

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.



Mark Levy grew up in England, attending Colchester Institute near home for a catering and culinary course at his mother's insistence. He'd always been drawn to cooking, occasionally helping out in the kitchen, and had a cousin working at London's venerable Dorchester Hotel.

He came to the states following graduation, and at Keswick Hall in Charlottesville, VA, quickly rose from breakfast duty to running Saturday night dinners in a year. One of his sous chefs, Kevin McCarthy, would go on to become executive chef at two renowned Adirondacks resorts – The Point and Lake Placid Lodge.

Levy returned to Europe, working in Paris at the 2-star Michelin restaurant of Michel Rostang and later, in London where he first learned about gastro pubs. "What I love about gastro pubs is that you can go in a t-shirt and a pair of jeans and eat foie gras next to a guy eating a cheeseburger," he says. "It's comfortable and unpretentious, but the food is cooked with tremendous care and artistry." Mark continued on in that universe, working at the Star Inn, the Running Horse, and finally Greg Nicholl's acclaimed 'pub,' The Russell, where he won the title of England's Gastro Pub Chef of the Year in 2007.

On a visit back to Virginia, he had a call from Executive Chef Kevin McCarthy who was about to make a move and urged him to visit The Point. The rest was history.

FSE: What led you to become a chef?

LEVY: My cousin was a chef at the Dorchester Hotel in London under Anton Mossimon. He was a role model for me when growing up.

FSE: Who influenced your culinary style and how would you describe it?

LEVY: I've had a lot of influences and my style is still not established, but I do prefer a lighter touch these days.

FSE: Tell us more about gastropubs and their cuisine? Is this the 'cozy pub' fare that has been around for a very long time or is it different, and if so, in what ways?

LEVY: Gastropub cuisine is for everyone. Some is still cozy with the classics, but also today, you see 300 year-old pubs doing sous vide cooking so there is a lot of variation. Some are very modern and swish; some are very traditional and down to earth.

FSE: How is casual pub-style food different in the US than in Britain?

LEVY: There are still a lot of traditional techniques being used in cooking, and families will go to pubs for supper. There are no sports on televisions hanging on walls; just a roaring fire and some good company.

FSE: What kinds of beverages go best with your cuisine?

LEVY: Wine, obviously. I'm a big fan of German wines as well as the Old World.

FSE: What is the 'secret' of your success?

LEVY: Bloody hard work, stubborn relentlessness and if I'm going to work 70 hours a week in a sweat box, I may as well do it well.

FSE: What trends do you see in high-end resort food? What you are doing is very different from the traditional haute cuisine that many resorts have been known for in the past. Is gastropub food a return to another era as a way to deal with the current economy?

LEVY: At the moment, I think it's not so much trends as just food cooked with new intelligence. I don't think what we are doing is much different. It is just that this way of having the knowledge to cook food and make money is good in any economy.

FSE: What would you like to be doing if you weren't a chef?

LEVY: A greenskeeper, pro wrestler, or something less stressful.

FSE: What do you see yourself doing 10 years from now?

LEVY: Who knows? That's the beauty of this trade!

FSE: What's in your refrigerator at home?

LEVY: A '95 Moet and Chandon rose (a gift from the former GM at The Point); a rotten egg; three bottles of Sam Adams Oktoberfest – mmmmmm, and a jar of pasta sauce - Italian sausage, I believe.

FSE: What changes do you see ahead for restaurant/resort chefs?

LEVY: More spas, lighter food, more challenges, and new levels of guest expectation.

FSE: How is cooking in high-end resorts changing? Once it was dominated in this country by European chefs, classical training, very high-end food. What do you see coming for the future?

LEVY: Chefs are getting information from all over the planet, and all have different backgrounds. I think the old school way of learning can hamper progress. This, I think, will dissolve slowly and open the door for a new breed with a new way of thinking.

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