



Apéritif – FAQs for Chef Nic Vanderbeeken

About Nic Vanderbeeken, Executive Chef of Apéritif

Chef Nic Vanderbeeken, 38, brings over 20 years of experience to lead the team at Viceroy Bali's Apéritif, an elegant fine dining restaurant serving Contemporary Global Cuisine in the lush valleys of Ubud. Emphasising his mastery over infusing lesser-known Indonesian flavours and ingredients with distinctive modern European cuisine, Nic presents dishes that embody the essence global cuisine, reflecting the borderless nature of today's world.

Having led the team at the luxury property's award-winning CasCades restaurant over five years, Nic continues to elevate his one-of-a-kind creations at Apéritif. His progressive and eclectic cooking style lends itself to the restaurant's cuisine. It melds the best of modern European techniques and cuisine with various ingredients and touches from the Old Spice islands to create dishes that appeal to the modern global diner. The wealth of knowledge he has accumulated from his time in Bali and Indonesia allows him to meticulously craft distinctive degustation menus for an unrivalled culinary journey through the world of gastronomy.

FAQs

1. What do you think of Ubud/Bali/Indonesia's fine dining scene?

In my eyes, fine dining restaurants in Bali are quite limited at the moment, but always growing. There are amazing restaurants and chefs that are creative and innovative, but don't necessarily fall into the classic "fine dining" category. To me, fine dining is about the entire experience – from beautiful food and a gorgeous space to the attention to detail in the service and, also, the selection of wines helped by a talented sommelier and team.

Many restaurants may choose to focus more on a concept, rather than delivering a holistic fine dining product, but I believe that fine dining should be about the whole package. We are lucky that the Ubud dining scene as a whole is always growing. There are many places opening that cater to different dining preferences, which I believe is good for the scene in general. This means that Ubud is a dining destination, and eventually, will be home to more fine dining restaurants of world-class calibre. I believe that this will help elevate Ubud, and Bali, as a whole. As for Indonesia, I cannot necessarily speak for the country as a whole, but discerning diners definitely know to travel to Bali to get some amazing experiences. There is a lot of potential for Bali and Indonesia, and I can only foresee that growing in the coming years.

2. How, in your opinion, Apéritif is different from these places?

Apéritif is a unique dining experience. We aim to redefine the entire experience of luxury fine dining, as we think about each guest's enjoyment. From the space and décor, to the atmosphere and quality of produce—whether local or imported—used, we definitely value each and every little detail. At Apéritif, quality comes first.

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From the moment the guests step through the door, you are transported to another world and era. Guests can truly experience the ambiance of a luxurious colonial era that harks back to the Roaring Twenties. On one side, there is the gorgeous 1920s-inspired bar, where you are able to enjoy a pre-dinner drink or aperitif with snacks, prior to stepping into the grand dining room for a lovely degustation meal. Coupled with the view of the Valley of the Kings and the rice paddy fields, it is an unparalleled experience that transports you back in time. The bar also beckons you to come back for an after-dinner digestif, which adds another touch point for the entire experience.

The food we offer is eclectic and takes inspiration from many different places in the world, which means that diners can connect even deeper to the food we offer, as there are little hints of flavours that are familiar to many diners. Apéritif should not just be a special occasion destination, but one where you can create memories with friends and family over amazing food, cocktails and wines. We would like to bring back this forgotten era of fine dining, which is one that will surely be unforgettable.

Our entire culinary journey is reflective of our philosophy—one that is unique and crosses many cultures and culinary borders. We are very open-minded with where our inspiration comes from, and we'd like to take you on a journey around the world with a well-balanced, yet eclectic menu.

Many dishes have hints of Indonesia—which is also about us respecting where we are and where we live—but is still international modern European cuisine. We are bringing back memories of the various things we have tasted from our travels and life experiences, including that from Indonesia, Southeast Asia, Europe and America. It is not really about where we are, but who we are as a team. This is what I believe makes Apéritif truly unique.

3. What do you hope to achieve with the restaurant?

The most important thing for us is to ensure each and every guest has a memorable experience at the restaurant. We hope to be able to impart our take on global eclectic cuisine to discerning diners from all over the world. We would like to make a memorable impression from the moment they step through our doors.

I hope that the team and I are able to cook for our guests and make sure that they have a good time and grow to love our food. We hope to also be able to impart the essence of Old World meets New World fine dining where they are able to get the full fine dining experience, combined with modern gastronomic dishes.

4. Can you describe your culinary philosophy?

At Apéritif, we serve cuisine that is inspired by different cultures and countries around the world. We take commonalities between each culture's culinary histories, and merge it in a holistic and harmonious way to create unique dishes that can be a fusion of even three countries. Having said that, we also respect the place we are in and pay homage to the complex flavours from the Indonesian diaspora. That is how we got to define global eclectic cuisine at Apéritif.

