

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.



Daniel Bruce, who, before he turned 30, was executive chef at New York's 21 Club, brought his passion for pairing wine and food to Boston Harbor Hotel in 1989 and within six months, co-founded the Boston Wine Festival in order to, as he puts it, "drive revenue in the slowest quarter."

To say he put Boston on the map as a destination for wine lovers in the winter may be an understatement. The Boston Wine Festival today is the longest running food and wine- pairing event in the country, running from winter to April.

Bruce, who grew up in northern New England with a love of food, attended Johnson & Wales, trained in Europe, and returned to lead the kitchens at Boston Harbor Hotel where he developed Meritage, a restaurant focused on wine and food pairings.

FSE: What led you to become a chef?

BRUCE: I have been fortunate in that it has always been a passion. I never considered another profession, and even now, have no desire to leave the kitchen.

FSE: The Boston Wine Festival has been a boon to winter tourism and in a way, created a new tourist season for Boston. What changes have you seen over the years with it?

BRUCE: The Wine Festival doubled the first year and doubled again the second year, due to an interest and response. Since 1994, four years into the Festival, I have kept the events to 50 during the 12 weeks. It is a formula that continues to attract new guests as well as maintain the loyalty of long-term supporters.

FSE: What's the most rewarding part of the Festival?

BRUCE: Most rewarding is the fact that it is a personalized festival, by which I mean I not only create the menus and produce the food (for 54 dinners) but choose the winemakers and all marketing materials before the festival. The personal relationships that I have built over the years, both with winemakers and guests and those who work with me complete the package.

FSE: What do you see ahead for the Wine Festival?

BRUCE: I have expanded the Wine Festival to New Orleans, now in its second year, with plans to also host in Washington, DC. However, the importance of the Boston Wine Festival as the home base will remain with all the dinners personally produced.

FSE: What about your job gives you the greatest satisfaction?

BRUCE: The loyalty and following built up over the years and with that, the high expectations which I enjoy the challenge of exceeding.

FSE: As wine prices go up this year, what changes will you be making on your list at Meritage to offer value?

BRUCE: It is important that Meritage reflects an international list. As far as values, we are constantly looking to add value. On that note, the developing wine regions of the world offer those values as well as strengthen the list. For example, wines from Chile and Argentina, South Africa and other Southern Hemisphere wines are among those that currently offer great value.

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