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**NEW CHEF AT ROYAL PALMS RECOMMITS TO  
SHOW-STOPPING MEDITERRANEAN INSPIRED CUSINE**

***Executive Chef Lee Hillson showcases his talent with brilliant simplicity***

**PHOENIX** – (December 2005) – While it has become trendy to blur the lines of cuisine, to turn conventional flavors inside out, and to challenge the palates and patience of many diners, T. Cook's newly-appointed Executive Chef Lee Hillson is taking a different, refreshingly simple approach. His singular focus at T. Cook's, the celebrated restaurant at Royal Palms Resort and Spa, managed by Destination Resorts & Hotels, is Mediterranean-inspired cuisine infused with authentic flavors and presented in fresh new ways.

Born in England, Hillson was classically trained and worked eight years as a pastry chef in prestigious restaurants and the Roux Patisserie, owned by world-renowned chefs, Albert and Michel Roux, and the Michelin star Le Poussin, in Hampshire England. But his talent and curiosity could not be contained and he was soon appointed Sous Chef at Hintlesham Hall, a European award-winning fine dining restaurant. In 1998, Hillson crossed the Atlantic to become Executive Sous Chef at Vanderbilt Hall in Newport, Rhode Island. Two years later, he joined the Royal Palms Resort and Spa as a Sous Chef, and quickly became an integral player in a cuisine style that has become the hallmark of T. Cook's.

Coupled with his European heritage and his reverence for the luxurious cuisine that has put T. Cook's on the map over the years, Hillson now boldly returns the restaurant's culinary style to a heartier, more approachable fare. This is no recycled menu, however, but a thoughtfully crafted, perfectly executed tribute to cleverly updated classics.

***Flavor is the driving force....***

In describing his underlying philosophy, Chef Hillson explains, "I want to return T. Cook's to a more simplistic style so I can let the flavors speak for themselves. I respect my products and believe that when people order a dish, they want to taste what they ordered. My goal is to make the main item the star and *complement* it, not overwhelm it. If there is an ingredient that can't be tasted, then I've wasted it."

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When asked how he maintains the kind of discipline required to produce such honest flavors, Hillson shares a mantra he learned early in his career: “A good cook can create a dish, but a great chef knows when a dish is complete.”

This commitment and discipline are evident in Hillson’s pan-roasted Duck Breast and Confit, which is sumptuously slathered in duck demi-glace that has been infused with orange liqueur, paired with a decadent gratin of potatoes layered with orange zest, dried cranberries and cream. “Duck with orange is classic, but I’m updating the interplay while keeping the dish appropriately seasonal by adding the fall flavors of cranberries and an accompaniment of Brussel sprouts.” The result is satisfying to all the senses with its complex textures, brilliant color and bold flavor.

Referring to his inspired cuisine as “simplistic” should in no way imply a lack of flavor or creativity, as Hillson’s Lobster and Fennel Bisque clearly shows. It is redolent with lobster stock, fennel and cream, then garnished with fennel foam, caviar and fennel confit. Equally indulgent in preparation and flavor are the appetizers Burgundian Escargot and Veal Sweetbreads and the Mussels with Smoked Paprika and Tomato Broth.

Rather than being restricted by a signature style, Hillson’s devotion to authentic flavors gives him license to recreate dishes “just as you’d taste them in a high-end European bistro.” His five-course **Tasting Menu** showcases a particular region each month, allowing Hillson to transport diners to the Mediterranean with brilliantly paired wines and delectably distinct dishes. As an avid culinary student of the world, Hillson appreciates a region’s cuisine and realizes that “if it has taken them generations to perfect something, then I would be remiss to change it.”

For example, while pork belly is a mainstay in Italy, it is seldom offered on local Valley menus. In a bow to tradition, Hillson marinates the pork bellies overnight in roasted garlic, rosemary and olive oil, then slow roasts them four-to-five hours for an unmatched melt-in-your-mouth flavor. Paired with pork tenderloin, a tomato onion tart and traditional sides of crunchy green apples and sautéed spinach, this pork entrée has become an immediate hit.

Similarly, Hillson intensifies the T. Cook’s traditional Mediterranean paella with the addition of shrimp stock, butter, calamari and diced pork, and then finishes it off in the wood-burning oven. Hillson knew he had a winner when a guest from Madrid said that this was the first paella that made him think of home.

The breadth and depth of Hillson’s Mediterranean influences is further exemplified by the braised lamb shank with toasted cumin demi-glace and artichoke and tomato risotto, and the Moroccan spiced scallops with Kabocha squash custard and vanilla butter sauce, both rich with Mediterranean flavor and tradition.

***“Only the best” products enhance Chef Hillson’s flavors....***

Not surprisingly, Hillson will continue T. Cook’s stringent commitment to quality products, and while he has always been an advocate for local growers, he is already excited about the Arizona winter crops and how he’ll best showcase them. His menu will adjust subtly with the seasons, with several dishes reflecting the local bounty.

Likewise, the restaurant has enjoyed a long-standing relationship with Foley Fish, a small family-owned enterprise famous for the freshest East Coast fish available. The mussels from Snug Harbor just off the coast of Cape Cod and Georges Bank scallops are examples of a level of quality and flavor that is unmatched in the desert. While the cost of these premium products is prohibitive to many establishments, Hillson is honored to carry on the T. Cook’s tradition of utilizing the freshest and the finest to create stellar cuisine.

Chef Hillson, however, is reluctant to over-analyze his work and the jaw-dropping effect it has in the restaurant, for he is a man who is living his dream. “Cooking is fun, so at the end of the day, my goal is to make it fun, and sometimes adventuresome, for our dining guests.”

A member of Historic Hotels of America, Royal Palms Resort and Spa is a AAA Four Diamond resort located at the foot of majestic Camelback Mountain. Combining the graciousness and sophistication of a Mediterranean villa with the intimacy and privacy of a secluded retreat, Royal Palms offers: 117 custom-appointed guest rooms and intimate clusters of casitas and villas; regal Spanish Colonial architecture; over 20,000 square feet of estate-like meeting space; Tuscan-style gardens; exquisite tapestries, antiques and stone fireplaces throughout. Designed around the original historic private mansion, Royal Palms is home to the award-winning T. Cook’s restaurant, Alvalora Spa, a swimming pool with private cabanas, and croquet lawn. Just minutes from Scottsdale’s shopping, galleries, golf, Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport and the Camelback financial corridor, Royal Palms is an ideal retreat for business, pleasure and special occasions, offering luxury, privacy and convenience.

Royal Palms Resort and Spa is one of 32 independent, upscale and luxury hotels, resorts and golf clubs in the United States managed by Destination Hotels & Resorts, the fourth largest independent hospitality management company in the country. The company, based in Englewood, Colo., features a portfolio of more than 8,000 guest rooms, 13 golf courses and nine full-service spas. DH&R properties are located in key metropolitan and resort markets including New York, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Denver, Dallas, Boston, San Diego, Aspen, Phoenix, Palm Springs, Jackson Hole, Maui and Lake Tahoe.

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