

# *My Interview with* **CHEF THIERRY**

| BY TRACY ELLEN BEARD

**Chef Thierry, it's an honor to sit down with you. Your restaurant, Café des Artistes in Puerto Vallarta, is iconic. How does it feel looking back on 34 years of its legacy?**

Thank you, Tracy. It's been an incredible journey. When I opened the restaurant 34 years ago, it was just a tiny corner spot in Puerto Vallarta—a quiet town back then. Over the years, it has grown—sometimes during good times, sometimes through challenges. Today, Café des Artistes is a unique place that represents my life's work. I'm very proud of what we've built here.

**I understand your daughter worked with you for a while. Are all your children involved in hospitality?**

Not all of them. My eldest daughter worked with me in the kitchen for a time before going to Paris for culinary school. She stayed in France for ten years but plans to return to Mexico to help open our new restaurant in Bucerías later this year. It will be a small, home-style concept, cooking what we love at home. My second daughter is in Guadalajara, consulting for restaurants, even though she never formally studied hospitality. My youngest sons are pursuing their own paths—one is in real estate near Dallas, and the other is studying in Santa Barbara. But hospitality runs in the family, even if not everyone works directly with me.

**Your passion for the kitchen is evident. What drew you to this career?**

Growing up, I lived in hotels managed by my father, so the hospitality world always surrounded me. Cooking was a hobby I loved, but I never imagined it would become my career. In high school, I considered many paths, but I eventually decided to try culinary school in New York. They required a year of industry experience, and during that time, I fell in love with the profession. I decided to skip school and trained intensively instead. That training, coupled with opportunities to work in Mexico's finest hotels and restaurants,

became my college.

**What led you to Puerto Vallarta?**

When I first visited, I was struck by its natural beauty. It reminded me of my childhood in New Caledonia—the sea, fishing, and outdoor life. I came here for a one-year job and fell in love with the place. I told myself I'd leave for France after that year, but the hotel manager convinced me to stay longer by offering me training opportunities in France and Chicago. Those experiences broadened my perspective, but Puerto Vallarta had my heart. That's when I decided to open Café des Artistes.

**What was it like starting from scratch?**

It was a challenge. I started with no money, renting a small house with 60 seats. The rent was high, and I had to borrow at steep interest rates. In 1994, a devaluation doubled my debt overnight. It was a tough time, but the devaluation also brought more American and Canadian tourists to Puerto Vallarta, which saved us. Slowly, I expanded—renting and eventually buying surrounding lots. It took 20 years to own the property and another 20 to transform it into what it is today.

**What sets Café des Artistes apart from other restaurants in Puerto Vallarta?**

Many of our guests tell us there's nothing like it, even worldwide. The magic begins when you step into the garden—the heart of the restaurant. It's an oasis of beauty and tranquility. Combine that with our dedication to exceptional service and a menu that blends French techniques with Mexican flavors, and you have an unforgettable experience. Every detail, from the architecture to the ambiance, was designed to make guests feel transported.

**Speaking of your menu, how would you describe your culinary style?**

My style is a blend of my French heritage and my love for Mexico. The menu combines French techniques with Mexican ingredients. For example, I'll pair the best local seafood

with classic French sauces or create dishes that highlight Mexican spices in a refined way. Over the years, I've shifted towards simplicity—focusing on the quality of ingredients and using techniques to enhance, not overwhelm their natural flavors.

**Do you have a favorite ingredient?**

That's hard to say! I love tomatoes. A perfectly ripe tomato with the best olive oil, a touch of fleur de sel, and maybe some fresh herbs can be a sublime meal. It's the simple things done well that stand out to me.

**Are you still producing your own tequila and wine?**

Yes, though it's more of a passion project than a business. Our wines are made in collaboration with talented winemakers across Mexico. We have a Sauvignon Blanc from Sinaloa, a Merlot from Baja California, and a rosé named after my wife, Rosette. These wines are currently available exclusively in our restaurants, but we plan to expand distribution. As for tequila, we serve a house blend that pairs perfectly with our cuisine.

**It seems like you've managed to integrate your passions into your work.**

Absolutely. My wife, Rosette, is a jewelry designer, and her creations are featured in the restaurant. We also grow herbs and microgreens on our rooftop garden and collaborate with local farmers. To me, success isn't just about financial rewards—it's about loving what you do. When your work aligns with your passions, it never feels like work.

**What advice would you give to someone starting in the culinary world?**

Follow your passion, but be prepared for hard work. This industry is demanding, but if you love what you do, the challenges become part of the adventure. Always strive for excellence and stay true to your vision. Most importantly, never stop learning. That curiosity will keep you inspired and growing.

Thank you for sharing your story, Chef Thierry. It's inspiring to see how your love for food, culture, and community has created something so special. ❖

