

# Casa de Mañana Serves Up Chef Curtis

During his storied career as an executive chef at luxury spas and hotels, Chef Curtis Cooke catered to many celebrities.

But his belief in a work-life balance and a desire for more interaction with those he cooked for, recently prompted him to leave that glitz and glamour and bring his clean, smart, delicious and healthy cuisine to Casa de Mañana.



*Chef Curtis at Casa de Mañana*

“Coming here is a change from previous positions but I felt it was time I did something for my own soul,” Chef Curtis said.

“Getting to know residents, what they enjoy and creating a dining experience for them is priceless. When I see them happy, it’s like getting a warm hug from my grandparents. Here, the feedback, good or bad, is so genuine. I appreciate that. The feedback makes me do better.”

A native of Texarkana, TX, Chef Curtis originally pursued a degree in psychology from Texas State University. But tired of eating the same fast food during college, he discovered his passion for cooking while trying out the recipes on the Discovery Channel’s “Great Chefs, Great Cities,” and soon started as a cook in Austin.

He graduated from the renowned Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York and found himself at the Lake Austin Spa. There, he learned to embrace fresh, seasonal produce.

"I believe ingredients should always originate in their whole form, the way nature intended," Chef Curtis said. "I believe in honest food and flavors. A carrot should taste like a carrot, the way nature intended. I showcase natural flavors and find creative, healthful ways to complement them."

His philosophy of life balance makes it easy for him to mix comfort food like meatloaf and fried chicken with vegetarian choices. During the pandemic when many residents are having meals delivered to their homes, Chef Curtis could not connect with residents in the dining room. However, he got creative.

"I made it a point to accompany the food delivery staff to as many homes as possible and introduce myself to residents," Chef Curtis said. "I wanted to meet them. That's why I'm here. I want that interaction. It's important to me to get to know who I'm cooking for and for them to know me. I want residents to feel good after a meal."