



*Fresh, local ingredients and simple flavor combinations.
Bright, balanced preparations.
Perfectionism in culinary execution.
Dedication to her staff.
Resounding critical acclaim.*

Biography

Jennifer Jasinski

Cooking started at a young age out of necessity for Jasinski. Growing up in a single-parent household with two siblings who all took turns cooking, Jasinski developed a knack for following recipes and creating her own, until eventually, it was always her turn to cook. In a high school occupational program for aspiring chefs, Jasinski made the decision to leave her other passion – music – behind, and dedicate her studies to cooking, permanently trading the melodic sounds of her clarinet, oboe and flute for the cacophony of clanging pots and pans. At the time, the best cooking school in the state of California was right in her own backyard, Santa Barbara City College, where she not only refined her cooking skills, but got a taste of restaurant management and front-of-the-house experience.

Ever the over-achiever, Jasinski then took her training to the next level at the Culinary Institute of America, making the dean's list and unsettling more than a few teachers by challenging their principals or techniques. "I believe you get out of things what you put into them," she explains. "I always want to get the most out of everything I do." And she does. Working her way through school waiting tables on campus during the week and apprenticing in the famed Rainbow Room kitchen in New York City on weekends, Jasinski completed her formal education before she was 21-years-old.

After graduation, Jasinski worked at the Rainbow Room under renowned restaurateur Joe Baum and Chef André Rene, which gave her the real foundation of her training. The turning point in her career came from a chance meeting with a guest at the restaurant – Wolfgang Puck. In polite, casual conversation, he mentioned she should "look him up" when she was in Los Angeles. So she did.

Wary of the crazy, fast paced lifestyle in New York City, Jasinski was drawn back to sunny Southern California with a bold strategy: to apply for a job at the top ten restaurants in Los Angeles, one of which was Puck's Spago. She landed a job at the prestigious Hotel Bel Air, where she had the opportunity to re-acquaint herself with Puck, a consultant at the time for the hotel's restaurant.

When their paths crossed this time, Puck took more than a passing interest, referring her to Jody Denton, of Mansion on Turtle Creek fame, who was in the process of training a kitchen team for a new restaurant opening. Jasinski started as lead line cook at Eureka, a Los Angeles brewery restaurant, and within one year was promoted to sous chef. From there, Jasinski's fate was inexorably linked to Puck's.

Their creative and fruitful 10-year relationship took Jasinski around the country, with her helping to develop and open restaurants, create menus, train and manage staff, and, of course, wear her chef's hat for restaurant concepts ranging from fine dining to café cuisine. Her impressive restaurant credits include sous chef at Postrio, San Francisco; café chef at Spago, Las Vegas; executive sous chef at Granita, Malibu; executive sous chef at Spago, Chicago; and corporate chef at Wolfgang Puck Food Company. With Puck's support and encouragement, she even did a stint in Paris at Ledoyan, a Michelin two-star restaurant.

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"Wolfgang was my mentor and my culinary role model," Jasinski says. "His philosophy that it's not necessarily what you do, but how you do it, is my mantra...You can make mashed potatoes, or you can make great potato puree."

In 2000, Jasinski decided to simplify her life and settle down in Denver, one of the stops she fell in love with on the Wolfgang Puck tour. She became Executive Chef at Panzano, where profiles and reviews in local and national publications put Jasinski at the head of her class. Not only was she wildly successful, but she had the opportunity to work with future business partner Beth Gruitch.

In 2003, Jasinski and Gruitch 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. Having designed over 10 kitchen models during her tenure with Puck, Jasinski had no qualms about doing the same for her own.

Jasinski was named 2004 Colorado Chef of the Year and 2005 Western Regional Chef of the Year by the American Culinary Federation, and also appeared on The Food Network's "Thanksgiving Challenge" the same year. In April 2006, Jasinski and Gruitch made the decision to purchase Bistro Vendôme, a classic French bistro located across the street from Rioja. The pair recently announced the mid-summer 2010 arrival of Euclid Hall Bar and Kitchen, their third restaurant just around the corner from Rioja.

Rioja and Bistro Vendôme are consistently listed amongst the top restaurants in Denver by the Rocky Mountain News, 5280 Magazine and the Gabby Gourmet Restaurant Guide. Jasinski has been named Chef of the Year, Best New Chef, Rising Star and more in Restaurant Hospitality, Nation's Restaurant News, The Denver Post and 5280 Magazine. In 2007, she was the Jean Yancey award winner in the National Association of Women Business Owners Outstanding Women in Business awards presented by the Denver Business Journal. In 2010, she was a semi-finalist for the James Beard Foundation Best Chef Southwest.

A tireless worker, Jasinski appears as a guest chef at numerous fundraisers throughout the country. In her spare time she enjoys traveling, mountain biking and skiing with her family and friends.

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THE IMBERGAMO GROUP – 303.534.0567