

GETTING FRESH

Grand Hyatt San Antonio's executive chef Jeffrey Axell keeps it real.

By: [BONNY OSTERHAGE]



When you are the executive chef at a high-profile convention hotel, it can be a challenge to consistently turn out delicious meals, due in part to the sheer volume of food that must be produced on a daily basis.

Some chefs might be tempted to sacrifice quality for quantity, but that is not the case with Grand Hyatt San Antonio's Executive Chef Jeffrey Axell. Every single item that is served in Achote River Café and Bar Rojo, as well as all the room service and banquet fare, is in keeping with not only the high standards of the hotel, but also with the high standards this seasoned chef demands of everything that leaves his kitchen.

A Fresh Start in San Antonio

When you have been with the same company for 28 years, you learn a thing or two about how to stay innovative and fresh. For Axell, working at 11 different Hyatt properties gave him a unique insight into the various flavors and techniques of different regions across the country.

"That is why I enjoy moving across the country because you can try all kinds of new and exciting cuisines and experience different cultures," Axell says. "It has been a constant learning experience for me, and as a chef, it is what keeps you motivated."

Axell grew up in the picturesque San Francisco Bay area and attended California Culinary Institute. Immediately after graduation, he began his 28-year career with the Hyatt Corporation, which took him all across the country (including a stint at the Hyatt Hill Country Resort) before landing him back in his hometown of San Francisco. Along the way, he worked as the sous chef at the Capital Square Hyatt in Columbus, Ohio, where he got to know that property's general manager, Tom Netting. More than a decade later, Netting was tapped to be the managing director of a new property set to open in San Antonio that would feature a new concept in Hyatt restaurants. Netting knew which chef to call.

"When I got the call from Tom, I said 'I'm there,'" recalls Axell, who was intrigued with the Latin-infusion concept of what is now the Achote River Café and Bar.

Working closely with the Hyatt corporate chef, Axell began to research the bold flavors of that region and to experiment with recipes, keeping everything as pure and fresh as possible.

"You have to let the foods speak for themselves," Axell advises. "You can't overcook them or prepare them with too many seasonings or heavy sauces."

