

Epicurean EXCELLENCE

By CASSI CLARK

Chef Lachlan Mackinnon Patterson

'TIS THE SEASON TO CELEBRATE CULINARY MASTERY. IF YOU'RE PLANNING ON ENTERTAINING THIS HOLIDAY SEASON AND PREPARING TO DISH OUT AN EXCEPTIONAL HOLIDAY MEAL, WHO BETTER TO TURN TO THAN FIVE OUTSTANDING LOCAL CHEFS FOR SOME INSPIRATION. WE CAUGHT UP WITH FIVE TALENTED CHEFS FROM THE FRONT RANGE WHO SHARED THEIR PERSONAL HOLIDAY TRADITIONS AS WELL AS FAVORITE HOLIDAY RECIPES. IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A LITTLE MOTIVATION TO IMPRESS EVEN THE MOST DISCRIMINATING GUESTS, OR JUST SIMPLY WANT TO INDULGE YOUR INNER CHIEF, HERE'S SOME HELPFUL INFORMATION FOR SENSATIONAL HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS.



Frasca

"This business is all about mentors," says Chef Lachlan Mackinnon Patterson, owner of Frasca in Boulder. And he has had his share. Starting out at the Old Warson Country Club in St. Louis, MO, the Irish owner helped him get into the prestigious Ecole Gregoire-Ferrandi cooking school in Paris. With his Certificate d'Aptitude Professionnelle, Chef Lach spent two years honing his skills apprenticing with Benoit Guichard at French classic Jamin and Chef Guy Guilloux at La Taupiniere in Pont Aven, Brittany as well as at a butcher shop, before getting to work with Thomas Keller at the French Laundry in California.

"Paris gave me an umbrella of range," Chef Lach explains. "Being in Paris, and being in France, all those years took me to a place in my career that I never would have gotten to, ever."

In his own restaurant, Chef Lach encourages his chefs to work under him for 18 months so they can see all of the seasons once and two seasons once again. Being patient and instructive, he teaches his staff a rounded set of skills, and then makes calls to other great chefs to move his employees along in their careers.

"I always tell all of my chefs that before you have your own restaurant, you need to go have at least two great mentors," he says. "They have to be people, when you asked almost anyone in the business about your mentors, they would know who they were." Like Thomas Keller, Chef Lach hopes to sit at the James Beard awards one day and see his former employees win awards. This year, Keller had the honor of watching Chef Lach win the James Beard Best Chef of the Southwest.

Chef Lach and his wife and toddler daughter celebrate Christmas and Thanksgiving alternating between their families: his in St. Louis, and hers in Oklahoma. For his family, the ingredients make the meal, and traditions of roasted turkey, Ocean Spray cranberry sauce from a can, peas from a can, mashed potatoes, gravy and roasted root vegetables are not to be substituted. "For some reason, doesn't matter how much we wanted to jazz it up," he says, "it was always shunned on if you didn't use those particular ingredients. They know what flavor they're getting into and they want it to stay just like that."

Kitchen Must Have

BERKEL SLICER WITH CONCAVE BLADE—IT CREATES PERFECTLY THIN PROSCIUTTO. "THE INCREMENTS THAT THE CAGE ADVANCES TO THE BLADE ARE SO MINUTE THAT YOU CAN HAVE PROSCIUTTO THAT YOU CAN SEE THROUGH," SAYS CHEF LACH.

Frico Caldo

(Yield - 4 pieces)

INGREDIENTS:

4.5 oz Yukon Gold potato (approximately 1 large potato)
1 oz onions (approximately 1/2 onion)
2 oz grated montasio (1/2 cup) (or piave cheese or aged Montasio)
Pinch salt
Grated nutmeg to taste
4 pieces of sliced prosciutto

CILANTRO VINEGAR:

1 TBSP chopped Cilantro
1 TBSP grapeseed oil
1 tsp shallot minced
Sherry vinegar to taste
Salt to taste

EQUIPMENT:

