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Biography

Beth Gruitch
Proprietor / General Manager

When people say the restaurant business is in your blood, Beth Gruitch is a believer. Her great grandparents, three generations before her, must have passed down the gene. They owned and ran a diner, setting the standards that have led to Beth's record of critical acclaim. "It doesn't matter if you're running a diner or a five-star restaurant," she explains, "it's all about being proud of the product you put out, and to that end, I have no tolerance for shortcuts – no matter what the restaurant concept."

While Gruitch claims she simply "fell into" the restaurant business, destiny probably played more of a hand. After high school, the Colorado native learned the business from the ground-up, bussing and waiting tables, washing dishes, bartending and managing a restaurant office. The long hours and backbreaking work temporarily dissuaded her from pursuing a restaurant career, so she moved on to explore other options. She tried retail sales (drawing on her penchant for shopping) and taught pre-school (testing her infinite patience), until she was finally drawn back to the restaurant business.

Gruitch decided to supplement her hands-on experience with academic training before she seriously entered the competitive restaurant world. She earned a four-year business degree in Restaurant Hospitality from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and graduated with several offers on the table. She first took a job managing Boogie's in Las Vegas, a fun and wild upscale diner, then she managed DIVE!, the kitschy submarine-themed restaurant partnership between Steven Spielberg and Levy Restaurants.

Deciding it was time to expand her culinary horizons beyond diner food, Gruitch officially joined the ranks of Levy Restaurants in Chicago, managing some of the group's high-end concepts like Bistro 110 and Voila. This was the turning point in her career where she realized she only wanted to work with people who shared her passion for food and wine and took pride in the product and service they offered.

Gruitch found herself back in Colorado and accepted the general manager position at Panzano in February 1999, where she met Jennifer Jasinski. During their tenure at Panzano, the duo led the restaurant to the top of Denver's culinary mountain - consistently named one of the top 5 Denver restaurants for food and service.

In 2003, Gruitch and Jasinski decided to leave their posts to begin their first venture into restaurant ownership. The following year they opened Rioja, a restaurant in Denver's Larimer Square with a contemporary design and Mediterranean menu influenced by local and seasonal Rocky Mountain ingredients. "I feel like all of the work I've done so far in my career has come together in Rioja," Gruitch says.

Perhaps her business partner, Jasinski says it best. "Beth makes sure all the best happens for our guests. She hires the best service staff, gives them complete and thorough training and coaches them to perform. She's the reason people rave about our service."

In April 2006, Gruitch and Jasinski made the decision to purchase Bistro Vendôme, a classic French bistro located across the street from Rioja. In addition, Gruitch completed her level-one sommelier certification in 2007, continuing to keep her at the top of her game overseeing the wine lists for both restaurants.

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