

Denver's Star Chefs

Weigh in on the City's Next Top Culinary Artists



We asked five of Denver's top chefs

— all of them veteran kitchen magicians — about their thoughts on the Mile High City's next up-and-coming culinary star. Turns out, these are a loyal bunch of toques, most of whom oversee more than one restaurant — which means they wanted to share the wealth... with chefs from their own restaurants. That, of course, would be cheating, so we poked and prodded, and threatened to skewer them over hot coals if they refused to branch out beyond their own burners. An empty threat, to be sure, but it worked. Read on to learn whose rising kitchen you should be eating in next.

By

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**THE STAR CHEF:**

Jennifer Jasinski

The Kitchens:

Rioja

Bistro Vendôme

TOP UP-AND-COMING CHEF?**"Alex Seidel"**

On the Burner: In an industry monopolized by white males renowned for their flaring tempers and egotistical antics, Jennifer Jasinski, an admitted "over-achiever," stands out as a highly successful and determinedly anti-theatrical female whose Rioja kitchen is also predominantly overseen by women. In this business, that's an anomaly. Despite Jasinski's resounding accomplishments – an apprenticeship with New York's esteemed Rainbow Room, a 10-year stint working alongside eponymous star chef Wolfgang Puck, and heaps of awards – she was named 2004 Colorado Chef of the Year and 2005 Western Regional Chef of the Year by the American Culinary Federation – Jasinski is refreshingly grounded. "I believe you get out of things what you put into

them," she says. "And I always want to get the most out of what I do." Here's the proof: In 1999, Jasinski opened Panzano in the Hotel Monaco, elevating that restaurant to national prominence. In 2004, Jasinski unveiled Rioja, a brilliant Mediterranean-inspired food temple that incorporates Jasinski's passion for fresh, locally sourced ingredients with vibrant flavor combinations. And that's not all. The prolific chef, along with business partner Beth Gruitch, bought Bistro Vendôme in 2006. Not bad for a woman who's just 38.

Denver's top up-and-coming is... Alex Seidel, executive chef, Fruition.

What inspires you most about his cooking? He has a straightforward style that's clean and not overdone.

What's your favorite dish?

I don't really have a favorite dish, but I do love Alex's beet salad with beignets.

What makes him unique? I think he's great for so many reasons.

He has such a nice demeanor and presence in the dining room as well as his kitchen. He's not a hothead type of a chef, and he's not arrogant. I really like that about him.

What are the biggest challenges in rising to the top? Stick with it. You're going to fail at times, and sometimes it's gonna be great. You have to be in it for the long haul and take the good with the bad. Be a good teacher and be willing to teach the people around you, because you can't do everything yourself.

**ALEX SEIDEL**

Executive Chef, Fruition

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