Measuring spoons
1 small pot
1 small sauté pan
Cheese Grater
Cast iron or Teflon pan (4 inches diameter)
Mixing bowl
1 large spatula
First poach Yukon gold potato in a pot with salted water until fork tender. This may take up to 45 minutes to one hour. When cooked, peel the potato and crush to small pieces. Then mince the half onion. Bring the sauté pan to moderate heat and add the butter. Place the minced

onions into the sauté pan. Slightly sauté the onions until translucent and sweet. Mix all the ingredients together in a mixing bowl. Be sure not to over mix. Heat a Cast iron/Teflon pan on high heat. Lightly grease the pan and add the potato mixture. Let the potato cook on one side for 5 minutes, until golden brown. Then using a spatula, flip the Frico to complete cooking for 5 minutes. Mix the components of the cilantro vinegar together. Cut the Frico into wedges and serve with the cilantro vinegar. With each slice of Frico, serve one piece of sliced prosciutto.

Chef Frank Bonanno

Mizuna

Chef Frank Bonanno, owner of Mizuna, Luca D'Italia and Osteria Marco, and D.I.N.R. member, expresses his love by striving for perfection in food.

"To me it's very important that we are striving to be the best we can be every night of service," says Chef Bonanno. "We shoot to get better every day. We shoot to make sure the food is perfect when it goes out, every element of it."

Testing Julia Childs' recipes, Bonanno started cooking as a child with his mother. As an adult he has written Mizuna Cookbook, appeared on the Food Network Challenge, and received numerous local top chef and top restaurant awards. "I'm a motivator, I'm a teacher, I'm a cook. My life is here. I'm so focused; I'm driven. My day starts at eight in the morning. I'm dropping my kids off at school. I'm at the gym by 8:30; I'm here by 9:30 or 10:00. I work 'til 5 p.m., and go back to the gym, and come back at 6. And then I'm here 'til 10:30 p.m., and I do that five days a week."

After graduating from the Culinary Institute of America in New York, Bonanno relocated to Denver to be with his wife and cooked at Mel's Bar and Grill. Wanting to learn more, Mel encouraged the growing chef to take stints as a guest chef at prestigious restaurants around the world including the French Laundry in California and Albergo Ristronate in Italy. That training gave him the basis for running his own restaurants.

While his staff gets a week off with pay, the Bonanno family goes to New Jersey for a big Christmas Eve dinner at either Chef Bonanno's father's house or his uncle's. "When it's at our house, I cook. When it's at my uncle's house they cook," he says. Feeding about 21 adults and 20 children, Chef Bonanno, with the help of his mother and wife, likes to keep it simple. "Last year I did whole roasted black cod with just like herbs and lemon. And I think I did grilled beef tenderloin," he says. "I did some soft polenta, smashed red bliss potatoes, asparagus. It's just pretty simple good food. We usually have smoked salmon to start and caviar and salamis—tons of salamis and cheese. And then my sister usually cranks out some great cookies for dessert. She's awesome."

Thanksgiving is more of a traditional holiday for Chef Bonanno, with local friends and staff from the restaurant. "I'm so straight, I do turkey, macaroni and cheese, sausage stuffing and then vegetarian stuffing, cause my wife's vegetarian and mashed potatoes with gravy. Sometimes we have pasta, 'cause I love pasta, and then simple finger foods. Someone always brings the candied yams, which I hate so I won't make them, and then people bring some stuff with them, so I just do the basics."

Kitchen Must Have

CHEF BONANNO LOVES HIS KNIVES. "ANYTHING GOOD," HE SAYS. "JAPANESE, MASAHIRO."

Fruits De Mare

(Appetizer, serves 4)

A regular on Chef Bonanno's Christmas Table

VINAIGRETTE:

1 cup extra virgin olive oil
¼ cup red wine vinegar
1 tsp Dijon mustard
¼ cup lemon juice
1 TBSP chopped tarragon
In a medium bowl, combine all ingredients and set aside.

SALAD:

Sea salt
Freshly cracked pepper
½ cup celery
¼ cup fennel
½ cup red onion
8 medium shrimp
8 oz good lump crab
4 oz scungilli
6 oz calamari
Tools: Slicing knife, 2 large pots, colander, large bowl
Finely dice celery, fennel and red onion. Set aside. Set 2 quarts salted water on high. While waiting for water to boil, fill second pot with ice water; set aside. Toss in shrimp in boiling water. Turn off heat and let

shrimp steep for 3 minutes, then strain and immediately plunge into ice water to cool. Cut into ¾-inch pieces. Place crab, scungilli, and shrimp in a bowl and lightly toss with celery, fennel and red onion. Cover with vinaigrette; toss; season to taste with salt and pepper. Refrigerate.

