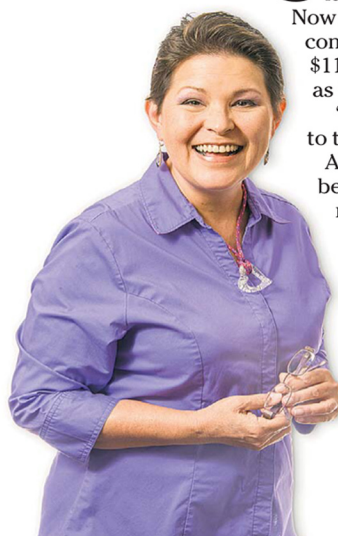


A Japanese-style ochazuke breakfast, front, is topped with saba, pickles and nori strips. In back is a spin on the loco moco: poached egg with kalbi-seasoned bacon, bulgogi and kim chee fried rice.

PHOTOS BY CRAIG T. KOJIMA | CKOJIMA@STARADVERTISER.CO.I

## Redesigned menus at 'Alohilani to add more local, ethnic flavors



**C**hef Conrad Aquino remembers going to the Pacific Beach Hotel with his family for special occasions as a boy. Now he's in charge of designing culinary concepts for the property as part of its \$115 million renovation and rebranding as the 'Alohilani Resort Waikiki Beach.

"I didn't expect this kind of blessing, to tell you the truth," he said.

Along with Kahau Manzo, food and beverage director; Ryan Nomura, director of outlets; and others on the management team, Aquino has designed menus for Lychee, the breakfast buffet space; O Bar, the lobby bar with a view of the ho-

tel's iconic three-story aquarium; and Swell Bar by the pool. Aquino also oversees all banquet functions on the two-tower property.

"My inspiration and vision is from traveling around the islands a lot, getting to know a lot of great farmers," he said. "I just wanted our food to respect the ingredients. I know how much work it takes to grow a product."

In addition to keeping hotel guests happy, "we want the kamaaina to come back and identify with the things we've been doing, to come back and enjoy," he said. "It's still a family place."

Tentatively set to open at mid-month is Lychee, a lofty, airy space above the lobby with a window into the Oceanarium. Aquino wants guests to feel as if they're being invited to "our

**THEBUZZ** | Erika Engle

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**When Lychee opens this month, dishes will highlight the flavors of Hawaii, such as stuffed French toast made with bread from Punaluu Bake shop. Above, a filled malasada.**

breakfast table,” he said, adding, “The food tells a story, and we’re teaching local flavors. Maybe not how you eat it at Grandma’s house or Auntie’s house, but a little elevated.”

Small skillet of varied local dishes will be offered as a way for guests to sample Hawaii’s rich ethnic traditions. He is considering dishes beyond Japanese, Chinese and Korean, to include Hawaiian, Portuguese, Filipino, Samoan, Latino and others. “We want guests to experience that, because they might not get to go to Helena’s or Gina’s.”

ASIAN-STYLE breakfast options include Aquino’s twist on a loco moco, with a poached egg over bulgogi on kim chee fried rice, with a strip of kalbi-glazed bacon. A bacon bar will offer kalbi bacon, maple-sugar-glazed bacon, Kukui Sausage Co. pasteles sausage and other meats.

As far as sweets go, consider a Nutella-peanut butter French toast or s’mores French toast served on Punaluu Bake Shop bread from Hawaii island and a range of specialty pancakes that encompass flavors such as ube (purple sweet potato).

Malasadas were a staple on the Pacific Beach Hotel’s breakfast buffet, and Lychee will continue the tradition with Aquino adding varied flavors, such as a creamy Oreo filling.

Downstairs in the high-ceilinged lobby,



COURTESY PHOTO

**Conrad Aquino:**

*The new executive chef at the Pacific Beach Hotel — soon to be the ‘Alohilani Resort Waikiki — has been developing new dishes, beginning with breakfast*

O Bar will offer wine, beer and spirits pairings, with a view of the revitalized Oceanarium. The estimated opening is mid-July.

“We’re playing around with fresh fried cheese curds, short ribs, and we wanted to play around with arancini,” Aquino said, as well as the more expected charcuterie and cheese platters.

The menu for Swell, the pool bar, will be its own kind of fun, Aquino said, with nachos, chicken wings, paninis, burgers “and little pizzas for the kids.” The opening time frame for Swell, overlooking the infinity-edged pool that itself overlooks Waikiki Beach, is November.

ALSO COMING to the ‘Alohilani is famed chef and restaurateur Masaharu Morimoto, who will launch two new restaurants at the hotel in August, closer to the official opening of ‘Alohilani in the fall. Morimoto Asia will feature Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Malay and other types of Asian street food, while Momosan will be a beer garden with ramen, yakitori and a variety of small plates.

Aquino joined the Pacific Beach from Turtle Bay Resort, where he had been executive chef. His resume also includes top positions at the Sheraton Maui Resort and Spa, the Royal Hawaiian Hotel and the Kahala Resort and Spa. He is a graduate of the culinary arts program at Kapiolani Community College. “I owe a lot to them,” Aquino said.