



THE
STANWELL
hotel & restaurant



Zamora's

Profile on Executive Chef - Manuel Zamora

Manuel, where were you born? Santa Barbara, Tenerife 12 September 1958

What was it like growing up in Tenerife? It was very family orientated with lots of family outings. I also helped Dad on the banana and potato farm. As the weather got warmer, we were always outside; we had a fantastic time after school playing football and swimming in the reservoirs; after we'd made sure the goats and the chickens had been fed, of course! And a walk to the beach was always worth it! There were lots of fiestas to go to in the neighbouring villages, they would last a whole week!

Tell me about your formative years? I went to primary school in Tenerife and then onto boarding school in 1969; a Seminary School to study to be a Catholic priest - I was 11 years old! It's usually a 13 year process but it was very strict (worse than the Army) so I left after 6 years in 1975 and then decided to go into teaching but came to England first to learn English.

What happened when you arrived in the UK? I attended Language school in the afternoons at Slough College and worked the rest of the time as a kitchen porter doing the washing up at the Burnham Beeches Hotel. After 3 months, the Head Chef promoted me to Commis Chef and I stayed there for 8 years and learned how to cook! It was like a family there; a happy, loyal team and a successful hotel which always seemed to be busy. I worked under several different Head Chefs and learnt classical French cuisine. I prepared al la carte, did large numbers for functions, individual room service orders and created very personal menus for weddings.

And Manuel became the Chef! Well more accidental rather than vocational!

So you made Berkshire your home and you've been here 35 years now! Yes, I met my wife Rowena in 1977 and married 1983 and we have 2 daughters; Becky is 20 and studying English at St Mary's in Twickenham and Jessie is 17 and is studying Psychology & Art at Reading University.

What happened next? I moved to La Capella, an Italian Restaurant in Denham which had a 60 seater Bistro and a 90 seater restaurant. I then moved to The Greyhound Inn in Chalfont St Peter, a 70 seater restaurant. Eventually in 1988, the ex Manager Jean Dunston who had moved to The Stanwell Hall Hotel by then, offered me a job as Head Chef here.

What were your first impressions of the Stanwell Hall Hotel? *“This is not going to be long-term!”* I started there on 22 June 1988; the restaurant was originally called the St Anne’s Restaurant. It became Zamora’s in 2005 which was Ian Hall’s idea; the owner at the time. I inherited some fairly complicated menus but they were straight forward dishes. Over time I developed the menu to suit the market and my style.

Describe your style of cooking today: Eclectic European, especially French, Italian and of course Spanish dishes, which are my favourite to cook, especially tapas, paella and rabbit (Mum’s recipe which doesn’t taste as good as in Tenerife - with a glass of Spanish Rioja!)

Who cooks at home? – I cook; Rowena doesn’t like cooking that much!

What is the favourite family meal? This year, definitely pasta! Seafood Linguini – my family say “anything cooked by Dad is ok!”

How did you spend your time while the Stanwell Hotel was closed? I spent a lot of time in Tenerife with my family. My Dad is 80 years old now and he loves my cooking! My brother and sister-in-law (who is also from Slough!) still live there and they have a son, Christopher and daughter, Victoria. I also worked at the Copthorne Hotel in Slough and the Thames Hotel’s Italian restaurant, The Trevi. It was a great experience to learn from the Chef there, Fabrizio, about how to cook proper Italian food. I really enjoyed having no responsibilities for once; we love walking and discovered lots of new country pubs in Henley, Hurley and locally along the Jubilee River.

What was it like to design your own kitchen? Fantastic – a once in a life time experience for any Chef. It’s not often after 22 years you can design and see your own kitchen being built.

What plans do you have for Zamora’s in the future? We hope to welcome our regulars back and to encourage new clientele to Zamora’s. I hope they like the more modern interior design! My signature dishes still include some of the old favourites like Crab Pancake, homemade Pate, and homemade short bread. Most of our food is cooked fresh on the premises and we have good, reliable local suppliers.

What is your wine of the moment? New Zealand Pinot Noir – it is so smooth and spicy. It is a versatile wine which goes with most foods; it’s easy drinking in summer or winter. And I would encourage people not to try to match wine with food too much; if you fancy a particular wine, just enjoy it despite what you are eating.

What are your other passions besides food and wine? I love my motorbike, a Honda Deuvelle 650. I get from home to work in 15 minutes! I love cycling, so I love following The Tour de France (which is on the TV as we chat!). I relax by reading books, crime mainly and Roman historical fiction. I am currently reading a book about Napoleon Bonaparte and The Duke of Wellington – it’s about the territory wars in the West Indies and France.

What do you think about all the Celebrity Chefs on TV? I rate Jamie Oliver; he's got that obvious love of food and the ability to show you how dishes should be done and makes cooking look easy; I think he comes across well on TV. Saturday Kitchen with James Martin is my favourite for picking up tips.

Have you won any Awards yourself? Yes an RAC Merit Award in 1994 and 1995 for Outstanding Restaurant Food.

And finally, do Virgos make good Chefs? Yes, I think so! About 20 years ago I read a Gastrological Guide about Virgos which revealed some amazing things. I kept this article all this time and as I have progressed in my career as a chef, more and more of the detail in it has come true. It is so accurate about me! Here's an excerpt: *"When Virgo cooks, the results are superb. Nobody gathered at their table will be able to find fault with what is placed before them; nobody that is, except the Virgo Cook! Their powers of observation make them potentially the best writers, critics and advisers about gastronomic subjects and as planners of banquets, receptions and similar events for large numbers, they are without equal. To be blessed or cursed with the necessity to achieve perfection is the lot of the Virgo! The only refuge for them is in simplicity – delicious pasta, a well made salad, crusty freshly baked bread and, oh dear, chocolate!"*

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