

Eugenio Villafaña

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Culinary Director & Executive Chef with over 20 years of international experience across Forbes 5-Star and AAA Five Diamond resorts, luxury cruise lines, and private dining. Now based in the U.S., bringing a global perspective, operational excellence, and a deep commitment to innovation rooted in wellness, sustainability, and guest experience.

Known for creating purpose-driven culinary programs that blend sustainability, wellness, and regional identity into scalable, high-impact experiences. Trusted to lead and mentor multicultural teams, build operational systems from the ground up, and elevate brands through food that tells a story. Combines strategic vision with a soul-centered approach to leadership, rooted in hospitality as a vehicle for transformation.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

PRIVATE CHEF | Rancho Palos Verdes, CA | 2024 – Present

- Design and execute personalized dining experiences for high-profile clients.
- Focus on premium quality, dietary customization, and memorable service.

DIRECTOR | Gastrolúdica Experiences | Riviera Maya, MX & San Juan, PR | 2015 – 2025

Founded *Gastrolúdica Experiences*, a hospitality consultancy trusted by leading Riviera Maya resorts and international partners to strategically design, launch, and reposition luxury F&B concepts, guided by culinary innovation, sustainability, and guest-centric service. Alongside consulting, Gastrolúdica has also created original restaurant concepts, bringing fresh ideas to market with award-winning results:

- **Original concepts:** Developed *Xquitelicious*, *Plantiminati*, *Ya'axche*, *LevelUp*, and *Auritum* in Riviera Maya, and *Xolo Taquería* in Puerto Rico.
- **Group ventures:** Co-founded *Top Table Group*, launching acclaimed restaurants including *Piaggia* (Top 250 in Mexico), *Peccato*, *Patito*, and *Taquería Los Compas*.
- **Strategic collaborations:** Directed high-impact F&B initiatives for *Azulik*, *Palmaia*, *LeBlanc*, and *Belmond Maroma*, boosting guest satisfaction, operational efficiency, and profitability.
- **Strategic partnerships:** Collaborated with *OceansME* (2024–2025) to support *Royal Caribbean Cruises* in large-scale hospitality recruitment.

SUMMARY OF STRATEGIC COLLABORATIONS (2015 – 2023)

CULINARY DIRECTOR | Hotel Azulik, Tulum, MX | 2022-2023

- Redesigned F&B program with a health-centric, plant-forward focus.
- Increased guest satisfaction by 30% and average check revenue by 86% in nine months.
- Reduced food costs from 40% to a consistent 29%.
- Hosted Michelin-starred chefs for exclusive events, enhancing brand prestige.

CULINARY DIRECTOR / EXECUTIVE CHEF | Palmaia, The House of AïA, Playa del Carmen, MX | 2019-2021

- Launched and led the first luxury all-inclusive plant-based culinary program.
- Directed successful pre-openings
- Reduced single-use plastics by 95%.
- Partnered with local producers to source 80% organic ingredients.
- Introduction of “Think Plant Based First” Philosophy among culinary and hotel staff.

EXECUTIVE CHEF | Le Blanc Spa & Resort, Cancun, MX MX | AAA Five Diamond | 2016-2017

- Redesigned the full culinary program with wellness-focused, luxury menus.
- Introduced customizable dining for allergy and dietary needs across all outlets.
- Boosted guest satisfaction in F&B by 18% through retraining and standardization.
- Scaled successful strategies to sister properties with corporate collaboration.

EXECUTIVE CHEF | Belmond Maroma Resort & Spa, Riviera Maya, MX | Forbes 5 Star Hotel | 2015-2016

- Modernized F&B operations, elevating consistency and execution across all outlets.
 - Reduced food costs from 40% to 28% through procurement optimization and SOP alignment.
 - Co-developed a new culinary identity with Belmond's corporate team, blending heritage and wellness.
 - Launched advanced staff training to strengthen team performance and internal talent development.
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EXECUTIVE CHEF / CULINARY DIRECTOR | Royal Hideaway Playacar, Riviera Maya, MX**AAA Five Diamond and Forbes 5-star | 2011-2015**

- Preserved AAA ratings, upholding Five Diamonds for the property and elevating Las Ventanas and The Chef's Table to Five Diamond status.
- Redefined luxury dining with sustainable, health-focused menus across five award-winning restaurants.
- Maintained TripAdvisor's #1 ranking in Playa del Carmen for two consecutive years.
- Developed culinary education programs and chef's tables to enhance guest engagement.