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I always tell my team to be open-minded and respect those you work with. Each person may have their own ideas, but it's important to teach them about quality and basic recipes so they can build on it in the future, rather than copy their previous chef's philosophy. Learn to be different, don't pigeonhole yourself too quickly.

5. How has your experience influenced your style of cuisine today?

In all the restaurants I have worked in, it was always the quality that came first. Focus on the products and try to use everything from any given product in order to minimise wastage. Now, it is seen as sustainability, which we encourage and the industry is an advocate for. I was always trained not to throw anything away that we couldn't use.

In a restaurant I used to work at called Bru, if you cut even 2mm too much off the ends of a carrot, you'd get in trouble with the chef.

6. Chefs find their passion for cooking – how did you find your way into the culinary field and kitchen?

I started work in a kitchen as a steward as I wanted to become more independent. I did this for a year, and knew that the atmosphere of the kitchen was something that I liked and gravitated towards. It was a place that I felt I wanted to grow up being a part of. After that, it was just all about learning as much as possible, keeping my head down and doing the work, after which I slowly moved up.

7. How do you bring different elements – from fresh, quality ingredients to creativity and complex flavours – harmoniously into a balanced dish?

I always turn to what is available around me first: Where can I find the best quality produce that also showcases the right flavours? We work very closely with our suppliers; those who already understand what I'm looking for, which makes the job easier. A product needs to be respected for its own complex flavour, and in Apéritif, we always try to elevate the flavours using the right techniques. This can extend from pickling and fermenting to preserving. The whole menu actually builds all these flavours up so that diners can truly enjoy each and every flavour to the fullest. We also make flavours more complex by introducing spices. Most dishes are unique because of their sauces.

8. Tell us your inspiration for creating new dishes.

It is always a mix of techniques and flavours I like. I do like to experiment with different cooking techniques, whether it is braising, smoking, roasting, vacuum cooking or pickling. I believe in being inspired from all different cultures, as there are usually commonalities between them.

After that, it is about experimenting with different flavour combinations, spice mixes and techniques that will bring out the best in the produce we use, but also present something unique and interesting on a plate. It should always be something familiar, but still unexpected and surprising for my guests.

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9. What kinds of ingredients inspire you?

Ingredients are always selected by what is available. We're dependent on our farmers and suppliers in Bali, and that is why we are constantly experimenting with new ingredients in our kitchen.

10. Produce, Creativity or Technique. What is more important to you?

Produce always ranks on top. It will always be the starting point of a new dish. You always have to taste the product first, then decide what technique best showcases the flavour of this ingredient. After that, it is up to your creativity to bring it all together.

11. What is the greatest influence in your kitchen?

The greatest influence is usually my past experiences: What I ate, where I ate. The team gets the freedom to share dishes they love the most, which sometimes influences the flavours of our dishes here. I'm very open-minded and realistic, but still a perfectionist, so I follow my own style, while being open to trying new things.

12. What is your earliest food memory? Which flavours from your childhood can you not live without?

The time I made cake with my mother. I licked the raw batter of an apple cake off the spatula. An interpretation of this memory can actually be found in our menu.

I also love mayonnaise, mashed potatoes with hints of nutmeg, and brown butter from the pan when seared with steak or fish. It's the best when the butter is mixed with the mashed potatoes, too.

13. What keeps you motivated at this point of your career?

You need to be patient if you want to reach your target. I don't think I've reached my target yet, and even after I achieve that, I will want a new one. Challenges keep me going, as well as learning about new and different food. I grew up within the hospitality industry, and I don't think I can live without it. I try to always surround myself with people with the same passion.

14. What do you do to stay on top of the new cooking trends?

I read plenty of books and listen to chefs of the new generation. They usually have the opportunity to stage at plenty of edgy restaurants, where they are able to share the new techniques that they have learnt with me. It is also important to be talking or cooking with chefs, as every collaboration has a sharing of ideas and techniques.

15. In the past years, how has cuisine changed around the world?

These days, chefs are more open to sharing recipes and ideas are being exchanged very quickly. Social media has had a big impact on food. I feel that every dish should be Instagrammable, but it is a relief that people still hold true to the essence of cooking, the food and the product.

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16. Being a chef is perceived as a glamorous profession, what advice could you give to chefs who are first entering the field today?

Follow your heart, cook in a team where you feel comfortable, be open to constructive feedback or criticism, be disciplined and focus on your skills and what you do. Always take the time to learn the basics, and make sure you taste a lot, and everything. Follow your own path, but always be passionate and motivated. You don't have to feel like you are always measuring yourself against others.

What I have learned from the chefs I have worked with in the past is that you should stick to your culinary identity. Work in places where you feel connected with the philosophy and the restaurant, but also take the time to learn what they have to teach. The day you lead your own team, you will have to create menus and recipes based on these foundations and the knowledge you have accumulated over the years.

Other FAQs [always subject to change]

1. Favourite kitchen tool?
2. Favourite thing about Ubud?
3. What is your current signature dish?
4. What ingredients are you currently experimenting with?