

## **CHEF RODELIO AGLIBOT**

### **"THE FOOD BUDDHA"**

Born in the Philippines and raised in Hawaii, Rodelio Aglibot had his first inkling that his professional calling in life would be cooking at a very early age, crediting his parents as his culinary mentors while attending Lemoore High School in the heart of California's San Joaquin Valley. After watching his father, a US Navy Chef, cook at home, Aglibot tried his own hand at the techniques in a tree house with a hibachi grill and a can of Spam. Luckily, he didn't burn his backyard to the ground, but it did set him off on a culinary path that he is following today—combining a lively and experimental energy with unique ingredients, modern touches and a touch of surprise. His family opened a couple of restaurants growing up where he gained experience as a dishwasher, server and manager.

At age 14, Aglibot and his family settled in Lemoore, California. He later attended UCLA where he studied geography/environmental studies before relocating to San Francisco to pursue his culinary aspirations at the City College's Hotel and Restaurant Program, one of America's longest running hospitality and culinary school programs. His mentoring instructors imposed on him to apply for the prestigious Chef's Apprenticeship Program at the Five-Star, Five-Diamond Greenbrier Resort in West Virginia. Aglibot notes his acceptance into the program in 1995, shortly after graduating Culinary School, was the single most important and influential experience of his career. Today Rodelio cites his engineering experience as a valuable asset as he executes systems and practices to insure consistency and monitor all cost including labor and goods. His management experience prior to him becoming a chef has become invaluable and separates his skill set from other hospitality professionals.

Aglibot then returned to San Francisco from 1997 to 2001 where his creative zeal for creating and executing concepts, as well as restaurant openings took flight, most notably the E & O Trading Company, a Pan-Asian restaurant under the direction of chefs Joyce Goldstein and Gary Woo. As the opening sous chef, he furthered his education in Asian cuisine and began to hone his own culinary identity. His first "Chef" positions were notably in San Francisco as well at Peregrine, where he was also the "General Manager" and managed service and the beverage program, his FOH training continued as well at the Magic Flute Ristorante. He was also a founder in a specialty seafood company in San Francisco called Ahi Brothers in 1998, supplying premium ahi tuna to the finest dining destinations in the Bay Area including the French Laundry in Yountville, his entrepreneurial spirit began inconspicuous on his home kitchen table.

He relocated back to Los Angeles in 2001, first as the Chef and Manager at Zazen Asian Bistro, where he created the menu and trained all BOH and FOH staff to united the concept vision. Soon, his ascent into celebrity chefdom began when he became the founding/opening executive chef of the celebrity studded juggernaut Koi Restaurant in Los Angeles, in 2002, where he earned his stars for creating an innovative menu of Asian dishes, blending bright flavors with an array of textures and temperatures. Within two years of being at the helm at Koi, Rodelio was presented with an opportunity to develop his own concept, leading to the creation of his first restaurant Yi Cuisine, which was named one of the "Best New Asian Restaurants" by *Food & Wine* magazine in 2004.

After a 3 year run at Yi Cuisine, and eager to continue his education through real world experience, he traveled throughout the United States, Europe, Australia, Asia and Southeast Asia on a multitude of consulting projects. Celebrity guest chef appearances began filling his calendar with locations and events as varied as the Westin Hotel in Kuala Lumpur, the Shangri-La Hotel chain's two properties in Hong Kong and Manila, the Malaysian International Gourmet Festival held in Kuala Lumpur and at a chef event in Jakarta, Indonesia. His travels have introduced his food to all parts of the world. He also helped launch brands such as Mendocino Farms in LA and Blowfish Sushi, Hollywood.

In the fall of 2007, Aglibot was brought on to consult and help conceptualize Sunda New Asian restaurant in Chicago, which launched in the spring of 2009. There, he oversaw the culinary program until 2010. In the spring of 2011, Chef Aglibot and BLT Restaurant Group (now E Squared Hospitality) in New York created a partnership in the Spring of 2010 that would allow him to create a new concept from Italian to Asian Gastropubs, and serve as Corporate Executive Chef ultimately moving to NYC in 2010-fall of 2011. During his time with BLT,

Rodelio directed 15 restaurants nationwide and was responsible for all new concepts opening under the BLT flagship. All Chefs were under the direction of Chef Rodelio.

