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No rest for Ken Hom at the Copacabana

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Possibly the world's best renowned Chinese chef, Ken Hom talks to Jackie Mitchell about his venture at Brazil's most famous hotel – and reveals he's no plans to stop there

Celebrity TV chef Ken Hom's latest project is a new restaurant at Copacabana Palace hotel in Rio de Janeiro, which just celebrated its 90th anniversary. "They asked me to come up with a concept so I decided on pan Asian food taking the best dishes from all over Asia and mixing them together," says Hom.

Hom is masterminding every detail of the restaurant, due to open in January 2014 – even the music, which he's compiling himself. "It's Shanghai lounge music – Chinese music remodified."

Has he got plans for more restaurants? "I'm doing one restaurant at a time. I have a restaurant in Bangkok, which is about to move and be renovated, so it's keeping me busy. I only do restaurants in areas where I like to go and have fun," he adds. "I enjoyed my time in Thailand so much that I've lived there since 2002."

Hom thinks consultants play a big role, but they need to immerse themselves in any location they're working in. "Thailand is different to Brazil," he says. "I don't think I could have worked on a project in Rio if I hadn't been to Brazil so many times. I was able to design a menu based on 13 years of eating there."

When it comes to kitchen design, Hom's criticism is that often a restaurant or hotel design is carried out by people who haven't a clue what the menu is and how the food is going to

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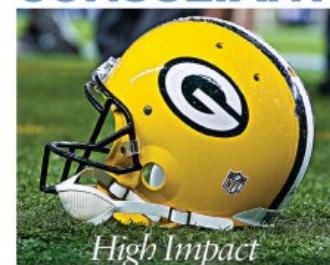
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be produced. "They have their own visions, but as they haven't had to cook in a kitchen, it isn't designed properly.

"At the same time, I have my ideals; I know about the kitchen but I don't know how other aspects will work such as the lighting, so experts are invaluable to support what we do. Consultants and chefs should have a good working relationship. They need to be respectful of the chef as he or she is the person who produces the food that pays the consultant's fee."

Hom was recently in London to take part in Channel 4's *Sunday Brunch Live*, where he demonstrated various recipes. "I'm a teacher, so I enjoy showing people how to cook more than anything," he says.

The TV show he enjoyed most was the award-winning BBC series *Exploring China: A Culinary Adventure*, where Hom travelled more 15,000 km over five weeks of filming in China. "It was a show I wanted to do for a long time, close to my goal of opening up China and going back to my roots."

Hom would like to make a TV series on Thailand and a TV programme about waste. "We waste too much food and resources. I am keen on that subject, so let's see if I can interest a broadcaster in doing it."

Hom is committed to teaching young people about the hospitality business. "I work with hotels all over the world and operate a pop-up restaurant for two weeks. In the process I work with staff. I love working with young people and seeing the look on their faces when they 'get it'.

"The biggest challenge for restaurants today is to train people in a professional way. You shouldn't do this work because you want to be a celebrity chef – you do it because you are passionate about food and giving good service."



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A few moments with Ken Hom

What's been your greatest challenge? "My first TV series. I was used to talking in front of students rather than talking to a camera. In 1984 when I was signed up by the BBC in London, they gave me a videotape of Delia Smith and said we want you to be like her, which would have been difficult as I prefer to demonstrate cooking techniques rather than to be precise with the number of tablespoons and so on."



[\(http://www.foodserviceconsultant.org/wp-content/uploads/KEN-HOM2-web.jpg\)](http://www.foodserviceconsultant.org/wp-content/uploads/KEN-HOM2-web.jpg)

Chef Ken Hom has plans to write another book

What is your favourite dish and what are you working on? "Peking duck. I love working on how you cook duck in different ways."

You've written 30 books. Any plans for new ones? "After the new restaurant has opened, I plan to start a book on my culinary memoirs and sharing my experiences."

How do you relax? "I love to cook and go out to eat. I'm a fan of British TV – everything from *Downton Abbey* to *Absolutely Fabulous* – I like the British humour. I'm a Manchester United supporter. In the 1980s, Sir Alex Ferguson read I was a fan of Eric Cantona and invited me to meet the team, including a 15-year-old David Beckham starting out. Since then I've been a fan. I also support many charities

including Action Against Hunger (<http://www.actionagainsthunger.org.uk/>) and Prostate Cancer UK (<http://prostatecanceruk.org/>)."

Jackie Mitchell

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