

FOR LIFE IN THE MILE HIGH CITY

denver

M A G A Z I N E



TOP TOQUE

Jennifer Jasinski, the mastermind behind Rioja, Bistro Vendôme, and the city's hottest new foodie hangout — Euclid Hall — is our 2010 Chef of the Year



Teri Rippeto uses mixed beets, baby turnips, and arugula from three area farms in Potager's amazing autumn salad

100 THINGS TO TASTE

OCTOBER 2010 \$5.95



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MASTER MIXOLOGIST: BOULDER BARTENDER IS BEST IN THE WORLD

SPORTS STARS: THE NEWEST NUGGET AND THE FUTURE OF THE AVS

2010 Chef of the Year

*Jennifer Jasinski*Chef-Owner Rioja, Bistro Vendôme,
and Euclid Hall Bar & Kitchendenver
MAGAZINE®Chef
of the
Year
2010

It's our favorite time of year for one reason: We get to honor Denver's most influential culinary artisans of 2010.

In the year since we founded this awards program, the Denver dining scene has continued to explode — in numbers, sophistication, and national acclaim. (This year, *Denver Magazine's* 2009 Chef of the Year, Fruition's Alex Seidel was named a *Food & Wine* Best New Chef, one of the highest honors in the industry.)

While Seidel and others continue to make an unquantifiable impact on this city, we dubbed this feature Chef "of the Year" for a reason. Yes, we are looking for the artisans who inspire their peers and deliver consistently impressive food every time we dine. That's a must. But we also want

something else — chefs; mixologists; and, this year, bakers and street cart operators, who have done something extraordinary for Denver dining since this time last year.

Identifying these tastemakers is an arduous job and not one that we take lightly. We started with an industry-only call for nominations. After all, who knows this business better than the chefs, farmers, sommeliers, brewers, and restaurant owners who are in it? We then exhaustively researched every nominee and ate countless anonymous meals to narrow it down to the finalists featured here. (We know, we know, rough life.) The results of this months-long process? Turn the page to find out.

Chef of the Year

Jennifer Jasinski

Chef-Owner Rioja, Bistro Vendôme, and Euclid Hall Bar & Kitchen
riojadenver.com, bistrovendome.com, euclidhall.com

ROOTS: Santa Barbara, California

CLASSROOMS: Santa Barbara City College, The Culinary Institute of America

KITCHENS: Rainbow Room in New York, New York; Hotel Bel-Air, Spago, Eureka, Postrio, and Granita Restaurant in California; Spago in Las Vegas and Chicago; Ledoyen in Paris; Panzano, Rioja, Bistro Vendôme, and Euclid Hall Bar & Kitchen in Denver

WHY SHE'S OUR WINNER: Jennifer Jasinski moved to Denver in 2000 following 11 years working with Chef Wolfgang Puck. She'd spent time at seven restaurants and in six food towns under his watch but "wanted to move somewhere where nobody knew me to see if I was good enough to be on my own," she says. A decade later, Jasinski has given Denver not one, but three of its most-loved restaurants. Since March, the 42-year-old (along with sous chef Jorel Pierce) has been testing Coney dogs, Hen of the woods poutine, blood sausage, deconstructed Philly cheesesteak, and other "favorites from the best tavern menus around the world" for the new Euclid Hall. While many think the menu mirrors food trends coming out of New York and Chicago in recent years, Jasinski's inspiration for the concept dates back to 1990 when she worked at Eureka, a Puck restaurant that employed a sausage master from Germany and was a nod to the celebrity chef's Austrian roots. "This is my boy restaurant," Jasinski says of Euclid Hall. "Rioja and Bistro are my girls." We love Jasinski for her obsessive commitment to the best possible ingredients and for bringing that ongoing quest to such an approachable, late-night, chef-friendly "boy" — all while making sure her "girls" continue to produce at the consistent, high level we've come to expect.

"I fight being trendy. Trends come and go. Quality, innovation, those things last."

