



April 8, 2010

Meeting Red Lobster's Executive Chef Darryl Mickler - Part One

I first want to tell you a little about Chef Mickler.

Chef Mickler is Director of Culinary Development, responsible for leading the Culinary Development Team in developing creative fresh, delicious seafood for national promotions. Darryl joined Red Lobster in March 2006, bringing with him a wide variety of culinary experiences. Prior to Red Lobster, Darryl worked at Walt Disney World, where he was Chef de Cuisine and oversaw all banquet menu development at MGM Studios, Animal Kingdom and Walt Disney World Sports and Recreation. Before Disney, he was a chef at Les Chefs de France, Darryl's 1883, McGuire's Irish Pub and Ruby Tuesday. Darryl has won numerous medals in national and local culinary competitions and in 2005 was the featured chef at The James Beard House in New York City. He has appeared on radio and television cooking demonstrations, including The Food Network's "Cooking with Kids" and the Discovery Channel's "Great Chefs, Great Cities."



Now I want to tell you about the real Chef Mickler and some of the people who work with him!

When I 1st arrived at Red Lobster for my meeting with the Chef Mickler, I expected to be one of many others in attendance. Boy was I wrong! The group consisted of Priscilla Tsai and Kelly Hill, both representatives from Creative Loafing's Eat My Charlotte, Gwen Poth with Tizzerts Custom Cakery and myself. We had the pleasure of being entertained and dined by Debra Kanter of Daniel J Edelman Co., Consumer Marketing, Kathy Murphy, Directors of Operations Red Lobster, Erica Jaeger Media and Communications Mgr. Darden - Red Lobster and of course Chef Darryl Mickler himself. The whole event was wonderful. We had the pleasure of enjoying some really wonderful dishes created by Chef Mickler and staff, some new and some being reintroduced. But not only was the food great, so were the people. I have to say that Chef Mickler was one of the most down-to-earth people I've ever had the pleasure of meeting. He gave us the history of each dish as it was served and you could hear the pride of each creation in his voice.

I have to admit something that most don't know, unless you've read my cookbook Stir, Laugh, Repeat. I don't eat raw tomatoes! When I saw the 1st dish making it's way to the table my first thought was "Oh No. Raw tomatoes!" But if you've read my book you also know that I will try almost anything just to be polite. As Chef Mickler talked about the 1st dish, I took my 1st bite. He made it sound so wonderful that it could have been made of liver and I would have tried it, even though liver is one dish I DO NOT eat. And believe me, it was just as good as he made it sound as he described it and I really hated that I only put one slice on my plate. I'll give you more information on that dish and one of the others in my next post. Right now I just want to say that I believe through the leadership of Chef Mickler, Red Lobster is in the process of making some very wonderful and tasty changes.

So, check in tomorrow as I tell you about their new appetizers Wood-Grilled Shrimp Bruschetta and their Lobster Pizza!

For more information about what others think about Red Lobster's new menu go to [Men's Health Magazine](#) and read their article The Best & Worst Food Industry Changes. This is quite an honor for them. And for more information on the changes made to, not just the menu but also to the decor, just click here [Red Lobster](#).

April 8, 2010

Experiencing Red Lobster's New Menu with Chef Mickler - Part 2

The first item served by Chef Mickler from the Red Lobster menu was an appetizer called Wood-Grilled Shrimp Bruschetta. This is a new item on the menu and when it was first delivered to our



table I had my doubts. Remember I told you I don't eat raw tomatoes and this dish clearly had just that. But I was determined to give it a try anyway and boy were my taste buds happy that I did. This appetizer starts out with a piece of garlic sourdough toast topped with fresh tomatoes, red onions and basil and drizzled with balsamic vinaigrette. And if that wasn't enough to make it delicious they went a step further and added wood-grilled shrimp. When I say wood-grilled, Chef Mickler explained that all Red Lobsters have a grill that uses real wood, oak to be specific, not just an open flame. The wood brings out the natural flavor in seafood and sears in the juices. When I took that 1st bite all doubts of my not liking it due to the tomatoes disappeared. I really thought that this couldn't be topped. Wrong!

