

Carmel

The Lifestyle Magazine of the Central Coast

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magazine

Nicole Kidman

“Big Little Lies”

The HBO Series
Returns to
the Peninsula

City Chef Shines in Big Sur

Paul Corsentino Brings His Skills to Ventana

BY LARRY HARLAND

Chef Paul Corsentino once lived and worked inside the pressure cooker that is New York City, voraciously biting off chunks of the Big Apple as he went along.

Before he turned 30, Corsentino found himself at the center of the gastronomic universe, running the kitchen at The National, midtown Manhattan's chic restaurant owned by celebrity Chef Geoffrey Zakarian. Along the way, he helped Zakarian win "Iron Chef America" battles on the *Food Network*. And the cherry on top? Eater placed him on a short list of "Sexiest New York Chefs."

What a life.

Then he steered his clattering subway into a sudden, inexplicable U-turn. He released the pressure and left the paved, sleepless city for quiet reflection and a vast landscape.

Today you'll find Corsentino, 37, living in Seaside with his wife Amarisa and their rescue dog Sven. Each day, he makes a Zen-like commute into the wilds of Big Sur for his position as executive chef of The Sur House at Ventana Inn & Spa.

The couple made a joint decision to move to the Central Coast in 2014 following a reflective honeymoon tour up and down Highway 1 months before. Corsentino wanted to cook with the seasons using local ingredients, forage off the land and spend winters not slogging through the snow.

"I wanted to do something different," says Corsentino. "It was a culture shock, and it took some getting used to, but now I can't imagine working and living anywhere else."

As for his commute, the man who didn't drive at all in New York now loves the 45-minute decompression time on his way to work, with nature and beauty inspiring him.

Today he's a chef at peace, cooking with the same big-city level of passion but enjoying more the act of feeding each guest—while nourishing his own soul.

Q: What's your favorite childhood food memory?

A: Cooking on Saturday mornings for my siblings, not knowing what I was creating or doing but knowing they loved it anyway.

Q: What was your first job?

A: De-tasseling corn for a seed company in Peoria, Illinois. I was 12.

Q: Who most influenced your decision to become a chef?

A: My sister Theresa encouraged me to follow my true passion, and convinced my parents to send me to culinary school.

Q: What do you cook at home on a day off?

A: Dishes that my wife wants me to create and any new ideas that pop into my head.

Q: What is your favorite thing to do in Big Sur?

A: Being outdoors, hiking and visiting the Taphouse.

Q: Biggest difference between working in New York and Big Sur?

A: It's more personal here. I can be the face of the restaurant and engage with diners, doing things like the Friday wine and cheese social (he pours the wine and mingles with resort guests).

Q: What is your food philosophy at Sur House?

A: I want the food to seem thoughtful but not too contrived. Some

**Ventana's The Sur House
restaurant Executive
Chef Paul Corsentino has
years of experience,
including a stint on
"Iron Chef America."**



food out there is too fussy and it doesn't make sense. And I want to be hyper-seasonal, using ingredients from our own backyard and the resort garden.

Q: What's your favorite local restaurant other than your own?

A: Akaoni in Carmel and Ferdi's in Seaside.

Q: What's your most guilty junk-food pleasure?

A: Ice cream, but particularly Ben & Jerry's.

Q: What three things are in your fridge at all times?

A: Pickled anything, Kewpie mayo and hot sauces; Crystal and Tabasco are a must.

Q: If you hadn't become a chef, what profession would you have chosen?

A: Police officer like my father, or EMT, or firefighter.

Q: Is there an ingredient you use a lot that would surprise people?

A: Pickled Fresno chiles, pickled red onions and garlic puree, all of which are in many of our dishes at Sur House.

Q: What is your go-to source of inspiration?

A: Cookbooks. I love pulling ideas and flavors from multiple places when researching new ideas.

Q: What person, living or dead, would you most want to eat dinner with?

A: Barack Obama so I can get the true inside scoop.

Q: What's your go-to snack?

A: Chips and salsa.

Q: What food or ingredient do you dislike the most?

A: Beef liver and under-seasoned food.

Q: What's your favorite kitchen gadget?

A: Vitamix: the kitchen workhorse.

Q: Describe how you feel when you cook for someone?

A: I feel honored that someone trusts me to create an enjoyable dining experience, and that makes me very happy. ■



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