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FOUR NEW YORK CITY CHEFS, FOUR SECRETS TO SUCCESS

By Roger Sands

The dining options in New York City are as bountiful and diverse as any in the world. Here you'll find everything your palate desires, including innovative dishes that dare to challenge traditional cuisine. No matter which NYC neighborhood you are exploring, you'll discover a restaurant where skilled chefs are crafting their culinary magic, often bolstered by years of training at the highest levels. Cooking is an art form and chefs throughout New York City create masterpieces that can only be experienced in the Big Apple.



Florian Wehrli
Triomphe, The Iroquois
New York Hotel, NYC

Born in Switzerland, Wehrli discovered his passion for cooking at a young age. He earned the designation of "Best Apprentice of Switzerland" and embarked on a culinary journey from Europe and across the United States. He most recently oversaw five award-winning restaurants as the Executive Sous Chef at Crystal Springs Resort in New Jersey.

Describe your culinary philosophy.

I believe that cooking is all about sharing — sharing food with others, sharing knowledge with employees, sharing and cultivating relationships with the producers, sharing recipes and our passion with our guests. This is what drives my cooking and helps me develop new recipes and ideas.

What are your favorite dishes to create?

I love to work with the freshest, seasonal produce. Soups have always been one of my favorites. I really enjoy cooking with the seasons and I have to admit that fall dishes are my favorite because of their healthy, complex flavors that warm the heart and soul. What's not to love?

What are the secrets to a successful career as a chef?

Always work hard, respect those around you and let your passion drive your cooking. It is also so important to love the people surrounding you. As chefs, we work with amazing staffs, producers and other skillful artisans. Not to mention, we are in the business of hospitality, and welcoming guests to my table and watching them enjoy what I've prepared is the ultimate satisfaction, and truly what keeps me going.



Willis Loughhead
InterContinental New York Barclay Hotel, NYC

Loughhead served as executive chef at New York's iconic Plaza Hotel. In 2007, along with acclaimed Chef Geoffrey Zakarian, Loughhead re-styled Country restaurant in The Carlton Hotel. At The Barclay, Loughhead leads efforts to champion positive and environmentally conscious food offerings, including its signature Natural Power Breakfast.

Describe your culinary philosophy. My culinary philosophy is based on my daughter's growth and development and my caring for the planet. I want to know the heritage of all ingredients and stay as local as possible. Organic practices are a bonus, but good and ethical treatment of all things on our planet is key.

What are your favorite dishes to create? I prefer preparing fish and grains and grilling for my family at our house in the Catskills.

What are the secrets to a successful career as a chef? The secret to a successful career as a chef is a strong sense of the absurd, the ability to smile in the face of pain and the willingness to catch bullets and dodge bouquets.

THESE FOUR EXECUTIVE CHEFS – EACH WITH A DISTINCT COOKING PHILOSOPHY – CONTINUE TO SET THE STANDARD FOR UNIQUE AND DELECTABLE MEALS THAT DRAW RAVE REVIEWS FROM FOODIES OF ALL TASTES AND DIETARY PREFERENCES.




Michael Poiarkoff
Vinegar Hill House, Brooklyn

Born into a family of cooks and bakers, Poiarkoff began his culinary education at a young age. From pierogi and marzipan for the dinner table, to sauerkraut and seasonal preserves, he learned that the best food is made with patience and attention to detail. He oversees the kitchens at Vinegar Hill House and Bar Jolie.

Describe your culinary philosophy. I cook what's around me, mostly using fire. I try to make everything from scratch. I enjoy making my own ingredients and cataloging them for later season's use. I enjoy using a whole animal as opposed to select cuts. I love the process of cooking: aging, fermenting, curing. I think that with enough time and love, even the simplest dishes can become very special dishes.

What are your favorite dishes to create? I like creating simple dishes with very special ingredients. My favorite dishes end up being my most approachable. One of my favorite dishes I've run at Vinegar Hill House was a house-cured 15-month ossabaw prosciutto with beurre de baratte, house-made fig vinegar, and crusty sourdough.

What are the secrets for a successful career as a chef? Take care of the people around you, and cook what you want to eat. Don't overthink things. Success as a chef is a very hard thing to measure. In this city, if it's not your passion, you'll probably fail, because in our little world, sadly, ambition often negates success. But in the end, it's just food. So if you feed people, make them happy, and teach some people along the way, I'd consider that successful. 



Greg Lombardi
Del Frisco's Grille, NYC

Lombardi has been cooking professionally for over 30 years. His first kitchen job was as a dishwasher at a summer resort on the Jersey Shore, where he fell in love with the high-intensity energy of the restaurant kitchen. From pizzerias to the finest of restaurants in NYC and Las Vegas, he learned from the best before working his way up the ladder.

Describe your culinary philosophy. My culinary philosophy is to be consistent no matter what. Building regulars is the key to a business's longevity. If guests come in for a specific dish on Monday, then it better be the same dish they receive when they come in again on Friday. I actually have a saying posted in my kitchen that says, "habitual consistency." I live by that phrase every single day.

What are your favorite dishes to create? Although the Del Frisco's name is well known for boasting only the best steaks, I personally love working with fish because it's so versatile. We offer a variety of phenomenal fish dishes, including the Sliced Ahi Tuna and a Bay of Fundy Salmon that I love creating in the kitchen for our guests.

What are the secrets to a successful career as a chef? Never quit. Never compromise. Be accountable to your team and yourself. Lead from behind, not from the front.