Next came the Lobster Pizza.

This isn't a new dish but one that if you haven't tried you are really missing out. Chef Mickler explained that this has been on the menu for some time and just hasn't caught on yet. I have to tell you that if you



like lobster and haven't tried this dish, you're missing the boat. This "pizza" starts out with a crispy thin crust. It's topped with langostino lobster meat, melted mozzarella cheese, sweet basil, and yes, fresh tomatoes. This combination was one that really surprised me. I love pizza and the more items dressing my pizza the better, but I never really taste any one single topping, just a combination of all combined. Red Lobster's Lobster Pizza has the perfect combination and blend. With each bite I could taste the lobster, the cheese, the tomatoes and even the basil leaving my taste buds very happy.

Well, those were the 2 appetizers. In Part 3 I'll tell you about the main courses. Can it get any better than the appetizers?

Visit [Red Lobster](#) for menu updates

April 10, 2010

Experiencing Red Lobster's New Menu with Chef Mickler - Part 3

After enjoying both of the wonderful appetizers, it was time to try some of the main courses. The first was called Maui Luau Shrimp and Salmon. This dish consisted of a beautiful cut of fresh salmon and skewered jumbo shrimp, all



brushed with a sweet and spicy glaze and cooked over that wonderful wood grill. Again, the blends were so perfect that you could taste the smoky flavor of the salmon, the wood flavor that seeped into the shrimp but still pick up the sweetness and a touch of spicy heat from the glaze. And to add even more taste, it came with grilled pineapple and a wonderful wild rice pilaf. Great dish!



Next came the Maple-Glazed Chicken. I have to admit that of all dishes served, this was my least favorite. But that isn't saying it wasn't good because it actually was. This dish consisted of a wood-grilled chicken breast basted with a

maple and cherry glaze, served over wild rice pilaf. Now when I said this wasn't one of my favorite dishes, it has to do with the glaze. I love my chicken. I love it grilled. But I'm not crazy about adding a sweetness to my chicken. Now, if the glaze had been on shrimp I would have declared it wonderful. I do have to tell you that I could actually pick up on both flavors as well as the smoky wood from the chicken. So as you can see, the dish made with chicken is great and the glaze is great but my taste buds would rather have the glaze on shrimp or even salmon.

I had thought about listing all 3 main course dishes in this post but changed my mind. After indulging in both appetizers and the 2 dishes above, I really couldn't see how anything could get any better.... But it did and I'm giving that dish its own post as Part 4 of this series. So, check in tomorrow to read about the dish that has become my Red Lobster favorite.

April 11, 2010

Experiencing Red Lobster's New Menu with Chef Mickler - Part 4

In the past, you could walk into a Red Lobster and one of the 1st things you saw was the color red, at least that's what I remember. No more. The colors are now woodsy, blues, grays with some warming reds mixed in. The décor is made up



of flags, ship steering wheels (you can see I'm not up on the nautical terms) and other gadgets used in the fishing/seafood world. And the lighting now accents the tables giving them a cozy, comfortable feel. But the interior and even the exterior décor aren't the only things that have changed and been improved with Red Lobster. They have added a "Today's Fresh Fish" menu.

The day of my royalty treatment was on April 1st and that day's fresh fish choice consisted of – Atlantic Salmon, [Tilapia](#), Rainbow Trout, North Atlantic Haddock and Mahi-Mahi. All are prepared either on the wood-fire grill, oven-broiled or blackened, your choice. Chef Mickler's choice for this final meal was excellent and became my pick of the best!

