



ERIC CHAVOT

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AMIR CHEN

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BRITS ABROAD

Jonathan Wright, director of kitchens at the Fairmont Singapore & Swissôtel The Stamford, tells *Janet Harmer* about the culinary community of Singapore

Q You are the director of kitchens across two hotels, how does that work?

As the director of kitchens for Fairmont Singapore & Swissôtel The Stamford, I look after all culinary operations at the 15 restaurants and bars across both hotels. We have a sizable team and take care to be highly organised because we have many projects in progress at any given time. Currently, we are creating a new kitchen garden on the roof, launching a new bar in November, developing three new kitchens and have just been involved with the Singapore Grand Prix.

Even though both hotels are part of the same organisation (FRHI Hotels & Resorts, which operates three brands: Fairmont, Swissotel and Raffles) and share internal structures, from a guest's perspective, they operate very differently.

Q What is the size of your team and how many food and beverage outlets do you service?

There are approximately 350 chefs and 150 stewards looking after 15 restaurants and bars, as well as two in-room dining divisions servicing more than 2,000 bedrooms across both hotels. The team also handles the banquet requirements for events held at the Raffles City Convention Centre, which includes 27 function spaces with combined seating for more than 10,000.

Q You previously worked in Singapore during the 1990s. What made you go back?

I had a very positive experience working at the Raffles Hotel, and enjoyed being a part of the country's rich culinary community.

I'm amazed at how Singapore has grown while I've been away. While expansion has brought problems – in particular traffic congestion and manpower challenges – it has also created a surge of entrepreneurialism throughout the restaurant and bar scene.

I enjoy hip restaurants opening every week, but I also remain a huge fan of Singapore's hawker food and local cuisine.

Q What do you like most about Singapore?

While I enjoy the mix of ethnicities, the food culture, Singapore's legendary efficiency and the energetic pace of living,



the most compelling aspect of working here is the people. They are warm, welcoming and have quickly made me feel at home.

Q And what do you dislike?

Everywhere has its ups and downs, but when we move somewhere we do a great deal of research to ensure we are confident with our decisions. We also make a point of absorbing the local culture and environment. Traffic congestion can be a pain, and I miss driving a car.

Q What are the biggest challenges?

Manpower issues pose a problem. The low unemployment rates, coupled with the decreasing percentage of locals entering the hospitality industry, means that hiring and retaining staff can be a challenge.

Q What encouraged you to work overseas?

In 1993, I took a team of chefs from Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons to Raffles Hotel in Singapore, which was newly renovated and absolutely stunning in both service and appearance. The city was exotic, full of wonderful sights, smells and tastes – I couldn't wait to get back to the country.

Q What are your career highs and lows?

The highs are innumerable – cooking at the famed James Beard House with a wonderful team of chefs and working in

CV JONATHAN WRIGHT

- **2013 – present** Director of kitchens, Fairmont Singapore & Swissotel The Stamford, Singapore
- **2010-2013** Director of culinary and food and beverage operations, Sandy Lane Resort, Barbados
- **2007-2010** Executive chef/director of food and beverage, Setai hotel, Miami Beach, USA
- **2006-2007** Executive chef, Lark Creek Inn, Larkspur, California, USA
- **2006-2007** Executive chef and director of food and beverage, Conrad Hotel Indianapolis, USA
- **2002-2005** Executive chef, Windsor Court hotel, New Orleans, USA
- **2000-2002** Chef-proprietor, La Gousse D'Ail, Oxford
- **1999-2000** Executive chef, Great Eastern Hotel, London
- **1996-1999** Executive chef, Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, Great Milton, Oxfordshire
- **1995-1996** Executive sous chef, Raffles Hotel Singapore
- **1991-1995** Executive sous chef, Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, Great Milton, Oxfordshire

a city as full of character as New Orleans, as well as the relationships I've formed.

The biggest challenge was Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005. Even though my wife and I were very lucky, it was a life-changing event.

Q Has working abroad enhanced your career?

Working in a foreign environment with people from different backgrounds, requires creativity and flexibility, which has made me a more well-rounded individual, both professionally and personally.

Q Do you have a family who travel with you?

My wife, our German shepherds and our cat travel with me. My wife was born in Singapore, but moved to the US when she was two, so she is enjoying exploring her birthplace. Transporting pets is expensive and stressful, but they are part of the family and make our house feel like home.

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