

# Westword

## *chef and tell*

**Jorel Pierce**  
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**Y**ou can't write that! I'm not a pussy!" Jorel Pierce, the stove sultan who mans the burners at Euclid Hall, is recounting the summer he spent in England, working as a stage at a hoity-toity country hotel and restaurant that, upon his arrival, welcomed him with four naked Latvians lying side by side. "They screamed at me, so I had to sleep in the hallway, and I felt so alienated that I called my mom, crying. That's the part that you can't write," pleads Pierce, who eventually relents, adding that by the end of his stage, his naysayers — the same guys who initially thought he was a "silly American idiot" — were calling him Captain America.

Pierce, who worked the line at Rioja for nearly four years under chef Jennifer Jasinski (who also owns Euclid Hall and Bistrot Vendôme with business partner Beth Gruitch), is arguably one of Denver's top rising-star chefs. He's confident, brilliantly innovative and, at 26, one of the city's youngest kitchen kingpins to pioneer a line that turns out what may very well be the most ambitiously crafted menu in Denver.

Which speaks volumes about a kid who spent three years working at Applebee's — and appreciates every second of his tenure there. "I loved working at Applebee's. It was a great job that taught me awesome line skills, and a great middle step, where massive volume, down-and-dirty hard work and a lightning-fast pace was all part of the job," says Pierce, whose first gig as a line monkey was throwing pies at Dino's, an iconic Italian restaurant in Lakewood.

Still, Pierce's first solid meal as a baby wasn't a burger, macaroni and cheese or a grilled cheese sandwich, but raw fish from Sushi Den: "Right off the bottle, I was at Sushi Den, eating steamed sushi rice and toro tartare."

Years later, he was on the fast track to a culinary degree at the Denver campus of Johnson & Wales University. "I knew that I loved the restaurant pace and that I loved food and the kitchen environment, and I wanted to work on my finesse and technique, so I went to culinary school to learn as much as I could," says Pierce. But culinary school, he insists, wasn't nearly as valuable as he'd hoped. "Knowing what I know now, I think that culinary school, in general, kind of teaches the remedial basics to the median, and I felt like I had to demand a good education from the instructors," confesses Pierce, who graduated summa cum laude in 2005.

"This is my life, this is what I do, and I take it very, very seriously," he says about



Rising star Jorel Pierce puts on the dog at Euclid Hall.

his new position at Euclid Hall. "I like being the keystone of what we've set up here, and I love that there are people falling in love with Euclid Hall, falling in love with food that they might be uncomfortable with" — bone marrow and blood sausage, for example. "And I really love the fact that people are putting a fork in their poutines, even though it's a catastrophe to their body."

So far, it's been a tremendous ride for Pierce, but he's smart enough to know that the path to culinary greatness is a lifelong journey. He addresses that in the interview that follows — where he also talks about fulfilling his dream, body parts, eggs and the egg hustler.

**Greatest accomplishment as a chef:** Euclid Hall is my greatest achievement as a chef, by far. From running the business side to being the face for the food and creating a family here, from the people who walk in the front door to those who come in through the back, it's been like the realization of a goal and the fulfillment of a dream in a lot of ways. This is a goal that's been a culmination of the last seven years.

**Favorite ingredient:** Eggs. They're a formidable platform on which to demonstrate technique on a beautifully balanced blank canvas.

**Favorite local ingredient and where you get it:** Pulling eggs from the chicken coop at the vegetable stand between Applewood Golf Course and Coors Brewery along 32nd Avenue yields some of the best and most delicious local huevos. There's a sign that just says, "Fresh Fruit and Vegetables" in

front of a dirt driveway. You take a right at the driveway, follow it down and park on the left. You'll know when you're there by all the chickens running around. The eggs are the bomb, and the guy who runs it raises the chickens and lets them die naturally.

**Favorite spice:** Salt. Without it, there would be no Great Wall in China, no bacalao and no blanching water. Life would be dismal.

**What's the best food-or kitchen-related gift you've been given?** A good, sharp palate. Unlike anything else I've been given, my tongue has never let me down.

**What show would you pitch to the Food Network, and what would it be about?** *Body Parts*. It would be a show about cutting, grinding, cooking, larding, barding and trussing and always thinking about appropriate techniques and applications for the different parts of edible fauna. I want to teach people why you cook things the way you do, starting with a firm understanding of what it is that you're actually cooking.

**Weirdest customer request:** Ketchup. Thanks, 99¢ menu.

**Weirdest thing you've ever eaten:** I unintentionally downed a fat tablespoon of pig blood once. Not recommended.

**Last meal before you die:** Brandade, caviar, perfect rillettes, duck liver pâté, good bread and some balanced mustard, followed by a moderately old Pappy Van Winkle, served neat. After all, I'm a simple man.

For more of Lori Midson's *Chef and Tell* interview with Jorel Pierce, go to [westword.com](http://westword.com).  
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