AIOLI:

2 egg yolks
1 TBSP Dijon
2 cloves garlic
3 white anchovies
1 tsp Calabrian chili
1 cup extra virgin olive oil
1 tsp lemon zest
1 TBSP freshly cracked black pepper
Sea salt
Tools: food processor, medium bowl
Slice calamari into ¾-inch pieces (from calamari preparation below), steep in buttermilk while making aioli. Place garlic, Dijon, egg yolk, chilies and anchovies in food processor and pulse while slowly streaming in the olive oil. When the mixture becomes thick and smooth, add lemon zest and pepper. Salt to taste; set aside.

CALAMARI:

1 cup buttermilk
1 cup oat flour
1 cup rice flour
Salt
White pepper
1 gallon extra virgin olive oil (for frying)
¾ cup baby arugula

TOOLS: fryer (or deep pot for frying), medium bowl, medium bowl lined with paper towels, four appetizer plates

Combine two flours into a single bowl; salt and pepper to taste; set aside. Bring oil up to 375. Lightly dredge the calamari through the flour. Shake off any excess flour and place immediately in fryer. Cook until crispy (about 3 minutes). Remove from oil and let drain on paper towel.

TO SERVE:

Round a serving spoonful of salad in the center of each plate. Scatter a few pieces of calamari over each scoop and top with a dollop of aioli. Garnish with baby arugula for pepper.

Chef Alex Seidel

Fruition

2008 James Beard Best Chef nominee, Alex Seidel starts his day playing with his toddler son Jack. When work calls he leaves his home family for his restaurant family at Fruition. "Me and my wife, our whole family is in Wisconsin, and [our staff] is like our family," Chef Seidel says. "They make us smile every day. They make this place go. They really are the true reason we're doing what we're doing."

Chef or Big A as his employees call him, started cooking at age 14 in Wisconsin; graduated top of his class at the Western Culinary Institute in Portland, Oregon; and worked in great restaurants like Sweet Basil in Vail, Hubert Keller's Club XIX in Pebble Beach, CA, and Mizuna in Denver.

"I made sure I took my time in learning things and just figuring out the right way to do things," he says. Now he's passing on what he's learned and inspires his work family with his food tasting trips, like the Fourth of July trip to Portland, OR for clamming and a Northwest food experience, and subscriptions to *Art Culinaire* magazine. Chef Seidel's kitchen runs with quiet motion and fluid cooperation—the way only a tight family can operate.

The holidays, for the Seidels, start off with a homemade 'turducken' at Thanksgiving, enjoyed at either Chef Seidel's house or his best friend's home—a tradition that has lasted years of commuting to or from Vail for the holiday, and eventually spurred his friend to move to Denver.

The second holiday is November 29th, both his and his son Jack's birthday. "He is only [two] and last year we just spent the day together. We had a little shopping spree," says Seidel. "In the future I am sure we will spend our day together with a nice meal out on the town."

Next, the family flies to Wisconsin and spends Christmas Eve with Chef Seidel's family and Christmas Day with his wife's family. "I remember back being younger and just getting into cooking and wanting to do a lamb dinner for everyone," Seidel says. "We went through all the hard work of doing a nice four-course meal for everyone and the traditional lamb; that was one year. The next year was right back into the turkey sandwiches."

Though his family has numerous recipes, the holiday is more about being together, so their spread, usually prepared by the cooks in his family (his aunt and grandmother), consists of easy foods like turkey sandwiches, mostacholi (pasta red sauce) for grandpa, and thousands of cookies made the week before by his aunt.

Kitchen Must Have

CHEF SEIDEL LOVES HIS PASTA ROLLER: "IT REALLY ALLOWS ME TO MAKE A LOT OF THINGS WITH IT, NOT JUST PASTA LIKE CRACKERS AND COOKIES."

