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“Top Chef” contestant Dale Levitski greeted Kazu Uyebara on Sunday at Hank’s Haute Dogs. Levitski is an old friend of Haute Dog’s owner Hank Adaniya and was invited to design a signature kobe beef hot dog. The “Dale” haute dog will be served on Sundays at Hank’s.

‘Top’ chef takes on

Contender Dale Levitski visited local restaurateur Henry Adaniya

By Jacquelyn Carberry
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IF YOU’RE A COOKING aficionado, you might well be aware of the name Henry “Hank” Adaniya as the former owner of Trio, the Chicago fine-dining restaurant accorded more than its share of awards over the years.

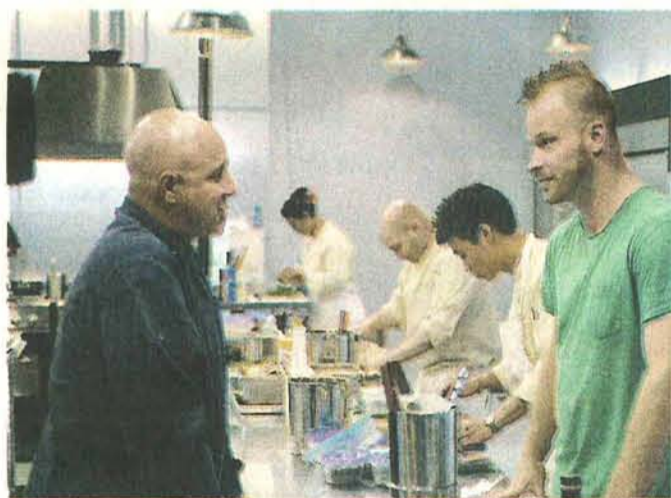
And if you’re a fan of the Bravo series “Top Chef 3 Miami,” you’re quite likely to be familiar with Dale Levitski — he of the fabulous pierogies, “sleazy” T-shirts and so-so math skills. As one of the remaining five in this year’s batch of contestants, he’s in the running for a generous cash prize and a spread in Food and Wine magazine.

But what’s the connection?

Adaniya turned his Chicago restaurant space over to his partners, moved to Hawaii and opened the restaurant of his latest dreams — Hank’s Haute Dogs — in Kakaako two months ago. Joining him last week to promote new Sunday hours was Levitski — Adaniya’s former chef at Trio, who still lives in Chicago.

“We’re cut from the same cloth,” Levitski said of his old boss. “We appreciate the finer things in life, but enjoy the things that are most familiar. It comes full-circle. You have to appreciate four-star dining to hot dogs.”

Levitski must remain mum on his opinions about the “Top Chef” cooking challenges and the other contestants,



TOP CHEF

- >> **On TV:** New episodes air at 7 p.m. Wednesdays on Bravo, repeating through the night
- >> **Fans:** Vote for your favorite contestant at www.bravotv.com or text the name to 46833 through 6 p.m. Tuesday. The winning chef will receive \$10,000.
- >> **Two-part finale:** Sept. 26, filmed in Aspen, Colo., and Oct. 3, when the winner is revealed live from Chicago

Tom Colicchio, a “Top Chef” judge, talks with Levitski in the competition kitchen.

a haute dog

who’ve included a former pro volleyball player (CJ), two Texans (Casey and Tre) and a bulldog (Howie).

But in answer to a question about what kind of personalities he finds most difficult to work with, he does offer this: “I don’t enjoy high-strung, arrogant types. It’s OK to be confident.”

Hmmm. You be the judge.

“Top Chef” is down to its last few episodes. Levitski said the final competitions have all been taped, but the win-

ner has yet to be named. That will happen when part two of the finale airs live from Levitski’s hometown, Chicago, on Oct. 3.

Levitski has finished near the top in several of the season’s challenges — but there have been a few rough moments. Highs include impressing judges with his revamping of a family recipe for pierogies. But in last week’s episode, Levitski made an impression for the wrong reason, inadvertently ex-

posing questionable math skills during a challenge to create a meal for guests aboard an airplane. Levitski accidentally left a diner in the wind, serving only 17 — 17! — of 18 guests, or so it seemed.

Levitski offers no excuses, but says with a hint of mischievousness: “I wish I could talk about it and publicly defend myself.”

>> **Top chef and mentor adopts a ‘slash-and-burn’ style, D2**

D2 TODAY FOOD



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Hank's Haute Dogs owner Hank Adaniya and "Top Chef" contestant Dale Levitski enjoyed a mini-reunion when Levitski came to town to assist his former boss with a new item on the menu. Levitski was Adaniya's chef at Trio in Chicago.

