

OUTSIDE THE KITCHEN

Chef: Andy Schilling

Residence: Manhattan

Restaurant: BLT Steak, White Plains

Having written this column for a year now, I've noticed a commonality among chefs: most have been itinerant travelers before reaching their culinary terminus. The swath of expat destinations would do Fodor's proud: Costa Brava, Crete, and the West Bank among them. And now the trend continues with Andy Schilling, another pilgrim to the Middle East by way of childhood summers in the British Isles with his Scottish mother. Curiosity, adaptation, resourcefulness, flexibility—they're all traits developed by wandering and essential for culinary triumph.

They've served Andy Schilling well. At 18, he mulled over pursuing film studies in college while on an Israeli kibbutz, assigned to farming, laundry, and, for a while, kitchen. But there was no cooking revelation—yet. What he enjoyed more, returning to an Israeli farm two years later after a stint in the photo department of *US* magazine, was goat herding. "It was very Zen," he muses. "It's so beautiful on a hillside at dawn gazing down at a valley." But adulthood was encroaching and hillsides were soon traded for vineyards. "I had earned enough money to get to France, then picked grapes for a month and had enough to get home." College and career were calling.

He answered by studying media at SUNY Buffalo and then post-grad film studies at City College. But doubt lingered. "I enjoyed the academic pursuit of studying film and reading papers, but felt it was confining, that I'd be enclosed in academia." He had worked part-time dishwashing, and then cooking, at a Greek restaurant during college and enjoyed it. The light bulb began flickering. "My sister knew I liked cooking and encouraged me to think about culinary school," he says. "My father was a good self-taught cook." He pauses and smiles. "I know it's a stereotype, but my father was a Jewish New Yorker and loved Chinese food. He taught himself to make pot stickers and a great hot and sour soup." Soon enough, Schilling enrolled at Manhattan's French Culinary Institute, now the International Culinary Center, and worked nights in a restaurant where he "loved the intensity, the challenge of timing and organization." Next stop: the stellar Eleven

Chef Speak

"Cooking is like playing a professional sport, you physically can't do it forever. It takes a toll."



Below: The popovers at BLT Steak are legendary; the USDA prime steaks aren't bad either.



Madison Park. "I wanted to work at a Danny Meyer restaurant, and I'd heard good things about his company." He started in pastry under James Beard Award-winner Nicole Kaplan, then worked the line up to sous chef, still loving the intensity. Looking to expand his skills, he moved to Meyer's catering arm with its focus on logistics and quantity. "I liked it enough to know that I didn't want to continue with it," he says.



He may have acquired culinary expertise, but he was born a hustler. Even if his days were spent cooking for hundreds there were still nights available. So he became Annie Leibovitz's personal chef, cooking at her West Village brownstone and, during summer, her Rhinebeck, New York, home.

Afterward, he spent five years at the West Side Manhattan's 15 Central Park West residence, cooking in the private dining room and apartments of the One Percent. "It combined all my experience: private chef, catering cook, running a restaurant," he says.

Now, that experience runs the BLT Steak kitchen. As with Meyer's firm, he's found a beneficent home. "It's a well structured, supportive environment," he says. "I'm happy here." So might his peripatetic days be over? "One day, maybe I'll have my own place, a great coffee shop with breakfasts, fine sandwiches: a down-home kind of place." He pauses, and then straightens suddenly and shrugs. "Cooking is like playing a professional sport, you physically can't do it forever. It takes a toll." But for now, he's staying put.

—Diane Weintraub Pohl

SPICE RACK

Discovering unusual spices and herbs, one jar at a time

[Cardamom]



aka...
green or true cardamom;
also (alternate variety)
brown cardamom,
bastard cardamom, black
cardamom, or Siamese
cardamom

Flavor Strength



Description: Cardamom is a member of the ginger family and comes from plants that grow small spindle-shaped, seed-filled pods. There are two main types: green cardamom (slightly sweet, astringent eucalyptus flavor with a minty aroma) and brown cardamom (peppery, sharply astringent, spicy with a medicinal aroma).

You Might Like to Know: Guatemala, not India (which is second), is the largest producer and exporter of cardamom. The spice is also the third most expensive behind saffron and vanilla.

Close-Talker Protection: Cardamom is one of the most effective remedies against halitosis. Chewing on the seeds eliminates bad breath.

—JBT



SIZZLING...

Eggs on pizza

HEATING...

Eggs on pasta

FIZZLING...

Eggs on burgers