

ORIGINAL FLAVOUR:
Chef Angus An in his
Maenam dining room



Culinary Blueprint

Angus An builds his award-winning restaurant, Maenam, one sketch at a time

Story Steven Graves // Photography Thorsten Gohl

Angus An looks perfectly at home sitting at the bar in the modern, clean interior of his newest culinary endeavor, Maenam. In front of him, a notebook is opened to a simple sketch of a dish—no words of description are visible.

For An, this sketch represents an integral step toward creating a meal. “A lot of the time I’ll visualize a dish instead of writing down keywords,” says An. “We eat with all our senses . . . so you have to create the food with all your senses as well.” It’s this creative process—a combination of experimentation, artistry and innovation—that has secured An a loyal following.

As accomplished chefs in Vancouver go, An has definitely earned his stripes. The man behind two very different restaurants, Maenam and Gastropod (the fine-dining restaurant that preceded Maenam at its West 4th address), has proven he’s not confined to just one cooking style. Although he’s hesitant to say the shift is an evolution, An does acknowledge that his creative approach with Maenam has become a little more tempered.

“When we were at Gastropod it was a lot more of that free-flowing creative food, but with Maenam there’s a little bit more research involved,” says An. “We’re trying to represent authentic Thai food with local ingredients.” It looks like he’s succeeding at it, as evidenced by the growing collection of awards Maenam has earned since opening its doors in 2009.

Considering An’s background and training, none of this should really come as a surprise. With a resumé that reads like a foodie’s dream vacation—attending the French Culinary Institute, apprenticing under Jean-Georges Vongerichten in New York City, then perfecting his skills in London, England, at Michelin-starred Thai restaurant, Nahm—An has honed his lifelong passion for food under an impressive roster of chefs, including one very special one: “I started cooking very young . . . my mom taught me how. I had a little stepladder that I could get up to the stove with.” What was on the menu? “Fried egg was my first thing, and then scrambled eggs after.”

Surprisingly, An’s professional aspirations weren’t always focused on becoming a chef. After graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from UBC, An had his sights set on becoming an architect. It was only after seeking career advice from local culinary legend John Bishop—someone An idolized—that he decided to turn his passion for food into a career. “[Bishop] had monthly cooking classes at his restaurant,” recalls An, “and I would literally be the only guy. Everybody else there was a housewife.”

Over 10 years later, at an industry event celebrating Gastropod’s win as Vancouver’s best new restaurant, An asked Bishop if he remembered him and the advice he gave. “He said he does [remember]; I really don’t know,” An says with a smile.

As An gushes about ingredients, famous chefs, culinary inspirations and the like, it’s obvious that the advice he received was spot-on. Bishop was lucky enough to be one of the first people that An made an impression upon, but An continues to leave his mark on Vancouver’s culinary landscape, and on every customer he serves. **P**