

PARK PLACE

Eat. Drink. Lounge.

EXECUTIVE CHEF BRAD KRATEN PARK PLACE CUPERTINO

Chef Brad Kraten put his rather busy day on hold recently to speak with us about his take on food in general, where he sees cooking going and why he prefers a Japanese knife to the German varieties.

How did you become a chef?

“My brother is a chef and he got me into business. When we grew up, we would spend time with our mother and grandmother during the holidays and weekends, cooking for the family. They taught me to be meticulous about every detail and I found I really liked mixing flavors together. When my brother became a chef, I helped him out on a couple of occasions and it was really something I enjoyed. I’m a Bay Area native, so I took what I learned from working with him and started my way up through restaurants in the region. Like Spago in Palo Alto, where I was able to study under Wolfgang Puck and his culinary team and now here at Park Place. Kimpton is a great company to work for when you are a chef – they give you freedom to design your own dishes and create a menu that uses only the best ingredients that you can find. They want the chef to be cooking in the kitchen and that is what I enjoy doing most, so when I heard of the opening here, I knew this would be a great fit for me.”

Chefs have signature dishes. What does it take for a dish to become a Kraten signature?

“I like to look for the traditional recipe and then employ new techniques and the best ingredients to come up with a special twist to the flavors. I really enjoy it when guests ask for a dish on a regular basis. They elevate it, really. I know it’s a very good dish if guests are asking for it even though it’s no longer on the menu.”

The Smoked Salmon is one of your signatures – what’s your recipe?

“It’s house-made. We cure the fish for three days in a mixture of herbs, sugar and salt. After the 72 hours, I’ll smoke it for 20 minutes. Salmon is a very healthy fish – I am able to buy only the best and still support the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch program.”

One of your self-taught passions is the Old World culinary art of charcuterie. How did that interest arise?

“I learned this while I was the executive sous chef at Spago. I learned to marry different flavors and come up with the end result of a great tasting plate. What is great about the art of making charcuterie is that you use the whole animal instead of throwing away some of the most flavorful cuts – cook it up instead of tossing it. I like pork. Duck’s good, but pork works the best. Charcuterie is a great plate for sharing – I remember really enjoying this with my family as I grew up”

What cookbooks have caught your eye lately?

“On Food and Cooking by Harold McGee. He [McGee] spells out the ‘why’ of why foods go together, the scientific aspect, and then details the actual cooking process. Thomas Keller’s cookbooks, too. He writes a lot about food science and technique, and the reasons why foods work.”

You've been involved in the El Cajon project for a while. What's it about?

"El Cajon has been around for several years. It helps at-risk youth by shifting their attention toward doing something with their lives. They learn skills, like working in a kitchen, to see if they'd want to make it a career. Some of the kids I've worked with went on to become cooks and others found it wasn't for them. I've been on the board about two years and working with the program for around nine years. I really support El Cajon's mission and find this is a great way for me to support the development of the community."

What cooking and food trends do you see the general public adopting in the near future?

"Of course, eating natural and organic foods is really catching on; people are much more aware of self-care these days. I think people will start getting into molecular gastronomy pretty soon, enhancing flavors with natural components. I also see a trend in people enjoying meals together as a family, kind of getting back to the principal that we really care about one another and what better way to do that than sharing good food."

What's the one thing in the kitchen you can't do without?

"A good sharp knife. I prefer Japanese knives. They hold an edge better and are easier to sharpen. They're lighter because they're not as thick. You get a thinner cut, which is preferable and makes the flavor more subtle."

When you're not working or spending time with your two daughters, what else do you do for fun?

"I try to spend as much time as possible with my kids. Then it's reading books about cooking and working on menus."

If you were stranded on a desert island, what's the one dish you must have or you couldn't go on living?

"Pork chops. No special preparation. Just a nice big pork chop cooked over an open fire."

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