

# 944 PICKS 2009'S HOT PLATES

THE MOST BUZZWORTHY CHEFS IN AMERICA

WRITTEN AND SELECTED BY THE 944 EDITORS



## Brian A. Cartenuto

Chef, Cantinetta

3650 Wallingford Avenue, Seattle, Wash.

206.632.1000 | [www.briancartenuto.com](http://www.briancartenuto.com) | [www.cantinettaseattle.com](http://www.cantinettaseattle.com)

With an Italian-Venezuelan heritage and lifetime passion about the joys of food, 28-year-old Chef Brian Cartenuto is poised to be one of Seattle's next culinary stars. Thirteen years of cooking experience has led him from East Coast restaurants such as Lavandou and Dean & De Luca to executive chef of Seattle's Cantinetta. His philosophy of refined simplicity when it comes to food keeps the menu at this cozy eatery unpretentious and ever-changing with the season's freshest ingredients.

**944:** How do you choose the menu dishes?

**BRIAN CARTENUTO:** It really [has] no rhyme or reason on how it comes about. Muses take many forms, from what I ate last night, to what mood I am in, the weather, seasons, random conversations that have nothing to do with food.

**944:** What do you think are the most under- and overrated ingredients?

**BC:** Filet mignon, foie gras, lobster are all overrated. Don't get me wrong I love them all but I like to cook the under rated stuff like pork cheeks, beef cheeks, root vegetables — things that take a bit more time and prep to cook. Like a lump of coal with the right amount of pressure and time it will be a diamond. I would rather start out with the coal. I find a sense of pride in that.

**944:** What five essential ingredients should every kitchen have?

**BC:** Good olive oil, lemons, sea salt, fennel pollen and thyme, and a bottle of bourbon for me!



Photo by:  
Erin Kunkel

## Justin Everett

Executive Chef, El Dorado Kitchen  
405 1st Street West, Sonoma, Calif.  
707.996.3030 | [www.eldoradosonoma.com](http://www.eldoradosonoma.com)

A rising star in the Bay Area food scene, El Dorado Kitchen Executive Chef Justin Everett describes his food as “farm driven.” And with the bounty of Sonoma Valley at his fingertips, what more could a diner ask for? Everett is well known for his handcrafted charcuterie: duck pastrami, cabernet sauvignon-cured beef eye of round and smoked ham hock rilette, among other carnivorous delights.

**944:** How do you choose the menu dishes?

**JUSTIN EVERETT:** I am very fortunate to have a partnership with Benzinger Winery and have access to their Bio-Dynamic Farms. My chefs and I base our menu upon what seasonal offerings our farmer (Colby Eierman) can provide us.

**944:** What are some common kitchen mistakes and how can one commonly remedy them?

**JE:** Please, season your food. Food needs salt.

**944:** Most interesting customer request?

**JE:** When people don't want the items on their plate to touch. What is that?

**944:** What's your go-to entree for a dinner party?

**JE:** Bouillabaisse with housemade chorizo and Rancho Gordo Heirloom beans.

## Jed Hackney

Pastry Chef, Cafe Fleuri  
250 Franklin Street, Boston, Mass.  
617.451.1900 | [Boston.langhamhotels.com](http://Boston.langhamhotels.com)

Jed Hackney, the premier pastry chef at Café Fleuri, located inside of the prestigious Langham, Boston hotel, has been making quite a stir since he's stepped onboard. The New York-born, Vermont-bred kitchen master graduated from the New England Culinary Institute in Montpelier, where he trained under some of the best pastry chefs in the world before coming into his own.

And when Café Fleuri's renowned Chocolate Bar relaunched in mid-September for its 21st season, it was Hackney's turn to grab the reigns and give it a new theme — Boston's Chocolate Trail. Gourmet bite-sized desserts include treats from the North End (Bittersweet Chocolate Chestnut Mousse) to Faneuil Hall (Boston Cream Pie) and Chinatown (Dessert Sushi, Five Spice Chocolate Soup and White Chocolate Pudding — just to name a few.)

**944:** How do you choose the menu dishes?

**JED HACKNEY:** It is a combination of using ingredients from the current season in New England and regional availability. For example, I would use local apples in the fall and winter to convey to our guests the New England fall and winter flavors. This also helps with our efforts to provide sustainable cuisine and reduce our carbon footprint.