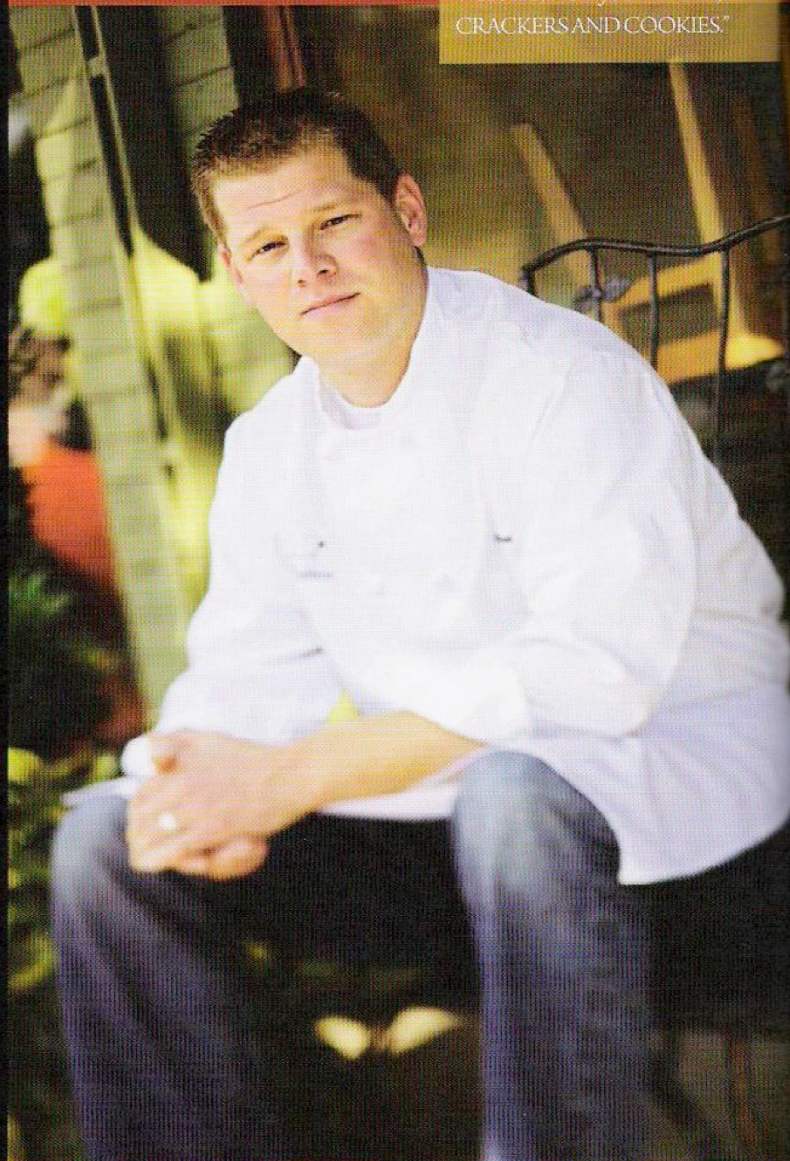


PHOTO BY MÀRC PISCOTTY

Bourbon Pecan Pie

(Recipe makes 2 large 9-inch pies)

"I make Pecan Pie for everyone during the holiday season," says Chef Seidel.

TART DOUGH:

4 cups AP flour (sifted)
1 TBSP kosher salt
3 TBSP sugar
¼ pound butter (small dice)
6 TBSP shortening
Water to bind dough into a ball

Combine first three dry ingredients into a medium bowl. Cut in chunks of butter with a fork or pastry knife keeping the butter from melting. Once incorporated, knead in the shortening and add just enough water to form the dough into a ball. Rest for two hours in the refrigerator.

PECAN PIE FILLING:

8 each eggs (room temperature)
13 oz brown sugar

1 tsp salt
½ cup molasses
½ cup corn syrup
1 tsp vanilla extract
¼ cup bourbon
3 oz butter (melted)
1 lb toasted pecans

Beat the eggs in a mixing bowl. Fold in the sugar, salt and combine well. Add the next five ingredients stirring until incorporated. Last, fold in the toasted pecans and reserve.

ASSEMBLY:

Pull the tart dough from the refrigerator and roll out on a floured surface until ¼-inch thick. Line the pie mold with the rolled-out dough. Trim any excess around the edges. Fill the pie shell with the pecan pie filling. Bake in a 350-degree oven for about 30-45 minutes or until the filling has set. Serve warm with vanilla bean ice cream.

