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Top-shelf chef shifts to light fare

The man who catered the British royal family and gave up two Michelin stars to open his own eatery says key is to dump the heavy ingredients and go with individual flavors.



Ruby Gao

In the culinary world, Swiss chef Anton Mosimann pulled off the most attention-grabbing event so far in the 21st century — the catering of Prince William and Kate Middleton's wedding.

Mosimann says the key to his success with the wedding banquet was simply listening. It came from his conversation with the couple in advance, so that their personality and romance could be integrated into the menu and table setting.

"They (Prince William and Kate Middleton) are wonderful people, very engaging, becoming and discussing details," says the 67-year-old chef in an interview with Shanghai Daily.

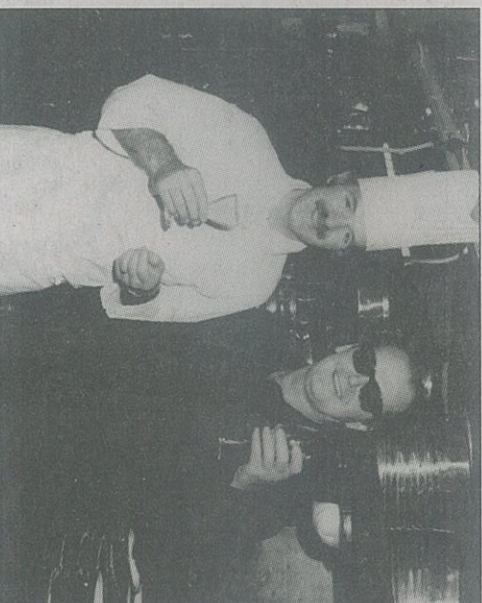
He was in town last week to give a speech at the China Wedding Summit. He declined to give more details due to a confidentiality agreement with the royal family but insisted there were no disagreements between the couple.

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To combat rain-inducing illness, try these foods **B3**



Anton Mosimann (right) with Elton John



Mosimann with American actor Jack Nicholson



Mosimann (right) with late tenor Pavarotti

It's all about light fare, says chef for Brit royals

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"They make each decision together in harmony. Obviously they know each other well," says Mosimann.

He has cooked for four generations of the British royal family, from the Queen Mother to Prince William, and become the holder of the Royal Warrant by Appointment to HRH The Prince of Wales for Catering Services in 2000. In 2004, the chef received the OBE (Order of the British Empire) "for services to the tourist and food industries."

He has witnessed dining changes at Buckingham Palace brought by younger royal generation. "Taste becomes lighter and lighter," he says. And his culinary style fits such an evolution.

"I created what I call cuisine naturelle," he says. "Its main characteristic is that it does without such ingredients as butter, cream and alcohol. The focus is concentrated even more on the flavor of the individual ingredients. The dishes are only lightly cooked."

He says his technique was formed and influenced by a year he spent long ago in Japan, where he became impressed by the "light, honest and artistic" cuisine.

Mosimann was born in Solothurn in the foothills of the Swiss Jura. Life in the kitchen started when he was 15. In his early 20s, he traveled to Japan, becoming the head chef at the Swiss Pavilion during the World Expo 1970 in Osaka.

One of the new trends he is seeing now is that organic food is being accepted more by the royals thanks to Prince Charles. In the kitchen of Buckingham Palace, with an area of around 300 square meters, old traditional copper dishes and pots coexist with modern equipment. The table is laden with various organic ingredients, mostly from Prince Charles' farm at Highgrove House in southern England.

"There's a huge garden, with wonderful flowers, herbs and vegetables," says the chef.

His interpretation of royal food is "good and honest food made from British ingredients, organic."

Prince Charles is addicted to Mosimann's roast lamb.

"He (Charles) is a lamb lover, eating the lamb from his farm. I roast it with fresh herbs, a nice sauce and gravy, and serve it with roast potato and light colorful vegetables," Mosimann says.



Swiss chef Anton Mosimann addresses the China Wedding Summit in Shanghai.

Besides Buckingham Palace, the chef is also often invited by No. 10 Downing Street to cook for prime ministers and visiting heads of state. So far he's served five British prime ministers — Margaret Thatcher, John Major, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and David Cameron.

It's not easy to entertain the politicians, but it's perhaps more odd to see his cooking kept under close watch. He says once he served a very famous president, and two security guards were assigned to the kitchen to check every detail, from ingredients to utensils, tasting every dish before final serving.

The most impressive politician he served was Thatcher. Mosimann was responsible for a dinner she used to entertain Francois Mitterrand (the late French president) at Downing Street 30 years ago.

"I don't think she was excited about her chef at that time. I cooked veal steak for her and morille mushroom

for Mitterrand, as it was one of his favorite foods," he recalls.

After the meal, Thatcher wrote him a letter to express thanks. But that's not the end of the story.

"Three years later I was at a party in London, and she was together with her husband. She came and told me she still remembered that dish, saying 'That was fantastic, but very expensive.'"

Mosimann cooked for a Chinese political leader 12 years ago but can not remember his name. To cook with a Chinese touch he cooperated with celebrity TV chef Ken Hom, who is Chinese American.

Mosimann's close relationship with the British royal family dates to 1975, when he was 28. At that time he was probably the youngest Maitre Chef des Cuisines at the Dorchester Hotel in London, one of the most prestigious hotels in the world.

"One day the mother of Queen Elizabeth came to lunch," he says. "After

going back, she asked her chef to write to him to learn about the recipe. She loved my food and approach."

Mosimann made a big name for himself throughout the United Kingdom when the Dorchester's Grill restaurant, for which he worked, became the first hotel restaurant outside France awarded two Michelin stars.

He'd been a Michelin-starred chef for a decade when one day in 1987 he stopped by a beautiful old former church building in the Belgravia section of London, which had been converted into a private, members-only dining club.

He had always wanted to open his own restaurant, and had a decision to make.

The 19th-century building was perfect as a private club due to its low profile and location in one of London's wealthiest districts.

But if he took over the eatery and kept it private, he would have to give up his Michelin stars.

Finally he choose to keep it private, naming it Mosimann's. Prince Charles is one of his regular customers.

"I didn't lose my stars. I keep them in my heart," the chef says.

Now he enjoys cooking for those loyal customers, which is more like cooking for the family, says the chef. Three weeks ago he entertained 15 Chinese guests in his dining club.

"I served them risotto, the most demanded food in my culinary life. Tell you a secret: I replaced whipped cream with the butter and added my beloved sauce champagne!" he says.

He says Chinese customers behave differently overseas, compared with the past. They no longer stick to asking for Chinese food but are more open-minded, embracing different food cultures.

Mosimann has started developing a catering business with his sons, Philipp and Mark. They started doing catering for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

When asked about his success — why a Swiss chef is so loved by the British royal family — he says, "I am lucky and it's all about quality, consistency and dedication."

As a testament to that quality, he has twice heard the compliment, "It's the best lemon tart I have ever had in my life!" That praise came in identical quotes, at different times, from Carla Bruni, the former French first lady, and Jimmy Carter, the former American president.