The dish served was Atlantic Salmon with New Orleans Shrimp. All I can say is OH MY! The salmon was blackened with Cajun spices but the real treat came in with the shrimp topping and it's spicy [Tabasco](#) beurre blanc. The salmon was, of course, wonderful! Moist and flaky with the perfect seasonings. The shrimp was tender and juicy and cooked to perfection. But the Tabasco beurre blanc was what really made the dish. I have no idea as to what is included in the makeup this wonderful sauce. All I can tell you is that it isn't really hot as you would expect anything with the name Tabasco to be. It has a gentle blend of herbs that I feel would compliment any dish it might be served over. This has become my all time favorite and the dish that I will have a hard time diverting from when I order from Red Lobster. If it weren't for the wonderful treatment that was bestowed by Chef Mickler I would be begging him for this recipe. But, I guess I'll just have to indulge myself with frequent trips to Red Lobster to satisfy my taste buds for this one.

Tomorrow, in Part 5, I'll tell you about the 2 desserts that were served and the 2 wonderful Chef's who actually prepared each dish that was delivered to our table.

Go to [Red Lobster](#) to learn more about the new items on their menu.

April 12, 2010

Experiencing Red Lobster's New Menu with Chef Mickler - Part 5

I'm going to bring my Red Lobster Posts to an end with the desserts. I can tell you that both looked so tasty but I didn't sample them. I don't eat chocolate. But I promise that from the look on everyone's face, they had to be wonderful. Here is a little description to get your taste buds begging.

The Chocolate Wave cake is a warm, rich chocolate cake with vanilla ice cream and a chocolate sauce. It's for the true chocolate lover. This dish also happens to be our #2 preferred dessert among regular guests.



As you can see from the picture, this cake is chocolate with chocolate with chocolate and a little more chocolate on top. Man, if I liked chocolate, this would be a dream!



The Chocolate Lava Cookie is a warm chocolate chip cookie filled with chocolate ganache and topped with vanilla ice cream. It's a modern spin on chocolate lava cake and is only served at Red Lobster. This is the #1 preferred dessert. I

actually started to sample just the cookie part but got wrapped up in seeing the delight on everyone's face as they took a bite that I actually forgot. Again, judging by their expressions, this was another hit.

Now I want to tell you a little about the 2 men that actually prepared these wonderful dishes that I've told you about.

April 12, 2010



Cat Alvarez (left) has been with [Red Lobster](#) for 14 years. He started as a Red Lobster bartender in 1996 and is now a manager of culinary operations. He is responsible for ensuring restaurants prepare and serve the executive chef's creations with excellence, every single day. He also plays a key role in the menu testing program (I would love that job).

Cat's favorite dish to eat at Red Lobster is the Salmon New Orleans, his favorite foods include cheese and any kind of sausage. Cat has done live cooking demos on Hispanic television and remembers making seafood gumbo; he also cooks his Thanksgiving turkey every year in a different style

Chef William (right) discovered his passion for [culinary arts](#) while working at his local Red Lobster in Altamonte Springs, Florida during high school; he's currently been with Red Lobster for 13 years. He pursued a degree in culinary arts from Le Cordon Bleu's program at the Orlando Culinary Academy. Soon thereafter, he became the [sous chef](#) for Red Lobster's corporate culinary development team, working with our Executive Chef's Michael LaDuke, Darryl Mickler and Michael Senich.

Chef William's role consists of being responsible for creating new menu items. His recent creations found on the menu include: beer battered shrimp and Cajun shrimp scampi. His proudest cooking moments -- seeing his family and closest friends react to his creations. A favorite family tradition -- always cooking on mother's day. He favorite cooking techniques are sauté and grilling and he has a special fondness Barbecue and Chinese cuisines.

Both of these young men are based in Florida, but travel to different parts of the country periodically. I have to say that I would love to have either of their jobs. I want to say thank you to both of them, to Chef Mickler, to Erica Jaeger and everyone else involved in making this tasty experience possible.

I hope you've enjoyed my report on the new décor, the new menu and the new and some not-so-new dishes now served by Red Lobster. If you're not sure where the closest restaurant in your area might be, simply click on **[Red Lobster](#)** for their restaurant locator tool.