— Jennifer Jasinski,
executive chef Rioja,
Bistro Vendôme,
and overnight hit
Euclid Hall Bar & Kitchen

Jeff Osaka

Chef-Owner Twelve Restaurant, twelverestaurant.com

ROOTS: Los Angeles, California

CLASSROOMS: Diablo Valley College

KITCHENS: DC3, Tarpy's Roadhouse, One Market, Pastis, Pinot Bistro, Joe's Restaurant, Chloe, and Melisse in California; Chinois in Las Vegas; Restaurant Terroir and Kosu Wine Bar in Jackson, Wyoming; Twelve Restaurant in Denver

WHY WE LOVE HIM: Jeff Osaka took a chance on Denver (and on the Ballpark neighborhood) when he moved here from L.A. to open Twelve Restaurant in 2008. Since this time last year, the Colorado newbie has gone from relative obscurity to being

ardently respected by his peers. When we sent this year's call for nominations, Osaka was the single most nominated chef. He's as quiet about the kudos, however, as he is in his kitchen, "I'm still a bit of an outsider," Osaka says. And while he is working to change that by teaming up with renowned area chefs Alex Seidel, Scott Parker, and Justin Brunson for a quarterly dinner series, it might be precisely this introverted tendency that generates perfection. "I've only taken one day off since we opened. I like to touch every plate," the chef says. We continue to love what every Denver chef seems to have caught on to: Osaka's understated but impeccably executed food.

Tyler Wiard

Executive Chef Elway's Cherry Creek, elways.com

ROOTS: Manhattan, Kansas; Evergreen, Colorado

KITCHENS: Q's and Jax Fish House in Boulder; Windows on the Water in Morro Bay, California; El Rancho in Evergreen; Cliff Young's, Zenith, Napa Café, Mel's Restaurant and Bar, Fourth Story Restaurant & Bar, and Elway's in Denver

WHY WE LOVE HIM: Tyler Wiard grew up in Evergreen and has been cooking in the area for most of his adult life. This year, however, Denver has seen a new side of him. Since last fall, Wiard has attended a Pork 101 seminar in Napa and an intensive, three-day beef course at Texas A&M

University. "I always need to keep refreshed. I don't know everything about the cow," the chef says. A member of the group of chefs known as Five, Wiard's done some 25 dinners, charity balls, and cook-offs this year. For most chefs, the travel schedule that comes with tenure like Wiard's is a curse, but for him, it seems to be a blessing. While he has certainly shaken up an otherwise scripted steakhouse menu with dishes such as enchiladas, it's at these out-of-house events where Denver gets to see an amazingly creative, artistic, inspired Wiard. We love him for continuing to seek new lessons after so many years and for truly working for perfection in anything he touches.

Tyler Wiard

Denver chef who once worked under Wiard: Frank Bonanno. **Important lesson from Boulder restaurateur Dave Query:** "We're not building bombs; we're not saving lives. Take what you do seriously, but don't take yourself seriously."

Biggest risk he's ever taken: Coming to Elway's. **Has it paid off?** "Absolutely!" **The next Elway's:** In the mountains, fall of 2011. **Number of times he's cooked at the James Beard House:** Five. **Chef he most respects:** Nancy Oakes of Boulevard Restaurant in San Francisco. **Why his thirst for knowledge is insatiable:** "They say the male human being thinks about sex every three seconds. Well, food and sex are really close for me." →



the dish

**Jeff Osaka**

Why he's quiet in the kitchen:

"I've always worked for chefs who were yellers and screamers, and I told myself in the beginning I'm never going to become like that. It's unproductive."

Contender to join Osaka's quarterly group as a guest chef at an upcoming dinner: Lon Symensma from ChoLon. **Best bargain at Twelve:** Eat dinner at the bar and get wine by the glass for half-off.

The latest on his wish to open an authentic, true-to-his-roots izakaya: It's still in the works. He's looking at spaces in the Ballpark neighborhood and Highland.

Jennifer Jasinski

Her GPA at the Culinary Institute of America: 4.0. **Why imported is as important as local:** "I buy an ingredient because it tastes the best, not because it's a fad." **Case in point:** Tasmanian salmon (\$17 a pound). **Why the chef is not afraid of being called a restaurateur now that she has three spots:** "I am a restaurateur. I don't see what's wrong with that. I'm always going to cook, though. I get antsy when I don't." **Her management philosophy:** "Good energy is contagious." **Love of her life:** The Squeaky Bean chef Max MacKissock and their Labrador puppies. **What's next:** A market that has ingredients from her restaurants — housemade pastas, stocks, sausages — for people who want to cook them at home. →