EXECUTIVE CHEF & B | Hotel Villa La Estancia | Riviera Nayarit, MX | AAA Four Diamond | 2010-2011

- Optimized costs and guest satisfaction by implementing cost-control measures and standardized SOPs.
- Secured AAA recognition, upholding Four Diamonds and earning Five Diamonds for La Casona.
- Boosted revenue by launching a successful guest cooking class program.

EXECUTIVE CHEF | Vallarta Palace | Riviera Nayarit, MX | AAA Four Diamond | 2008-2010

- Revitalized operations by redesigning restaurant concepts and creating the company's Formative Chefs Program, a talent-development initiative for future culinary leaders.
- Maintained AAA Four Diamond status for the property and achieved a Five Diamond award for the Asian restaurant.

TRAVELING EXECUTIVE CHEF | Celebrity Cruises & Azamara Cruises | 2006 - 2008

- Completed advanced training at The Waterside Inn (3 Michelin Stars) in Bray, England.
- Directed culinary strategies for the successful rebranding of two ships from Pullmantur to Azamara Cruises.
- Oversaw culinary operations for the Celebrity Century, Mercury, Summit, and Constellation, ensuring consistency, quality, and guest satisfaction across large-scale international operations.

EXECUTIVE CHEF | Hotel Mayan Palace Marina | AAA Four Diamond | 2004-2006

- Reengineered restaurant operations by introducing new dining concepts and launching the Formative Chefs Program, designed to mentor and develop emerging culinary talent.
- Upheld AAA Four Diamond recognition

SOUS CHEF | Princess Cruises | 1999 – 2004

- Progressively promoted across multiple vessels, culminating in Sous Chef role overseeing high-volume, fine-dining operations for international guests. Ensured culinary excellence, consistency, and team performance in a fast-paced, global environment.

EDUCATION & TRAINING

- **Food & Beverage Administration Degree** – Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara, Mexico
- **Culinary Arts Diploma** – Pacific Institute of Culinary Arts (PICA), Vancouver, Canada.
- **Wine for Chefs Program and other advanced Culinary Programs** – Culinary Institute of America (Napa & New York, USA)
- **Raw Food Chef Certification** – Thrive Wellness Center, WA, USA
- **Specialized Training in Superfoods & Wellness** – David Wolfe (Mexico & USA)
- **Professional Development with World-Class Chefs** – Michel & Alain Roux, Massimo Bottura, Martín Berasategui, Joan Roca (Playa del Carmen, México).

CORE COMPETENCIES

Culinary Leadership & Innovation

- Culinary Strategy, R&D, Product Development
- Core Menu Optimization, BOH Modernization

Operational Excellence & Cost Efficiency

- Food Cost Control, Supplier Partnerships, SOP Implementation
- Food Safety, HACCP, Regulatory Compliance

Team Development & Experience Design

- Culinary Training, Guest Experience, Team Mentorship
- Cross-Functional Collaboration (Ops, QA, Supply Chain)

Language Skills

- Bilingual: English & Spanish

ADDITIONAL TRAINING & INTEGRATIVE TOOLS

- **Pranic Healing Practitioner** – Applied energy principles to enhance awareness, intention, and vitality in culinary work.
- **Holistic Nutrition & Wellness** – Focus on plant-forward menu development and allergen-conscious culinary strategies.
- **Enneagram Studies** – Leveraged personality typologies to improve communication, feedback delivery, and team dynamics.
- **Core Energetics (Body-Based Leadership)** – Used somatic practices to strengthen emotional intelligence, presence, and coaching effectiveness.