

Press release
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BMW GROUP
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The ECKART 2013 for Creative Responsibility and Enjoyment is awarded to Alex Atala: Pioneer of South American haute cuisine.

The Brazilian's work is concerned not with exclusivity, but with sustainability and the survival of regional specialities.

Munich. Alex Atala (45) is certainly not your typical top chef. As a teenager he worked as a DJ in an underground club in his hometown of Sao Paulo in Brazil, before embarking aged 19 on an apprenticeship at the Namur Hotel School in Belgium. He opened his ambitious restaurant D.O.M. in Sao Paulo in 1999. And now the Brazilian has won the ECKART 2013 for Creative Responsibility and Enjoyment, an award that comes with a purse of €10,000 from the BMW Group.

Alex Atala may have his roots in Brazil, but his ideas spread right around the world. He is fascinated by the culinary potential of the Amazon region: "If we are to protect Brazil's greatest treasure, we have to find ways to use it sustainably – and that means working with the people there." It is hard to find a better way to describe his efforts to make chefs more aware of creative responsibility.

Born in São Paulo in 1968, Alex Atala studied the art of cooking in Belgium, France and Italy. He returned to Brazil in 1994, where he continues to devote his passion and commitment to the flavours and aromas of his native country. His focus is on Brazilian ingredients, preferably supplied by small, local producers who farm using sustainable and organic methods. Fruits, plants and spices, for example, that are now all but forgotten, but were once picked and used by Indians in the Amazon Basin. Another key aspect of Alex Atala's responsible and sustainable approach is his desire to scale up activities by developing a stable network of producers, markets and suppliers who will carry his rediscoveries and new creations far beyond his own sensational cooking.

He is spurred on by the aromas of his childhood and fascination with disappearing traditions. For several years in succession, Alex Atala's D.O.M. has been voted The Best Restaurant in South America, and in 2012 it climbed to fourth spot in the annual rankings published by the British magazine *Restaurant*, which described the Brazilian maestro as "part chef, part historian, part botanist".

The responsible and sustainable aspects of his work are found in the detail. For example, Atala has invested a great deal of energy in a project to harvest palm hearts without destroying the trees. His discoveries in the Amazon region's wonderfully productive and diverse larder are what make his cuisine distinctive. These finds include *pripioca*, an aromatic root used today only by the cosmetics

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industry, the mangarito (a tuber once common throughout Brazil but which had virtually vanished from Brazilian markets until Alex Atala began using it again), palm fruits such as acai and pupunha, and herbs, shoots and edible flowers from the country's vast and rich vegetation. This is Alex Atala's ultimate goal: to harvest the plants, herbs and spices of his homeland to the social and economic benefit of the people of the Amazon region.

ECKART

The International Eckart Witzigmann Award is one of the most important distinctions recognising leading contributions to the art of cookery and food culture. "Chef of the Century" Eckart Witzigmann uses the ECKART awards – launched in 2004 – to reward outstanding achievements in cookery and exceptional commitment to the multi-faceted area of cultural living. In partnership with the BMW Group, the Witzigmann Academy presents the awards annually in the "Art of Cookery", "Innovation" and "Cultural Living" categories. The prizes will be joined in 2013 by an ECKART for Creative Responsibility and Enjoyment, which comes with €10,000 worth of financial backing from the BMW Group.

Previous winners of an ECKART include Daniel Boulud (New York City), HRH Prince Charles of Wales (Highgrove), Elena Arzak (San Sebastian), Anne-Sophie Pic (Valence), Harald Wohlfahrt (Tonbach), Dieter Kosslick (Berlin), Ferran Adrià (Barcelona), Marc Haerberlin (Illhausern) and many more besides.

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