

Mabuhay Ka!

By: Vic Alcuaz

Philippe Bartholomi, Belgian hotelier is almost a Filipino

PHILIPPE BARTHOLOMI WAS A sous chef for a top rated 2-star Michelin restaurant in Belgium in 1986 when he got a call from a good friend in the Philippines about an opportunity to work for a 5-star hotel in Manila. "The Philippines? Wasn't there a revolution in that country recently?" exclaimed Philippe to his friend. Fortunately both for Philippe and the Philippines, his French friend who was also a chef (Michel Leteuff passed away in the country last year), told him how peaceful the revolution was and that things would get better for the country soon. Philippe wasted no time, packed his bags and flew to Manila.

Philippe's first assignment was chef for the VIP Room kitchen of the Playboy Club at what used to be the Silahis International Hotel (Grand Boulevard when it closed in 2008). The club consisted of the Cabaret, the Playmate Bar and special function rooms for members. It was in this hotel that Philippe met a beautiful Filipina named Gina Fernandez who would become his future wife. They were married in 1989, have a son and a daughter and they continue to live happily to this date.

After a 2 year stint with the Silahis Hotel, Philippe took on an assignment in Australia, setting up a Latin American bar and restaurant in Melbourne. He was chef and manager. But after 2 years, missing his young family, he headed back to the Philippines for yet another exciting assignment. Bill Stelton, a restaurateur and businessman appointed Philippe

general manager of a unique restaurant called 'La Scala Opera-Restaurant', the first and only 'fine dining with opera entertainment' concept in the Philippines. It was a huge success and a favorite dining enclave of the rich and famous. After La Scala, Bill and Philippe opened another equally popular Brazilian restaurant and bar called Barbareeba.

After managing these two popular restaurants in Makati, in 1993 Philippe was poached by the popular international restaurant/club chain Studebakers to become general manager and eventually regional director of operations for Australia and Asia, with branches in Sydney, Auckland and Singapore. In September 1994, Studebakers Manila opened its doors and Philippe came back to become its general manager until 1997. Philippe did several consulting jobs until 2001.

The ultra exclusive Manila Polo Club became Philippe's next assignment from July 2001 until December 2002. Philippe was in the thick of major rehabilitation and renovation work of this club which dates back to 1909. His stint at the Manila Polo Club was extra challenging as he had to deal not only with a hands-on board of directors but with 'difficult to please' members. As a true blooded European hotelier, Philippe was able to charm his way with everyone.

After his Manila Polo Club assignment, I remember Philippe telling me that he was ready to relocate his family to Belgium if he did not find any suitable assignment in the



Philippines, "all our bags are packed Vic and we are ready to go!" Fortunately, I had something for Philippe and this new assignment was going to be his longest, happiest and most rewarding. He became general manager of the triple-A Fridays Resort in Boracay for 5 years from 2003-2008. The photo accompanying this article was taken in Fridays Boracay.

Today, Philippe is back in the city and is general manager of the Lucio Tan owned Century Park Hotel (formerly a Sheraton and Ana Hotel).

And after 25 years in the Philippines Philippe considers it his home where he intends to retire and live happily ever after!

(Vic Alcuaz is a hospitality headhunter, trainer and consultant. You may e-mail him at va@vicalcuaz.com)

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Graphics Design Alden Joshua Cedo