**944:** Which five essential ingredients should every kitchen have?

**JH:** In my pastry kitchen I must have: Valrhona chocolate, 40% heavy cream, King Arthur Flour, Nielsen-Massey Vanilla Beans, and crème fraiche.

**944:** Most interesting customer request?

**JH:** For a hotel wedding in Colorado, I made a five-tier purple wedding cake with dog paw prints on it. They couple brought in Superman and Wonder Woman action figures as the cake topper.





Photo by:  
Mario Arizpe

## Rodolfo Valdes

Chef & Co-Owner, The Garden and Crave Kitchen and Bar  
300 Cincinnati (Kern Place), El Paso, Texas | 915.351.3677  
www.cravekitchenandbar.com  
511 Western Street, El Paso, Texas | www.thegardenep.com

Rodolfo “Rudy” Valdes is a Juarez native, so it’s no surprise his food features a distinctly latin flavor. After nine years in the kitchens of Phoenix, Ariz. (including a stint as sous chef for former 944 Buzzworthy Chef Aaron May at the acclaimed Sol y Sombra), Valdes set his sights on El Paso, Texas. Opening Crave Kitchen and Bar to rave reviews, his latest project is The Garden — contemporary American food, with his signature twist.

**944:** What was your worst cooking disaster?

**RODOLFO VALDES:** When working Passover and doing Kosher meals, I over-cooked the gefilte fish for 500 people. I’ve never heard so many “oy-veys” in my life!

**944:** What are the most under- and overrated ingredients?

**RV:** Most underrated? Quality salt. Most overrated? Beef tenderloin, it seems like it got a good PR person and everybody thinks the world of it, but there are tastier cuts of meat out there. Give me a medium-rare rib eye and I’m the happiest guy in the world.

**944:** If you could only use one cooking utensil to prepare food, what would you use and why?

**RV:** A cast-iron pan, because it can smash ingredients if I don’t have a knife and then I can use it to cook the meal, and if treated properly it is almost indestructible.

**944:** What’s been your most interesting customer request?

**RV:** A gentleman came into Crave and ordered the fried chicken and waffles, requesting that, if he finished it, his picture go up on the wall. We said yes, not thinking he was serious. When he finished, his girlfriend took a picture of him and they brought it back — poster-sized — to hang on the wall. We honored his request for the next 45 minutes and then took it down.

## Michael O’Dowd

Executive Chef, Kai  
5594 W. Wild Horse Pass Blvd., Chandler, Ariz.  
602.385.5726 | www.wildhorsepassresort.com

Executive Chef Michael O’Dowd oversees the kitchen at Kai, America’s only Native American restaurant to earn a *Mobil Travel Guide* five-star award and become a AAA five-diamond restaurant.

Located at the Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort & Spa on the Gila River Indian Community in suburban Phoenix, O’Dowd has crafted a unique menu of dishes that utilize ingredients grown on the Indian reservation and hailed as one of, if not *the*, best restaurant in Arizona. In addition to previously working with Michelin chefs such as Gunter Seegar, Boris Keller and Pierre Orsi, he has also recently co-authored *The New Native American Cuisine*, a cookbook that offers the public a spectacular introduction to dishes long overdue for recognition.

**944:** Since you are cooking all day, do you still enjoy it when you get home?

**MICHAEL O’DOWD:** I love food and it loves me. I’d say it’s a solid marriage.

**944:** What are the current and upcoming culinary arts trends?

**MO:** I think we’re still moving towards foods that are from local growers and that have a story attached to it as well as foods that are bold in flavor, small in portion and easy on the wallet. Hmm, Native American Dim Sum?

**944:** Most interesting customer request?

**MO:** This was years ago in New York and a female guest asked if I could cook her dinner naked in front of her. I told her only if it was bacon.

**944:** What are your hobbies?

**MO:** Racing cars with Racersweb.com, fly fishing, creating an African Cichlid biotope fish tank, golf, tennis and collecting a few swords.





## Adam Sobel

Executive Chef, RM Seafood  
3930 S. Las Vegas Blvd., Las Vegas, Nev.  
702.632.9300 | www.rmseafood.com

What do culinary masters Guy Savoy, Bradley Ogden, Charlie Trotter and Guenter Seeger have in common? They have all shared their kitchens and their techniques with up-and-coming chef Adam Sobel. Honing his skills in some of the best restaurants in America, Sobel has learned the ins and outs of what a customer wants in a fine dining experience. Currently, along with Chef Rick Moonen at RM Seafood (who is known for his sustainable sourcing and dining practices) Sobel is rocking Las Vegas with his boyish good looks, undeniable talent and his boundless enthusiasm for eating well.