Chef Patricia Perry

Highland's Garden Café

An old black and white photo of Mary Clark, grandmother of restaurateur Patricia Perry, greets customers entering the Highland's Garden Café. Down the hall, murals of Perry's mother's Pumpkin Bread recipe and portraits of family pets peeking out from painted windows decorate the walls. The outside foliage creates a secret garden ambiance, and all of it screams Chef Patricia Perry.

Chef Perry began her food career with the invention of the microwave, cooking for the faculty at St. James Catholic School where she taught. Soon after, she opened Today's Gourmet, a catering business and neighborhood café located on 6th and Marion (now Fruition), in her childhood neighborhood.

"I always liked more of the spontaneity [of the restaurant versus catering] and the ability to change things out on a daily basis," says Perry. Her love of the restaurant business and the community in the Highlands led her to open the Highland's Garden Café 14 years ago, and recently to become a member of Denver's independent restaurant community, D.I.N.R. (Denver Independent Network of Restaurants). "As a resource, it's fabulous," she says.

An avid supporter of Denver's art community, Chef Perry hosts chamber musicians and guests in the parlor of her home, next door to the restaurant, and authors and artists in the restaurant at periodic Café Artist Series. She also invites neighborhood seniors to her monthly Senior Lunch, a four-course meal for \$15. Chef Perry's intrinsic palate and sense of design have maintained her mission of quality, simplicity and ambiance while nourishing her customer's bodies and souls with good food, art and community.

With the restaurant closed, Chef Perry kicks off the holiday season on Thanksgiving by pulling out many boxes of decorations and lovingly creates holiday themes for each of her seven dining rooms. "This old Victorian style home, just really lends itself to lights," she says. By 4 p.m. on Friday, deep into her project the servers come in and start moving the boxes around to open for the night, and the war of musical toys begins. "I love the toys that sing; they all hate them," says Perry. "[Last] year we made peace with them and put them all in one place, so people who enjoy them can enjoy them."

Working hard through a very busy December, Chef Perry finishes the season for her customers with a classic Christmas Eve dinner featuring Duck. The beloved event brings out many neighbors, some who even call ahead to request favorite dishes. At home she, her husband and her mother enjoy New England Clam Chowder and Boston Brown Bread. On Christmas morning, Chef Perry sleeps in and is treated to coffee and presents in bed by her husband. They enjoy Christmas dinner separately; she with her aged mother, him with his family, reuniting in the evening.

Kitchen Must Have

CHEF PERRY CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT HER DISHWASHERS. "ANYTHING ELSE WE CAN MAKE IT WORK, BUT NOT IF THEY DON'T COME!"

BrianKraft.com

Grandpa Joseph's Poticas

A Potica is like a nut roll. In the Perry family these are made and given to the children as a gift on Christmas Eve.

SPONGE:

2 packages active dry yeast
2 cups lukewarm water
7 to 8 cups all-purpose flour
3 eggs (well-beaten)
1 cup softened butter
1 cup sugar
1 TBSP salt

FILLING:

2 pounds finely ground walnuts
1½ cups warm honey
¼ tsp salt
1½ cups milk
4 egg whites (beaten stiff)
1 TBSP vanilla
1 stick of melted butter
Sugar and cinnamon

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place yeast in lukewarm water. Add 1 teaspoon sugar and 1 cup of the flour; mix well and set aside to rise. Meanwhile, mix creamed butter, sugar, salt and eggs together; stir well. Add remaining flour and the yeast mixture alternately. Mix well. Knead until dough is smooth and pliable. Let rise in a warm place in a greased bowl until double in size. Place on floured board and knead; return to bowl and let rise again for about ½ hour. Now melt butter (1 stick) and make a mixture of sugar and cinnamon. Mix filling: Heat the honey; add ground nuts, salt and milk. Last of all fold in the egg whites and 1 teaspoon of vanilla. Keep warm so that it will spread easily.

Let dough rise for ½ hour. Roll very thin. Brush with melted butter and sprinkle with cinnamon sugar mixture over the entire area of the dough. Spread with nut filling and roll up. Place in well greased bundt pan, being sure to have edges well sealed so filling can't spill out in the baking. Allow about one hour to bake.

