

# Secrets of Success

an online exclusive from Foodservice East

An ongoing series of interviews with chefs, restaurateurs and foodservice operators, Secrets of Success looks at the paths taken to professional recognition and acclaim.



*Boston Zagat Guide participants use the word 'sublime' to describe the food at Prezza, a high-end restaurant in the city's North End, where Chef Anthony Caturano puts his twist on the foods of his grandmother's home vilage, Prezza in her native Italy.*

*Trained at the Culinary Institute of America, he honed his craft under such mentors as Todd English, Mark Militello and Joachim Splichal before journeying to Abruzzi, a sabbatical that led to immersion in the cuisine of Northern Italy. An avid hunter and fisherman, he celebrates the origins of his food in the land and sea.*

**FSE:** What led you to become a chef in the first place? You switched from following in your father's footsteps to a culinary career – what was the deciding factor in that choice?

**CATURANO:** I worked in a function hall when I was in high school and loved it, but thought that I really wanted to be an accountant like my father. He got me a job working at Olives the summer between my junior and sophomore year, I really had no experience at all and I was thrown into the fire. I liked it a lot. That same summer I had to take a couple of classes for summer school, and there was one class called Business Statistics. I remember the teacher asking this question like "Abraham Lincoln said 'you can please some of the people some of the time, but what are the chances you can please them if'..." and the question went on with all these variables and factors. I remember asking myself, 'what the hell am I doing here?' So I got up, left my book, notebook and pencil there, and I walked out, one class shy of an associates degree in Accounting. I never looked back. However, now that I own a restaurant that accounting stuff can come in pretty handy.

**FSE:** Which of your mentors had the most influence on the way you cook?

**CATURANO:** I think when I worked for Todd English at Olives, the food he was doing there was what I really wanted to do. I had just gotten back from a recent trip to Italy when I started working at the restaurant (for a second time). And I saw that the things he was doing were influenced by what I saw in Italy. He would take those old recipes and spin them out his way, with his style, you know - make them better.

FSE: How would you define your culinary style?

CATURANO: I think in my style, I try and do the same take; some classic ideas and improve on them and make sure they are right. The trick is to take an idea and make it work for the American palate/consumer. Americans and Europeans eat very differently. So I guess you could say that it's rustic European/Italian influence.

FSE: You opened a second restaurant, Copia, after great success in the North End. What were the factors that led to its closing?

CATURANO: Copia was a really big restaurant with a lot of seats, and it was in an area that was not a destination. It was easy to get to from the major highways, it offered a beautiful view of the city, but it was too tough to drag people over there. Live and learn...

FSE: What do you see as the greatest challenge for chef/restaurateurs, particularly in the current economy?

CATURANO: In this economy, I think it's important to remember who pays the bills. You have to treat your customers right. You have to understand what they want, and remember that you can't fool them. Just because they don't complain doesn't mean they left happy. Go out there and find out. Get personable. There is a scene from the movie "The Big Night" when the brother goes across the street to the restaurant that is very successful and asks the owner what he is doing wrong. His answer was something like - "first you have to give the people what they want, then you can give them what you want". It's a very true statement if you want a full house every night.

FSE: You've taken food and wine in the North End to new levels of excellence. What's next for you? Will there be other restaurants?

CATURANO: Right now there is nothing on the radar. For my next itch or feeling of creativity I am going to take up something like photography or woodcarving.

FSE: What do you see ahead for Boston restaurants in 2009?

CATURANO: I think in 2009 we will see a big shake up of restaurants. It's like the housing market; there were too many built and not enough demand. Those that don't have regular, consistent customers and carry too much overhead are going to see a tough time. I have to remember that too. We might be busy every night now, but that can change tomorrow.

FSE: What's in your refrigerator at home? Do you cook for your family?

CATURANO: I try to keep a few things on hand like milk, beer, Parmigiano Reggiano, limes, garlic, oranges and frozen deer meat. Don't ask for that recipe, it's a secret.

FSE: What kind of food do you enjoy when you eat out?

CATURANO: I love going to steak houses, as a matter of fact I am going to one after I am done returning this email, it's Monday and it's my day off...

## FOODSERVICE EAST

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Susan G. Holaday, Editor & Publisher  
Richard E. Dolby, Publisher Emeritus

197 Eighth St., No. 728  
Charlestown, MA 02129-4234  
617-242-2217 / 800-852-5212

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