

OUTSIDE THE KITCHEN

Chef: Peter Larsen

Residence: Westwood, New Jersey

Restaurant: Formerly of RiverMarket Bar and Kitchen, Tarrytown

Most kids would resent being uprooted from friends and school every few years to a different place for their father's work. Peter Larsen never did. And he was being uprooted from continents, not just states. "It was interesting," he says. "It opened me up to all the traveling I'd do later." His Danish pathologist father moved the family for teaching stints from Larsen's birthplace in Philadelphia back to Denmark when Larsen was 2 years old, then to Sacramento when he was age 6, Bangkok at 8, and back to Copenhagen. "My father constantly traveled for work—to Asia, Africa, and came back with stories and pictures." He chuckles. "Still, I always thought my parents were boring back then: so conservative. I'm getting some of that back now. My daughters are 10 and 11."

Yes, that's how it goes. He's settled down now in New Jersey, but Larsen misses the peripatetic life. "I read a lot as a child and always wanted to know more—and know why. It's been a thread my whole life, wanting to know more." That restlessness would haunt his Copenhagen youth: through art school aiming to be a painter, through bartending for pocket money, through apprenticing at a fine-dining restaurant, through culinary school and restaurant jobs. "Copenhagen's a great city, but I always felt it was too small," he says. Cooking was interesting, he felt, but the post-work late night partying was more so. For years, it kept the restlessness at bay. Until it didn't. "I realized I wasn't going anywhere. Things were getting too crazy, and I had to get out." The siren chanted America. "I wanted to get back to California. As a child there, it opened something up in me, gave me the sense of something bigger."



Chef Speak

"I realized I'd had it with fine dining, the pretension."



He arrived after detours in Ireland and St. Louis, cooking in Michelin-starred restaurants and country-club kitchens. San Francisco was his Mecca. "I'd heard about the food scene there, the innovations of Thomas Keller." He joined the fray in the hip kitchens of Rubicon and Aqua, planning to stay one year before setting out for Europe. He stayed three: Love intervened in the form of a waitress who would become his wife. But the restlessness surged, and it led them to New York, and then two months in Las Vegas ("hated it"), and back to New York, with a stint at Geoffrey Zakarian's haute Towne ("It set the bar, the French cooks' resumé's read like a phone book of three-star restaurants"), and nine years at Marseille. "I realized I'd had it with fine dining, the pretension."

After a stint at Terrance Brennan's Artisanal and some consulting, he'd had it for good. The late-night commute home to New Jersey, marriage, and fatherhood had prevailed. He found work in New Jersey, and then at Tarrytown's RiverMarket (he recently started a new position at Wallabout Seafood & Co. in Fort Greene, Brooklyn). So is he settled? Content? "I think I belong in California. That's where I want to end up. But we have a special needs child, and the programs here are the best in the country." He looks away, searching the distance. "I love change—or used to. I want to go somewhere else, but I have to stay here now. I have obligations."

—Diane Weintraub Pohl

SPICE RACK

Discovering unusual spices and herbs, one jar at a time

[**Ajowan**]



aka bishop's weed, ajwain, carom

Flavor Strength



Description: Native to southern India, ajowan is related to caraway and cumin, but its flavor is closer to thyme with some oregano-like pungency and a bite reminiscent of cumin. It looks similar to parsley (to which it's also related) when growing, but the leaves are not used in cooking—only the seeds. The annual herb can grow two to three feet in height; its tiny white-petaled flowers ultimately develop into small, oval-shaped olive green- to brown-colored seeds.

Use: The spice complements vegetables and carbohydrates and is popular in chutneys, breads, curried dishes, bean dishes, and in spice blends for deep-fried food.

Better Than Viagra?

A Unani (traditional medicine practiced in South Asia and Middle Eastern countries) folk remedy for impotence has ajowan seeds soaked in lemon juice and then dried. Eating the treated seeds purportedly stimulates waning libidos. —JBT

AJOWAN PHOTO BY SANJAY ACHARYA

SIZZLING...

Smoked Turkey



HEATING...

Grill-Roasted Turkey

FIZZLING...

Deep-Fried Turkey