

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

First episode of new Belmond series digs into 'glocal' Mexican cuisine

September 14, 2023



Maroma's chef brings together his Australian background, the brand's global perspective and the local Mayan culture in his cooking at Woodend. Image credit: Belmond

By EMILY IRIS DEGN

LVMH-owned hospitality group Belmond is out with the premiere episode of a new film series entitled "Breaking Bread."

Dedicated to the culinary minds responsible for dining across the brand's portfolio, the first release focuses on the Michelin-starred Australian chef running Woodend at the Maroma Hotel on Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula. Turning to Mayan food culture and the surrounding coastal jungle for inspiration, the gastronomical creative offers an exclusive look into his world at the Belmond location, speaking to Belmond loyalists, potential customers and conscious travelers alike.

"As chefs, we're in the business of memory making," said Curtis Stone, executive chef at [Woodend by Curtis Stone](#) at the Maroma Hotel and television host, Los Angeles.

"I want guests to remember the experience as special, from a meal that they crave to service that was attentive but unobtrusive," Mr. Stone said. "My hope is when guests look back at their time at Maroma, and those tender feelings well up, that we contributed to those emotions.

"That's all I can hope for."

Jungle to sea

Marrying the traditions of local communities and the haute cuisine of globalized luxury, Belmond is finding a way to offer guests an authentic taste of their destination while being an international name in the industry.

The brand's Maroma location is a part of this movement, serving up flavors and ingredients found in its jungle-to-sea ecosystem at Woodend, the on-site restaurant. This is shown in the debut episode of "Breaking Bread," which will soon reveal other stays in the Belmond portfolio that are similarly asking top talent to dish out delicious creations that bring their locales to life on the palette.



Surrounded by native plants, Maroma's Woodend restaurant features Mayan architecture and the culture's classic, geometric art style. Image credit: Belmond

In this first release, Mr. Stone shares his routine, connects his background to his professional life, walks viewers through popular dishes at the eatery, and explains that lush forest and glittering coast play a huge role in the Woodend menu. Many of the items are directly inspired by his view of the resort and his interactions with the nature that engulfs it.

"Mayan Rice" is made with ancient wheat used by the namesake people who inhabited the land on which Maroma sits, mixed with other grains, indigenous spinach and freshly picked flowers. "Grilled Zucchini" is charred and sits atop a pesto made with native herbs; "Tomato Water" nods to the chef's time swimming in crystal clear cenotes, made with the eponymous fruit's essence, compressed melon and cucumber.

"The first time I came to Maroma, I felt like it was where the jungle meets the ocean," says Mr. Stone in the episode.



Flowers grown around the resort are included in "Mayan Rice," a dish that highlights the ties between Italian risotto and the ancient food of Mexico. Image credit: Belmond

"There's this beautiful little moment where it's green and there are spider monkeys and white-tailed deer and all this incredible wildlife right here, and then as soon as you get to the sand, there's this incredible aqua or turquoise kind of water," he continues. "I feel like it's a really spiritual place, and when you walk out there's just something that calms you, whether it's the ocean or people of the history of the Mayans in this area."

The chef also turns to his Australian childhood for technique, using a smoking fire as the key cooking method at Woodend as he draws on lessons learned from the matriarchs of his family back in Melbourne.

"I named the restaurant Woodend after an area in Victoria, Australia where I spent many days during my childhood," said Mr. Stone.

"My gran Gwen had a farm there and I spent time with livestock and grew to appreciate the serenity of the surroundings," he said. "When I visited Maroma for the first time, so many memories came flooding back a sense of quiet, peace, and comfort."



Mr. Stone states that being skilled at managing a fire is just as important as other cooking techniques at Woodend. Image credit: Belmond

This mindfulness of his past makes Maroma's offering personal, as whatever guests order will be brought together thanks to what is found in Mr. Stone's memory. One of the signature plates, "Blue Prawns," is just one example, featuring sustainably caught local seafood.

Cooked over charcoal, smoke acts as the seasoning, and the flames blacken the tender crustaceans. Paired with delicate vegetables picked nearby, the meal falls in line with the chef's slow food philosophies and Belmond's global perspective.

As ethereal music plays and scenes of the serenely tropical spot cut through images of Mr. Stone crafting various inclusions from Woodend's menu, the restaurant and the landscape are woven together visually, suiting the narrative's description of the interconnected relationship at play.



Food from the ocean and the jungle meet on the plate at Woodend thanks to Mr. Stone's holistic concoctions. Image credit: Belmond

Fanning the flames, the renowned leader in conscious cooking situates Maroma's cuisine at the meeting point of Mayan gastronomy and Australian fire-wielding, aligning with modern luxury travelers' desire to bite into hyperlocal flavors, venture out sustainably and get adventurous overall.

"The jungle meets the sea here, so it's the best of both worlds, really," said Mr. Stone.

"The ingredients we source for the restaurant are the jewels of the sea and land," he said. "To have access to this local and fresh seafood and produce at my fingertips is any chef's dream.

"And when we kiss them with live fire, it creates a delicious and lasting impression."

Global brand, local look

Newly renovated ([see story](#)), Maroma is partaking in the benefits of fusing local and global, or what is known as glocalization.

Luxury travelers are increasingly opting for sustainable trips ([see story](#)) and community-minded vacations ([see story](#)), so as they gear up to fly further in the coming year ([see story](#)), brands that rise to their expectations are sure to be positioned well for the surge ahead.

Breaking Bread with Curtis Stone at Belmond's Maroma

Belmond has been quick to embrace these philosophies, from celebrating authentic Carnival celebrations in Rio rather than whitewashed versions of the event ([see story](#)) to showing off the bounty that seasonal eating provides in the Mediterranean ([see story](#)). The moves cover many burgeoning and long-standing trends that are heating up on

social media and throughout the industry at large, such as slow travel, farm-to-table cuisine, ecotourism, environmental justice and more.

"Breaking Bread" is only the latest demonstration of the company's support for mindful mobility, but it is certainly not the last.

© 2023 Reliance Relocation Services, Inc. All rights reserved.

Luxury Daily is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your **feedback** is welcome.