

Dessert duel of the giants

TWO talented young French chefs are fighting a culinary duel in Hong Kong. One is armed with a plump plunge purple aubergine. The other has a firm ripe tomato. Both are being used as basis for unique desserts.

On one side of the battle is Serge Burckel, who presides over the kitchen of Belvedere restaurant at Holiday Inn Harbour View. He fired the first fusillade when he invented a creative new dessert based on a stuffed eggplant. Unusual as it sounds, the light, tasty dish created a sensation among Hong Kong's legions of determined gourmets.

No sooner had this volley reverberated over Hong Kong Harbour than Paul Pairet, chef de cuisine at the Regal Hotels group, let loose with a formidable volley. He came up with a stunning creation; dessert is a boiled, skinned tomato stuffed with green peas, sweet boild rice and cottage cheese. Likewise, it's got the gastro-

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nomes delighted.

The two men, who are close friends when not competing in culinary duels, are among a wave of young international masters who are helping the hotel kitchens of Asia set international standards and trends.

Burckel, from Alsace, has 17 years behind the stoves of some of the leading restaurants of Europe; fittingly, one of the three-star establishments where he worked was Aubergine in Munich. He insists his dessert has nothing to do with that fine restaurant.

The eggplant is stuffed with banana and raspberry, the accompanying sauce is based on green apples, vanilla, cinnamon, saffron, vinegar and champagne.

Paul Pairet, a Basque from near Marseilles, went to Toulouse Hotel School. He has worked with such creative geniuses as three-star Chef Robuchon.



■ Culinary duelists Paul Pairet, left, and Serge Burckel.



■ Pairet's tomato.



■ Burckel's aubergine.