He returned to Chicago in the winter of 2012 and based his consulting work there in Chicago, the next year he created a hospitality group, Rodelio, also Partner/VP of Culinary Operations for Intrestco, LLC, a Chicago based lifestyle hospitality company that owns, creates and operates restaurant concepts such as E+O Food and Drink and EO Kitchen in Cincinnati with his Intrestco Partners Aeron Lancero and Paul Lee. During 2012-2013 prior to opening E+O, Rodelio had several consulting clients worldwide including Hong Kong and Southern USA.

His entrepreneurial background is dynamic and varied, including his long established (2006) west coast hospitality/consulting company Pilot Light Hospitality LLC in based LA as well as Babas Pasta, an artisan ravioli and pasta company in Southern California, which he owned and operated. In 2012 he helped open a regional American concept at the Madison Hotel, located in Memphis and a sleek Asian eatery in Hong Kong called Sesame. In the summer of 2013, Rodelio was also responsible for a Japanese-inspired menu in Salerno, Italy called Me Geisha. In the fall of 2015, Rodelio and his Italian partner Giuseppe Tuosto opened Me Geisha in Rome, and Me Geisha in Nola, Italy. Rodelio divides his time and resources between Chicago and Italy to oversee the expansion on the brand and concept, and maintain a life balance.

In the Spring 2015 until Fall 2016 Rodelio also served as Corporate Executive Chef for Lucky Strike Entertainment, a national chain of bowling alleys and restaurants, Rodelio morphed their current dining experience into a new concept as well as managed openings, menu development and new concepts. He was retained as a Corporate Chef at large traveling the nation half the month for Lucky Strike.

In the Spring of 2016, his concept opening continued with the creation and opening of Firefin Poke in Chicago, the first free standing Health/Poke fast casual restaurant of its kind, Rodelio and his partners recently dissolved the entity.

Known the world over as "The Food Buddha" because of his dedication to his heritage and his approach to creative menu development, Aglibot has been featured on many national television programs for his New Asian cuisine, as well as Italian and American cooking. In the summer of 2011, his show "Food Buddha" premiered on The Learning Channel ("TLC"). He has also appeared on a number of national and local television shows including; "TODAY Show", CBS Morning Show, "The Ellen DeGeneres Show", Food Network's "The Best Of", "The Steve Harvey Show", Style Network's "It's my Party", "Extra", Fox's "Live Like a Star" and "Entertainment Tonight", as well as local morning shows in Chicago, LA, NYC, Minneapolis and Miami.

His impressive culinary accolades include; print features in USA Today, Chicago Magazine, which just named Earth + Ocean, one of his newest restaurants, one of the best new restaurants in Chicago for 2013, *Food & Wine* named his LA restaurant "Best New Asian Restaurant in 2005", *Bon Appetit*, *CS Magazine* named his concept Sunda "Best New Restaurant in 2009", *The Chicago Sun-Times* and *Chicago Tribune* where he received glowing 3-star reviews from both publications and was recently named one of "StarChefs" 500 Chefs to Know. European coverage in *Elite Traveler* and *vanity Fair Italy*. Other current honors and positions include Tastemaker and Ambassador for Mariano's Fresh Market in the Midwest and DreamTrips Local, Global Chef Ambassador.

A three-time James Beard Foundation Dinner Participant, Rodelio actively participates in the promotion of the Culinary Arts as a guest speaker and judge for cooking competitions. One of his proudest accomplishments in 2012 is his non-profit charity named "In Chef's Hands", which connects individuals with special needs who have a passion for food and cooking with established Chefs in the Chicago land area.

Aglibot, a tireless creative soul, continues his passion for travel, knowledge and enlightenment. His unpretentious food style, knowledge of ingredients and exciting food traditions are trademarks to his personality. In his spare time, he travels, plays golf, paints, writes, speaks Spanish and Italian and volunteers. He lives his life by his own philosophy: "A tragedy in life is not to find oneself and one's passion...an even greater tragedy is to know one's passion and deny oneself of its treasures."