Mentor, disciple cook up kudos

By Jacquelyn Carberry

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"Top Chef 3 Miami" contestant Dale Levitski is limited in what he can say about the show before the airing of the finale on Oct. 3, but the Chicago native is much more comfortable anyway talking about the guy seated to his right: mentor, friend and former boss, celebrity chef Henry "Hank" Adaniya.

No signs of anarchy evident here; the guy with the (fashionable) mohawk would rather share the spotlight with close friends.

"Henry definitely took me from the talented chef level to the professional level," said Levitski. "Henry taught me how to bring organization to a dish."

Adaniya has a knack for spotting talent in the chefs hired at upscale Trio under his tutelage — Rick Tramonto, Gale Gand, Shawn McClain and Grant Achatz — and he saw the same creative spark in Levitski.

"Dale cooks soul food," said Adaniya. "Beyond its composition, his food speaks from a different spirit. He's good at all cuisine."

THEIR FRIENDSHIP dates back five years, when Adaniya brought Levitski on board at "Trio" after Achatz left. They worked together for a little over two years, but built a lasting friendship.

Leaning back in plastic chairs outside Hank's, the two trade compliments, as well as sit in occasional companionable silence. Their time at Trio was remarkable for its lack of stressful situations in the kitchen, both say.

"It was a good time," said Adaniya, "though there was that one New Year's... the first-seating party showed up an hour late. Everything happened all at once."

Rather than trying to measure up to Achatz and the other chefs before him, Levitski honed his own slash-and-burn style, a trait that is admirable to Adaniya, a traditionalist when it comes to creating new dishes.

"When I stepped into Trio, I felt like I was on a kamikaze mission or that I was

walking off the plank," said Levitski. "You think, 'How do I fill those shoes?' You don't; you just accept it."

"Dale is a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants chef," said Adaniya. "I can follow a recipe, but the really great ones, you just let them go. And that's what I did with Dale."

It was Levitski's variation on the dish Croque Monsieur that led Adaniya to bring him into the kitchen of "Trio." A chef at the breakfast restaurant Orange, Levitski wowed Adaniya with a particularly messy version of the traditional hot ham and cheese French sandwich.

"I've had Croque Monsieur before. I had gone to Paris. I thought nobody could touch it," said Adaniya. "And the first time I tried his was the first time he ever made it. The cheese was spilling out on purpose; the beauty was in its imperfections ... I just had to meet the chef."

LEVITSKY'S culinary risk-taking leaves Adaniya in doubt on occasion — for example the dressing Levitski that applied to the newest creation on the Haute Dog menu, Kobe Beef Dogs (\$8.50, available on Sundays). Levitski's idea was to sauce the imported dog with a spicy hoisin-ginger mustard and top them with furikake-sprinkled cabbage and Chinese parsley.

"When I smelled that cabbage cooking, I thought, 'This is what we will be serving?'" said Adaniya. "But it works; you need something assertive to bring the flavor up. I like regular condiments. But ketchup is for a mild hot dog. When he did this, I thought, 'Hey, go with it.'"

Thinking outside the box is a trait that serves Levitski well in the high-pressure situation of "Top Chef," said Adaniya.

Levitski said his ability to regroup quickly and focus on the task at hand is a result of years of swim practice — not the presumed formal culinary training. A former competitive swimmer for the University of Iowa, Levitski attended school to become a Russian translator but dropped out due to a lack of financial aid. "I walked away to flip burgers at age



The "Dale" haute dog features a kobe beef hot dog topped with a hoisin-ginger mustard, Asian-style slaw and furikake.

19," he said.

Both watched the most recent episode of "Top Chef" at Side Street Inn, where Levitski received the to-be-expected sideways glances.

"That was the most public viewing I've been to," said Levitski. "It takes some getting used to. I was offered drinks at the Chicago and Honolulu airports. I've signed some autographs. It's flattering. I've met people from other ("Top Chef") seasons. It's like we're survivors of a train wreck."

BEYOND "Top Chef," Levitski's plans include opening a fine-dining restaurant, plans that were in motion even before he applied for the show on a whim after a marathon viewing session.

There was also a recent flirtation with the idea of moving to Sydney.

"When he said he was thinking of moving to Australia, 'I thought are you crazy?'" said Adaniya. "But then here I am."

For now, Levitski will stay put in Chicago.

Would he return to the show for a future season, if asked? "In a second."

His friend Adaniya would be less inclined to participate on such a show. "I don't watch any culinary shows. It's too close to what we do. All the anxiety and intensity. But I started watching 'Top Chef' religiously because of Dale. It's the highlight of the day."

Hank's Haute Dogs, 324 Coral St., is open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekends. Call 532-4265 or visit www.hankshautedogs.com.