**944:** What was your worst cooking disaster?

**ADAM SOBEL:** When I was a young buck working at Seeger's in Atlanta I experienced quite a few disasters, all of which were my fault. The worst was setting a Loup de Mere en Papillote on fire under the Salamander. Chef Seeger nearly had a heart attack.

**944:** What five essential ingredients should every kitchen have?

**AS:** Fine sea salt, Peugeot peppermill with toasted black peppercorns, Arbequina Spanish olive oil, sambal and good quality soy sauce.

**944:** What's your go-to entree for a dinner party?

**AS:** Peking-style duck with steamed buns and hoisin sauce. It blows people away every time.

## Craig Strong

Executive Chef, Studio  
30801 South Coast Highway, Laguna Beach, Calif.  
949.715.6420 | www.studiolagunabeach.com

From a child tending to his family's vegetable garden to an extraordinary culinary artist with positions such as sous chef in Barcelona, first assistant to chef in Philadelphia and garde manger in Atlanta, San Diego native Craig Strong is now back in Southern California. As executive chef of the elegant and intimate seaside Studio Restaurant at the Montage Laguna Beach, chef Strong's culinary expertise will allow Studio to keep its foothold on Orange County despite the departure of opening chef James Boyce.

**944:** What was your worst cooking disaster?

**CRAIG STRONG:** I was working with another chef and we were on our way to a charity event. We had a cart with 500 portions of veal cheeks in the back of a truck and when we turned a corner they flew out onto the street. So, we only served my course at the event.

**944:** What five essential ingredients should every kitchen have?

**CS:** At home, I always have good olive oil, sea salt, cheeses, salami or chorizo and olives. This makes it easy to put something together.

**944:** Most interesting customer request?

**CS:** I had someone say they won't eat anything green. No green vegetables, parsley, chives — nothing.





Photo by: David Lathan Reamer

## David Siegel

Executive Chef, Belly Timber  
3257 SE Hawthorne Blvd., Portland, Ore.  
503.235.3277 | www.bellytimberrestaurant.com

It's his very first "executive chef" title and outpost, evidence that quite a few discerning foodies have faith in the potential of 29-year-old David Siegel. Housed literally inside a restored Victorian house in Southeast Portland, the clever French-Italian cuisine at Belly Timber (Victorian slang for "food of all sorts") has been deemed quite the culinary find, garnering rave after rave by locals and critics alike. Escargot fans claim there's no better rendition than Siegel's dish — escargot prepared with bone marrow, pickled garlic, yellow beets and chickpeas.

**944:** What food myth would you like to dispel?

**DAVID SIEGEL:** The idea that good food needs to be complex and difficult to prepare is simply not true. Some is and that has its time and place, but anyone can cook if they stick with the things they like and take some time to appreciate the process.

**944:** What's been your biggest challenge?

**DS:** This is my first executive chef opportunity and no matter how much time I had to practice, gaining the confidence to do this job well has been an uphill battle. The support of an amazing staff in both the front and back of the house has helped me quite a bit.

**944:** What five essential ingredients should every kitchen have?

**DS:** Patience, humility, strong work ethic, personal pride and salt.

## Eric Greenspan

Chef & Owner, The Foundry on Melrose  
7465 Melrose Avenue, Los Angeles  
323.651.0915 | www.thefoundryonmelrose.com

While attending business school at UC Berkeley, Eric Greenspan took a summer job as a dishwasher at a restaurant near campus. Luckily for him, it wasn't long until he found his way out from under the suds at Caffé Mediterraneo, where, by summer's end, he was named head chef. Following graduation, he chose to follow his newfound career path — all the way to the halls of Le Cordon Bleu Ecole de Cuisine in Paris.

After spending years working for James Beard Award-winning and Michelin three-star chefs in New York, Greenspan returned to the West Coast to be sous chef, and eventually, executive chef, at Patina before opening his own restaurant. In 2007, The Foundry on Melrose opened to rave reviews and, two years later, is still going strong.

