

hospitality design

october 2015 hospitalitydesign.com

the restaurant issue

platinum circle 2015



HDexpo
hospitality design expo

special feature chefs

BRIAN MALARKEY

Searsucker and Herringbone

Becoming a chef

Brian Malarkey didn't have lifelong professional culinary ambitions. "I actually failed at just about everything else in college," he says, "and one day, my father said, 'Brian, all you do is cook food for your friends, and you really don't seem to be enjoying this college thing, maybe you should think about cooking for a living?' As it turns out, that was the question that sparked my culinary career."

Earliest food memory

Raised on a ranch in Oregon, "as a young kid, around 10 years old, our family had a friend that lived on the Oregon coast, and one day when we were there visiting, our friend caught and prepared a bunch of the most delicious crab. As we were all sitting at the dinner table, I remembered thinking to myself how cool it was that this food brought so many people together to enjoy a meal. From then on, I always loved food, especially cooking and serving it to others."

Striking out on his own

After graduating from Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts in Portland, Oregon, Malarkey worked at various well-known restaurants in Los Angeles, most notably Citrus for chef Michel Richard. He went on to become executive chef and partner for Oceanaire Seafood Room, opening the company's San Diego location. Five years and a *Top Chef* stint later (he was a finalist on Season 3), he ventured out on his own with local impresario James Brennan to form Enlightened Hospitality Group (EHG), launching, among other venues, the Fabric of Social Dining restaurants, namely Searsucker and Herringbone. "After spending many years working for the man, at some point you sort of want to be the man," he says. "I wanted to do it for myself after several years of working on the line." Since 2010, they've opened seven successes all designed by Thomas Schoos—in Austin; San Diego; Del Mar, California; and most recently, Las Vegas for Searsucker; and La Jolla, California; Santa Monica; and Los Angeles for Herringbone, with Las Vegas opening soon. As a result, restaurant and entertainment leader Hakksan Group acquired EHG in 2014.

Big break

"*Top Chef* was the lottery ticket that really propelled me into the spotlight," Malarkey says.



Photos by MARIE BUCK PHOTOGRAPHY

"It was an incredible launchpad for me, and I knew I made it big when I was at an afterparty one night and chef Mario Batali was there. I walked up and told him that I loved him as a chef, and Batali said, 'My kids love you!' It was such an incredible moment for me."

On the success of Searsucker and Herringbone

"The restaurants have been so successful because we've made them for the people, the guests. We make great, approachable food that people want to enjoy and share, and we present it in a welcoming, yet stylish setting with great service."

Greatest lesson learned

"To be humble and thankful for everything I have, and of course, to appreciate my fantastic team."

1+2. The main dining room and patio area of the Thomas Schoos-designed Herringbone Santa Monica.

Why San Diego and Las Vegas

"Both San Diego and Las Vegas are gaining traction as legitimate dining scenes, with great local food cultures. There are great grassroots movements in both locations spurred by chefs and farmers."

Food philosophy

"To have fun and not overcomplicate the food; I believe the product should speak for itself."

Mentors

"Every local chef, farmer, and purveyor I meet is my mentor. I am so inspired by other chefs and farmers—they push me to explore and try new things. I feel like I have a constant community of people inspiring me."

What's next

"I have my sights set on our new Herringbone Las Vegas project and a new project in San Diego."