

Patty Queen

THIS THIRD-GENERATION CHEF says she cannot remember a time in her life spent away from a professional kitchen. Patty Queen's Polish immigrant grandfather brought Connecticut its first diner. Her mother ran the family catering business in which Queen grew up. Cooking is the only career she ever considered. Today, she and her brother own and operate The Cottage Restaurant outside Hartford, Connecticut.

After graduating from Johnson and Wales College in Rhode Island in 1986 with a degree in culinary arts, Queen moved to Boston, where her first cooking experience was at the Harvest Restaurant in Cambridge. There, unusual ingredients and preparations were an everyday affair. She remembers,

"There was this wild guy training me. He said, 'We're going to do a duck confit salad with some kind of greens and a huckleberry vinaigrette.' I didn't have any idea what he was talking about! At the end of the night

there were twenty-five items coming off of my station." This intense first professional cooking experience taught her to think on her feet and to be creative, and landed her a job as line cook at the renowned Restaurant Jasper. She counts Jasper White and Julia Child, a frequent patron at Jasper's, among her influences.

Wanting to expand her food horizons, Queen decided to treat herself to six months of "culinary finishing school" in Europe. To experience the origins of American food, her research took her to Paris, Rome, Burgundy, Bordeaux, London, and Amsterdam. When her funds ran out after two months, she took a job as a chef in Florence. Unfortunately, the turmoil caused in Europe by the Gulf War in 1991 prompted an early return to the States.

In 1992 Queen moved to New Orleans to work at The Bistro at Maison de Ville. She eventually became executive chef, following in Susan Spicer's footsteps.

Queen's European experience certainly informed her approach to food. She insists that her "imaginative contemporary" cuisine must start with the freshest seasonal and regional ingredients. Spontaneity is important too: "If I had to stop and think about how I come up with my food, I wouldn't know how to explain it. It just comes to me. It's about textures and colors and contrasts." The results are an eclectic blend, as witnessed by the fusion of ingredients in Queen's rich and flavorful menu.