**944:** How do you choose the menu dishes?

**ERIC GREENSPAN:** If it sounds good, it'll taste good.

**944:** Do you have any inspirations for the food you cook?

**EG:** Inspiration for cooking comes from everywhere. The market, childhood memories, meals, everywhere.

**944:** You cook all day. Do you still enjoy it when you get home?

**EG:** I'd hate to have to cook when I got home from work, but I relish the opportunity to cook at home on a day off.

**944:** What food myth you'd like to dispel?

**EG:** I'd like to dispel all food myths! Boundaries are limiting and key to exciting cuisine is pushing those limits.

**944:** What are the current and upcoming culinary arts trends?

**EG:** I think quick service concepts are an upcoming trend, because these days, value with quality is experiencing a heightened sense of appreciation.





## Michelle Bernstein

Chef & Co-Owner, Michy's, SRA. Martinez and Michelle Bernstein at The Omphoy

Michy's | 6927 Biscayne Blvd., Miami, Fla. | 305.759.2001  
Sra. Martinez | 4000 NE Second Avenue, Miami, Fla. | 305.573.5474  
www.chefmichellebernstein.com

Miami native Michelle Bernstein has been in the national culinary spotlight since drawing in fans as executive chef of Tantra in the late '90s. Since then, she's climbed the ranks to become executive chef in even more of the city's hotspots and opened her own restaurant, Michy's, in 2006 in the burgeoning Biscayne Corridor. While Michy's was named "Best New Restaurant" (2006) by *Food and Wine*, it's the nearby SRA. Martinez that has everyone buzzing now.

Capitalizing on the small plate phenomenon, Bernstein divides the menu into cool and warm sides, and tempts gourmards with Bacon Wrapped Medjool Dates and Choclo Con Chilies. She's even opened a third spot; now Palm Beachers can discover her culinary magic at Michelle Bernstein at The Omphoy.

**944:** What are the most under- and overrated ingredients?

**MICHELLE BERNSTEIN:** My dream ingredients are sea urchin, white truffles and langoustine so I can safely say they might be a little underused, by other chefs, in my opinion.

**944:** What food myth you'd like to dispel?

**MB:** That all chefs based in South Florida use tropical fruits in their savory menus. We have progressed enormously and can finally say we are a gastronomic hub.

**944:** If you could only use one cooking utensil to prepare food, what would you use and why?

**MB:** Vitaprep blender; not so much a gadget as a dependency.

**944:** What's your go-to entree for a dinner party?

**MB:** My favorite dish to make is Cornish hens slow-roasted over sweet potatoes, parsnips and turnips, served with a fresh green salad.

## Jose Garces

Executive Chef & Partner, Mercat a la Planxa  
638 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago | 312.765.0524  
www.mercatchicago.com | www.grg-mgmt.com

Chef Jose Garces has been traversing Philadelphia's burgeoning culinary world with a passion for all things Latin. Amada, Tinto, Distrito, Chifa and Village Whiskey comprise the Garces Restaurant Group (he is also executive chef at Chicago's much-lauded Mercat a la Planxa). And similar to most rising star chefs today, Garces is mastering the concept of cooking beyond the kitchen, having recently penned his first cookbook, *Latin Evolution*, and signed up as a contestant on *The Next Iron Chef*.

**944:** Do you have any inspirations for the food you cook?

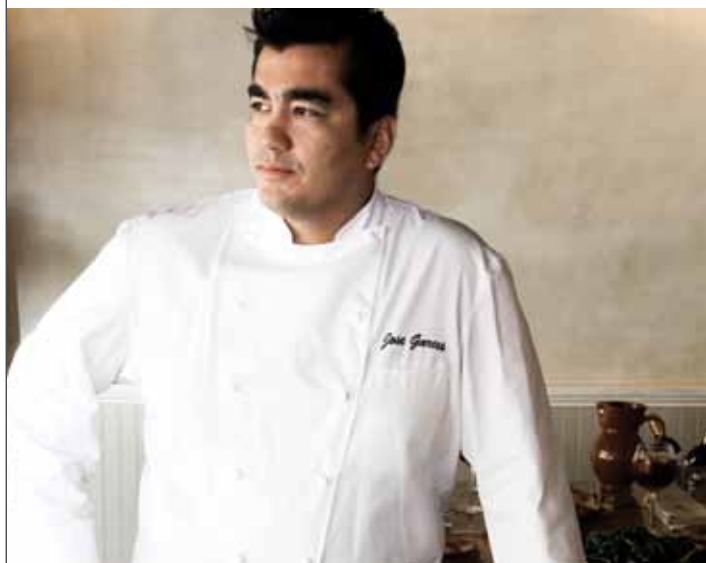
**JOSE GARCES:** Family tradition and culture informs much of my cuisine and personal style. My family history naturally influenced my cooking in a profound way, and the cuisine of Spain is at the root of so much of Latin cuisine. I have a passion for Spanish food and its wonderfully simple expressions.

