

OUTSIDE THE KITCHEN

Chef: Christopher Daly
Residence: Manhattan
Restaurant: Sorrel Wine Bar and Bistro, New Rochelle

In the pre-dinner calm of mid-afternoon, alone in his open kitchen, Christopher Daly is trussing a chicken. Simple, silent. Not the image of the warrior who launched a national campaign to combat childhood obesity. And there are other iterations: the harmonica player; the poet and short-story writer; the hunter and fisherman. So many talents, so many careers to ponder. That he chose chef was not due to chance, but practicality.

"My parents were from the Depression era and remembered what it was like to go without," he says. "Cooking seemed like a great way to earn money and was an extension of my creative bent." Having grown up in the Hudson Valley, most of his friends lived on farms—"the farms that created the original Greenmarket in Union Square," he states with palpable pride. "My family had a garden, and whatever we didn't consume, my mother pickled or preserved. She and my grandmother were incredible cooks and bakers. I grew up with the influence of great, fresh food, and that had a dramatic effect on the food I love cooking." By the age of 10, he was mopping floors, peeling vegetables, and stocking shelves in local restaurants. He grins: "I was the only kid in fifth grade with a bank wad."

Years later, after high school, a waiter at the local restaurant where Daly was cooking brought in an issue of *Gourmet* magazine, featuring an article on California chef Alice Waters' New American ethos. The effect was galvanic. Daly's future was fixed: he enrolled at the Culinary Institute of America, a plan that, he says, "seemed more professional, more focused than continuing to work in little Hudson Valley restaurants." And there was an added benefit: with a CIA education, "I could be working in Paris, Los Angeles, London," he reasoned.

Work in restaurants he did, stellar ones throughout Los Angeles (L'Orangerie, Checkers, on the line with Thomas Keller) and New York (the original Bouley,



Chef Speak

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the Plaza's Edwardian Room, Petrossian, the James Beard House). But it was France that sparked the other passion that would direct his life. In 1999, he had made it to Paris, where a co-chef was developing a locavore food education program similar to Alice Waters'. Daly jumped on board. "The trend was getting further away from the food supply. The traditional ways of life were rapidly disappearing. He wanted to re-acclimate people to the importance of farm-fresh food," Daly explains. Portion control, too, was important to the chef, who was extremely heavy. That program faltered, but, back in New York, Daly noticed an overweight population, and the idea gestated. "I wanted to get people thinking: local food! You don't have to go far to get healthy food and support local farmers."

His first project, an online tutorial geared toward mothers, went nowhere, so he shifted the emphasis. "I thought: If you want to affect someone's health, maybe start when they're younger. Why don't we start teaching kids?" He'd done culinary lecturing in Los Angeles and loved it. He had an affinity for technology, interested partners in a variety of fields, and a cadre of enthused student chefs.

In 2001, he launched the nonprofit that today has educated more than 200,000 middle schoolers and their parents nationwide: HIP4Kids. (The acronym stands for Hospitality Industry Professionals.) There's an online teacher curriculum, digital magazines, a Hudson Valley-made healthy cookie line, and community outreach programs. The next endeavor: specialized programming targeted to disadvantaged neighborhood schools in the Bronx. "I'm hoping I can keep all the balls in the air," Daly says. And he'll follow one of his father's principles: "He felt strongly about getting work done."

But for now, the chef has to get back to his chickens; the dinner rush is imminent. —Diane Weintraub Pohl

SPICE RACK

Discovering unusual spices and herbs, one jar at a time

[**Annatto**]



aka *achiote*, *achuete*, *bija*, *roucou*, *urucu*

Flavor Strength



Description: Annatto is the seed or extract from the spiky, heart-shaped fruit that grows on the *achiote* tree, which is indigenous to Latin and South America; it is used as both a spice and a dye, ranging in color from bright yellow to deep orange. The seeds can be ground into powder, turned into a paste, or infused into oil.

Flavor Profile: Earthy, musky, and mildly peppery; it pairs well with the mild flavors of rice, poultry, and onion.

Color Me Annatto: Annatto is used to color soups, stews, rice, and spice rubs in Latin America; it's also used to shade butter, margarine, and yellow cheese (all of which would be a pale, creamy color otherwise). It's used as a colorant in other products such as processed meats, smoked fish, and beverages.

Poor Man's Saffron: Annatto can be used to achieve a similar bright yellow color to saffron without the exorbitant price.

—JBT

SIZZLING...

Deep-Fried Butter

HEATING...

Deep-Fried Cookie Dough

FIZZLING...

Deep-Fried Candy Bars

