and certain other foods on site. He spends time creating his own recipes, tweaking them until “they are tried and true.” In his world, you start with good, simple ingredients and transform them into something amazing.

“I don’t want to overcomplicate the food,” he said. “I believe in simple.”

Jose Gutierrez, the resort’s executive sous chef welcomes Sommer’s team approach.

“He comes with new ideas, but he’s learning the local ways, too,” Gutierrez said.

Sommer starts his days with a basic breakfast (tea-infused oatmeal, yogurt and a protein shake), which he eats after doing

cardio and weights in the gym in his garage. He credits his love of athletics for keeping the weight off even though he’s surrounded by food all day. In high school, he did football, basketball, track and wrestling. As an adult, he shifted to mountain biking, kickboxing and archery.

When asked, he offers advice to aspiring chefs.

“Have realistic understanding of the business,” he offered. “You’ll be working your way up from the bottom. You’ll be peeling onions. These are the tasks that take you to the roots of what cooking is. You learn the best ingredients. You learn not to cut your fingers off.”

As Sommer navigated the huge kitchen on Wednesday, somehow, despite his constant proximity to food, his white chef’s jacket remained immaculate. He explained that white is actually practical for chefs because it doesn’t absorb heat, rather reflects it back. Plus, the coat can be bleached unlike dyed material.

As he navigated from pot to pot, he seemed in his natural habitat. The culinary world never gets boring, Sommer explained. There’s always new recipes to learn and invent and new technologies to incorporate.

“In this career, you’re never going to stop learning,” he said. “There’s always something new out there every day.”

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Less is more with this simple salmon dish

By KATIE WORKMAN
Associated Press

A good piece of fish needs very little to make it perfect. Here, the brisk, anisey-tangy flavor of tarragon vinaigrette is a wonderful complement to the lushness of salmon filets.

If you start with excellent salmon and super-fresh herbs, and don’t overcook the fish, you cannot mess this up. It’s a less-is-more dish.

The mix of orange and lemon juices in the vinaigrette gives provides a nice balance of sweetness and tanginess. If you are in possession of a Meyer lemon, you could use 3 tablespoons of that juice in place of the mix, and get similar results. Not exactly the same, but something else wonderful.

I love starting fish in a pan (make sure your fish is fairly thick, about 1-inch or even thicker) and then transferring it to a stove to finish cooking. Here are the three main reasons why:

1. You can use the oven to cook something else to go with the fish, whether it’s roasted potatoes or other vegetables.
2. If you are cooking the fish with the skin on, you can get that pan screaming hot before you add the fish, and when the skin hits the pan it starts to crisp up immediately. It then stays crisp and delicious and great to eat. Soft fish skin: not good. Crisp fish skin: a fabulous counterpoint to a well-cooked, soft, delicate fish.
3. Perhaps best of all: You don’t have to flip the fish, which even for the most



Salmon with a tarragon vinaigrette.

confident and experienced cooks doesn’t always end well.

Salmon is available everywhere because it’s so good and so popular. If you can get wild Alaskan salmon, do yourself (and the environment) a favor and buy it. It has a more pronounced flavor than farm-raised does, so you’re getting the full salmon experience. And because the Alaskan seafood

folks are vigilant about sustainability and harvesting practices, you know you’re eating salmon that has no growth hormones, artificial coloring, preservatives or added stuff that you might be wondering about in fish.

Serve this (maybe for Valentine’s Day?) with rice and a green salad, or a whole-grain salad mixed with some fresh or roasted vegetables.

SALMON WITH TARRAGON VINAIGRETTE

Serves 4
Start to finish: 25 minutes

- For the Salmon:**
- 1 tablespoon olive oil, plus more for brushing
 - 4 (6-ounce) fillets of salmon, 1-inch thick, skin on if desired
 - Salt and pepper for tasting
- For the Tarragon Vinaigrette:**
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
 - 2 tablespoons fresh orange juice
 - 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
 - 2 tablespoons minced fresh tarragon leaves
 - 2 tablespoons minced shallots
 - 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
 - Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees F. Heat a heavy, ovenproof skillet over high heat and add 1 tablespoon of the olive oil.

Brush some olive oil over each piece of salmon, and season with salt and pepper. Add the salmon to the pan, skin side down (if relevant). Allow to sear, without moving, in the pan for about 3 minutes. Transfer to the oven and roast for 5 to 8 minutes, until done to your liking.

While the salmon is cooking, in a small container combine the olive oil, orange juice, lemon juice, tarragon, shallots, Dijon mustard, and salt and pepper. Shake to combine.

Transfer the fish to a serving platter or individual plates. Shake the vinaigrette to remix it, and then pour it over the fish. Serve hot or warm.

Nutrition per serving: 285 calories; 128 calories from fat; 14 g fat (2 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 109 mg cholesterol; 605 mg sodium; 2 g carbohydrate; 0 g fiber; 1 g sugar; 37 g protein