**944:** Since you cook all day, do you still enjoy it when you get home?

**JG:** I take great joy from cooking for my family, both because it is such a strong tradition for us and because I love the way they dig into a delicious meal, letting the food become a jumping off point for lively conversation and sharing. I tend towards familiar favorites of ours: Ecuadorian-style ceviches; *caldo Gallego*, or *Galician* white bean and ham stew ... arepas and tacos and other dishes that my family has been preparing for each other for generations.

**944:** If you had to eat fast food where would you go for a bite?

**JG:** Philadelphia's Reading Terminal Market — it's not a restaurant, technically, but a huge indoor market with dozens of different food stalls where I can grab a quick lunch and then shop for farm-fresh ingredients to take home and prepare for dinner with my family.





## Joe Magnanelli

Executive Chef, Cucina Urbana  
505 Laurel Street, San Diego, Calif.  
619.239.2222 | www.sdurbankitchen.com

Cucina Urbana is hands-down the most buzzed-about restaurant in San Diego at the moment. The new eatery is a 180-degree rebirth of a space that once housed the stuffy and pricey Laurel, complete with a funky Italian farmhouse-meets-urban chic décor, retail wine shop and nothing on the menu over \$20. But it's Joe Magnanelli's food alone — fresh, California-inspired Italian cuisine with playful twists — that packs the house nightly. Previously heading the kitchen at Laurel, and before that, Chive, Magnanelli has hit a near-perfect stride with his cooking at Cucina Urbana — the latest brainchild of Tracy Borkum's Urban Kitchen Group.

**944:** What's been most interesting diner request?

**JOE MAGNANELI:** We had a request by a person who wanted us to separate their food on the plate so nothing was touching. And they wanted it in alphabetical order. Weird!

**944:** Where's food moving and what are some current trends?

**JM:** Smaller, local, and affordable is where food is moving ... The most current trends I am seeing is chefs making almost everything in house — i.e., charcuterie, curing, pickling, etc.

**944:** If you had to eat fast food where would you go for a bite?

**JM:** Do taco shops count?

## Michael Psilakis

Chef & Co-Owner, Anthos  
Anthos | 36 W. 52 Street, New York City | 212.582.6900  
www.anthosnyc.com  
Eos | 485 Brickell Avenue, Miami, Fla. | 305.503.4400  
www.viceroymiami.com/cuisine/restaurant.html

Michael Psilakis has been gaining notoriety for his Greek haute cuisine restaurant in Midtown New York, Anthos. It is here he rarifies an already refined cuisine, taking traditional Greek dishes and ingredients and giving them the star chef treatment. Dishes such as Smoked Baby Octopus with lemon and fennel, Roasted Duardade with olives and grilled calamari and Goat Cheesecake offer a glimpse of his skills. Now Psilakis, along with partner restaurateur Donatella Arpaia, has brought the same idea to Miami with Eos, a stunning new restaurant in a breathtaking Kelly Wearstler-designed space on the 15th floor of The Viceroy hotel. The creative chef has Miamians happily munching on Crispy Rabbit, Lobster & Sea Urchin Risotto, and Homemade Tagliatelle with Six Minute Farm Eggs and Black Truffles.

**944:** You cook all day. Do you still enjoy it when you get home?

**MICHAEL PSILAKIS:** I love cooking at home, but the cooking at home is real simple. Cooking at home is about bringing people together and spending time with people you love. Food is a gift. Chefs are gift givers by nature. It involves an emotional connection ... The food is about the gathering.

**944:** What's been your biggest challenge?

**MP:** Trying to get people to look at Greek food as a major cuisine and trying to showcase it in a way that makes it comparable to French, Italian haute cuisine.

**944:** If you had to eat fast food where would you go for a bite?

**MP:** Pizza, it's something I could eat everyday.

