

Angus An takes a rare break from running five restaurants, including Maenam (pictured), and planning the opening of a sixth

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Secrets of Success

Angus An reflects on a career spent in the kitchen **BY SHERI RADFORD**

"I know I won't be rich from running a restaurant, but I think it'll be a pretty fulfilling life."

It's a perfect spring day in Vancouver, and Angus An is reflecting on his career path. Between running five restaurants (and preparing to open another), writing a cookbook, and being a husband and father, the busy chef rarely has time to pause. But on this day, he sits at a sunny table in his flagship Maenam (page 100), overlooking bustling 4th Avenue, and reminisces. "I've always loved food," he says. "I've always cooked in restaurants. I've never actually had a job that's not restaurant-related."

After a brief detour to study architecture, and stints cooking and learning in New York, Montreal and England (where An met the woman who is now his wife), An felt it was time to return to Vancouver: "I always wanted to come back, because this is home." Most audaciously, he decided to open his own restaurant. An now calls his 27-year-old self "very very young."

Gastropod opened in 2006 and quickly garnered awards and rave reviews. For a couple of years, everything ran smoothly, though An admits now he was burning the candle at both ends: "It was work work work. Before I'd go to bed, I'd read cookbooks. It was everything for food and work."

Things changed when the recession hit, and diners could no longer afford Gastropod's fine-dining experience. Five months in a row, the restaurant lost huge sums of money. An made a tough decision: he shuttered Gastropod in 2009 and in its place opened Maenam, a casual Thai restaurant. Fortunately, it wasn't long before the diners came back and the accolades rolled in once

again. *Vancouver Magazine* named Maenam Restaurant of the Year 2016.

If An could go back in time, he knows his younger self would ignore any advice offered. "As a proud chef, a young chef, you have to have a certain amount of confidence to open a restaurant in an established city like Vancouver," he says, adding, "Gastropod was the right restaurant to open first. I needed to learn through those failures."

Now that An is a bit older, he's trying to work fewer hours so he can spend more time with his wife and 10-year-old son and pursue hobbies such as photography. The family eats at his restaurants a lot—partly for quality control but mainly for enjoyment—and makes time to dine at favourites around the city, including Cinara, Cioppino's, Masayoshi, Au Petit Café, Linh Café, Marutama, Fayuca, Monarch Burger, Kissa Tanto and Campagnolo. "I also enjoy cooking at home for the family," he says.

Next up for An is a new venture on Granville Island: Popina Canteen. He's partnered with three other celebrated local chefs—Robert Belcham, Hamid Salimian and Joël Watanabe—to launch this gourmet counter-service restaurant housed in repurposed shipping containers.

Because even when Angus An slows down, he still can't stop opening up innovative new restaurants. **W**

Angus An's endeavours include Thai restaurants Maenam, Longtail Kitchen and Sen Pad Thai, as well as Fat Mao Noodles, specializing in comfort food from Thailand, Malaysia and China, and Freebird Chicken Shack, which serves all things chicken. Popina Canteen is scheduled to open this summer.