Chef Scott Parker

Table 6

Chef Scott Parker is the kind of guy you imagine sitting with at a barbecue drinking a beer while talking music or sports, rather than the proper French techniques for making Duck Confit. But he can do both. Former bassist for metal band Clockwork, Parker started his culinary education at the Colorado Art Institute, while he worked in restaurant kitchens between music gigs. Upon graduation he entered the world of resort restaurants, first working in Telluride at the San Sofia, followed by seasonally alternating between high-end kitchens in Vail and Nantucket.

While in Nantucket, the camaraderie of the chefs left an impression on Chef Parker. Likely a reason, D.I.N.R. appeals to him and why Table 6 is a member of Denver's own restaurant resource organization. "I think it's cool," says Parker. "All the people who are involved in it seem to really care and work hard."

With restaurants like Game Creek Club, Rattlesnake Grill and Demarco on his resume; David Wheeler as his mentor; and awards like the *Robb Report* "Top 100 in the World" and *Esquire's* 2004 Best Restaurant, one could easily imagine a food snob or a hard-core foodie running the exposed kitchen at Table 6, but Chef Parker reveals that he enjoyed his time "slinging hash" at The Little Bear in Evergreen or making corn dogs at home just as much as coming up with new dishes for Table 6.

"[Winning the awards is] weird... we're just chopping vegetables," he says. But his humble attitude doesn't mean he serves plain food. Parker likes to push Denver's palate. "It's kind of a struggle sometimes," he explains. "You want to do some of the more obscure things, but also make them accessible."

Chef Parker and his front-of-the-house business partner, Aaron Forman, have celebrated the last couple of Thanksgivings with a family dinner for 30 to 40 employees and friends at the restaurant. Luckily they are not left to cook all alone. "Everyone jumps behind the kitchen," Parker says.

With a new family, including a year-and-a-half-old daughter, Chef Parker and his wife are starting new traditions. For Christmas, they spend time with his wife's family just outside of Phoenix, Arizona. Coming from a small family, Parker enjoys the large gathering, helping the five or six women in the kitchen with cooking or sitting out with the men drinking beer.



Kitchen Must Have

THOUGH THERE ARE LOTS OF COOL GADGETS IN CHEF PARKER'S KITCHEN, HE LOVES HIS COMBINATION OVEN. "YOU CAN COOK AT 165 DEGREES FOR LIKE THREE DAYS AND IT WILL STAY THERE."

Ham and Cranberry Onion, Truffle Relish

"This recipe takes a bit of time and can be challenging but the result is worth it," says Chef Parker.

EQUIPMENT:

Butchers twine
Cheese cloth
Wood chips (apple, cherry, maple, etc...)
Smoker or perforated pan with two other pans for a bottom and lid. Turkey roasting pans work just fine. Punch holes in one pan to allow smoke to pass through. Also you will need four blocks of some sort to support the perforated pan over the wood chips. Balled up aluminum foil works well. The last pan will be the lid. Tape it or just clamp it down to seal the smoke in.

CURE:

1 lb sugar
1 lb salt
1 tsp pink salt

SPICE RUB:

1 TBSP cayenne pepper
1 TBSP rosemary
1 TBSP onion powder
6-8 cloves
1 tsp garlic powder
4-5 lbs of raw ham

Cut into one-inch thick flat pieces. The goal is to roll them into cylindrical shapes about as thick as a man's forearm. Rub the salt cure and refrigerate from 4 hours to overnight. Rinse off the cure and rub with the spice rub. Roll in cheesecloth and tie with butchers twine. Make sure the rolls are tight. Hot smoke for about 30 minutes. Wrap in foil and bake at 200 degrees F for 2-3 hours. Let cool for about 30 minutes to one hour. Slice thin and eat. Good internal temp would be 150-ish.

CRANBERRY ONION TRUFFLE RELISH:

1 TBSP butter or oil
2 large sweet onions diced
2 bags of cranberries
1 TBSP turmeric
1 cup brown sugar
Cinnamon stick
Zest and juice of two each limes and oranges
Salt
Truffle oil to finish or chopped truffles

Sweat the onions in butter or oil. Add the rest and cook until the onions are soft but have a bit of bite. Finish with the truffle. Serve with the ham or anything you want.