

## And the beat goes on...

Award-winning Casa Natalia celebrates local artists and culture with a variety of new activities

by Christine Wenzel

Loic Tenoux doesn't like to follow trends. He likes to set the trend. He dismisses travel vacation promises of pampering and fine-dining with an adios-back-flip of his hand. Instead of hyped-up promises, Tenoux believes that visiting a destination should go deeper. Enriched travel, he says, is about having an experience with someone who lives 'here'.

When it comes to what vacationers are looking for, Tenoux knows what he's talking about. Casa Natalia, the hotel he and his wife Nathalie built 'here', has won, for the second year in a row, the *Condé Nast*, Best Hotel in Mexico Award – no small feat for a 16-room boutique hotel located on the edge of San José's art district. Even more impressive, considering we are a town more noted for beaches, golf, and brand-name chain resorts.

Both Tenoux arrived in Mexico from Europe. Loic from France and Nathalie from Luxembourg. Loic came 14 years ago, for, in his words, "the good life and surfing." Nathalie arrived a year later with a one-year management contract to work at the Westin Regina Hotel.

They met, they fell in love and then...Loic says, "suddenly we had a hotel." Nathalie sends me a look from the corner of her eye and a bemused smile re-



Loic and Nathalie Tenoux own Casa Natalia. Loic is from France and Nathalie from Luxembourg. They met in Mexico, fell in love and, as Loic says, "suddenly we had a hotel."

sponding to the word 'suddenly'.

'Suddenly' started with them buying a vacant lot beside the town square, across from the Casa de la Cultura. What followed was 18 months of intense decision making and financial risk taking. Then tout à coup they had an award-winning property.

Ten years later, while I am sharing a coffee with them in the small bar area that sits steps above their popular restaurant, Mi Cocina, the formula of their success is plain to see. They are both perfectionists and they share a passion for what they do. Loic and Nathalie, set out to create a place that they themselves would like to visit and they succeeded.

Not only is Casa Natalia

modeled after a place they would like to visit, their home is also integrated into the setting. During the interview, I catch a glimpse of one of their two children walking along the terrace above us, heading to the front door of their living quarters. She gives me a small wave.

The Tenoux are forthright, but not complaining when they say, it's not easy having your business and home life intertwined to such a large extent. You have to work at finding a balance. It wasn't until two years ago, that they felt comfortable enough to take a family vacation. And, even though they've divided job responsibilities to compliment each other's strengths, neither of them are ever, what you could



say, "off duty".

So, how do they find a balance? Loic, a music enthusiast, unwinds writing songs and poetry. Nathalie, says light-heartedly, "shopping is my relaxation".

With an acclaimed hotel and highly-rated restaurant to their credit, they are now looking for more. "It's time to start really enjoying it all." says Loic.

Enjoying it all means taking their lifestyle plan to the next level, by developing activities they believe in, and can enjoy with their guests.

Number one on the list is the formation of Jazzalude 69, a musical group formed by Loic in conjunction with Howard Clifton, the well-known saxophone, keyboard player

and musical director of Sexto Sentido.

Every Wednesday evening Jazzalude 69 sets up near the bar and performs a variety of music. Loic compares the atmosphere to witnessing a live rehearsal. If hotel and dinner guests want to pull up a chair close by they can, or they can listen from the dining area, or lounge by the pool and have the music as background enjoyment. Just as the name suggests jazz is the predominant music, but they also perform revisited and commercial tunes. On an evening when Loic sings, you can experience his authored songs. Many of them are in French.

In addition to live music on Wednesdays, Loic and Nathalie are putting to-