

OUTSIDE THE KITCHEN

**Chef:** Michael Abruzese

**Residence:** Yonkers

**Restaurant:** Polpettina, Eastchester and Larchmont



**Chef Speak**

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invitation to visit Japan for three years now, but hasn't gone. “I'm afraid I won't come back,” he laughs.

**M**ichael Abruzese always knew what he wanted to be, and trained for it night and day: Quarterback. After school, nights, and on weekends he pursued it, working part-time, from the age of 15, at Yonkers food shops to fund his sneaker obsession. Baskin-Robbins scooper led to deli stock boy to pizzeria counterman to red-sauce-restaurant prep cook. “I was always looking, watching, helping,” he says. “If football didn't work out, I knew it would be food.” At 25, playing semi-pro with football injuries mounting, he made the decision to trade pigskin for pork belly. “I would come into work all beat up, and the restaurant owner said, ‘Why don't you go to culinary school? You like food.’”

He always had. “Sundays, growing up, my grandmother would start her gravy in the morning, and it was an all-day thing: meatballs, sausage, pasta. I was intrigued, always the first one to taste, looking over everyone's shoulder, asking questions.” Food it would be. The restaurant owner wrote a recommendation to the Culinary Institute of America, and, soon, football's loss would be cooking's gain.



Abruzese during his Roosevelt High football days.

“School was boot camp,” he says, “but my dad trained me very young for sports; I put that hard work to use and that's what got me through.” Two years later, boot camp was packed in for beach with an externship at The Ritz-Carlton Club, St. Thomas. For eight months he swam, snorkeled, sailed—and found that a commercial kitchen was not for him. But he also found a passion: Japanese cuisine. “It's intricate and decorative, the opposite of my upbringing's heavy sauces and family-style plates. The art is amazing: the discipline, the cleanliness, the simplicity.” He moved on to a job in Miami, and was chosen to help open a Japanese restaurant with a Japanese colleague. That cuisine infuses much of his Polpettina menu: yuzu in vinaigrette for his octopus; sesame oil and soy sauce in his chicken meatball jus. He's had an

was back in New York with an infant son, a cooking job in Bridgehampton, and a restaurant-space search from the Lower East Side to Chappaqua. That quest ended in Eastchester three years ago with the first Polpettina, Italian comfort food jolted with the cuisines of his travels.

But Michael Abruzese has always been more about beginnings than endings. The second Polpettina opened six months ago, and they're looking for additional locations. “We want a Polpettina empire,” he states. “I want to give opportunities to people with drive, give them a carrot that they can reach, not like the unattainable ones that I struggled with.” And in the more distant future? A Japanese place? The chef smiles. “We have a few other ideas. I'll leave it at that.”

—Diane Weintraub Pohl

SPICE RACK

Discovering unusual spices and herbs, one jar at a time

**[ Chervil ]**



aka...  
French parsley, garden chervil

Flavor Strength



**Description:** Chervil is to herbs what Millard Fillmore and Rutherford B. Hayes are to US Presidents—often overlooked and sort of boring. It resembles the much more common—and only marginally less boring—flat-leaf parsley. The aroma and taste are similar to those of tarragon and fennel, although it's much less potent than the latter. Its main use is in soups, salads, and eggs.

**You Might Like To Know:** Chervil loses its flavor easily (if you dry it or expose it to too much heat), so it is should be added at the end of cooking or sprinkled over food just prior to eating.

**Purported “Joan Rivers” Attribute:** Applying tea made from chervil as part of a facemask can reduce wrinkles and improve the elasticity of skin.

—John Bruno Turiano

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SIZZLING...  
**Blender Juice Drinks**

HEATING...  
**Cold-pressed Juice Drinks**



FIZZLING...  
**Smoothies**