

# CHEF

& Restaurant

UNITED STATES

ISSUE 11

PASTRY AT PER SE

**ANNA BOLZ**

A PITMASTER'S  
FINE DINING DEBUT

**BRYAN FURMAN**

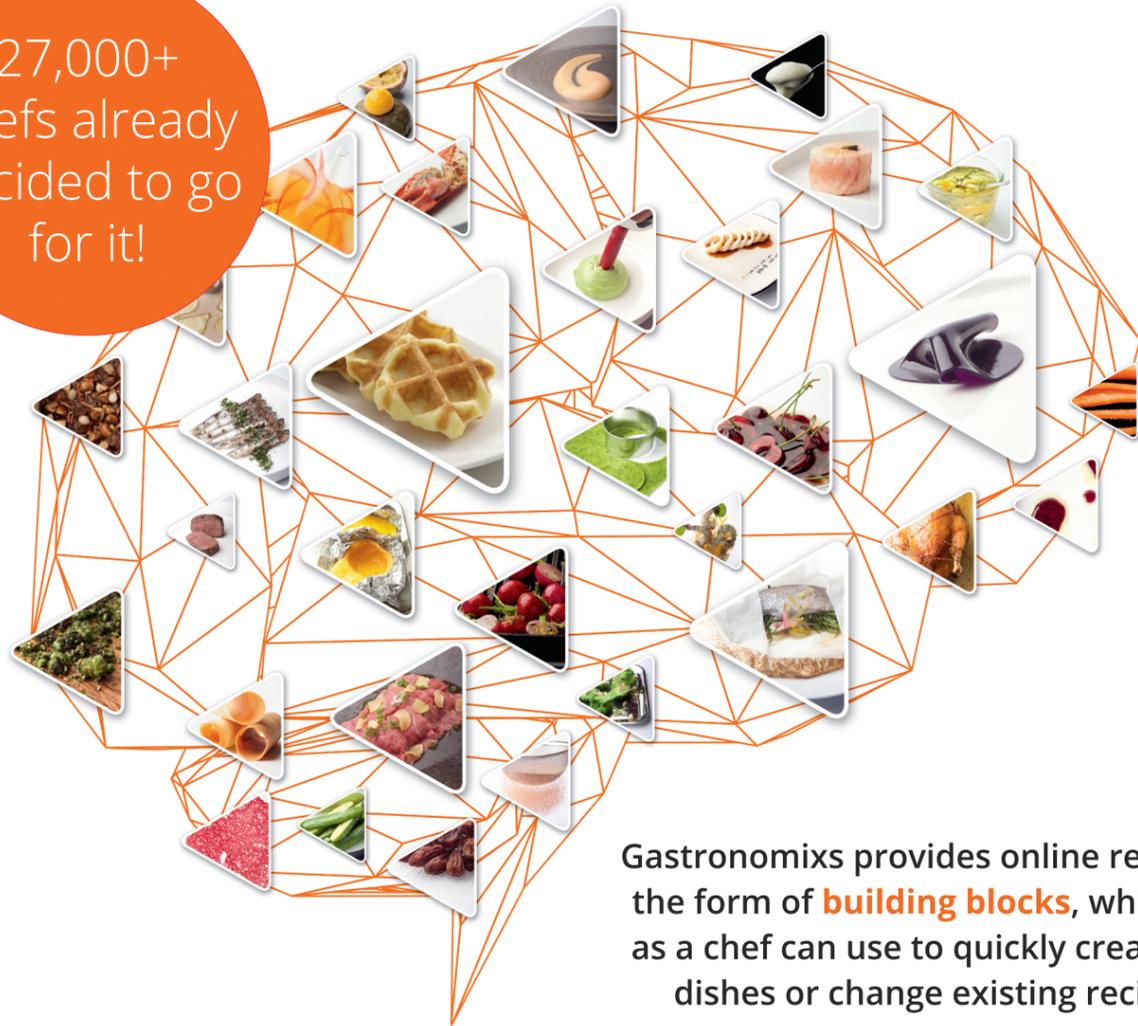
A FASCINATING BALANCE

**GAVIN  
KAYSEN**



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**Chef Publishing Ltd**  
Dormer Road  
Thame  
Oxon  
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**CHEF**  
PUBLISHING

**PUBLISHER**  
Martyn Keen  
[martyn@chefpublishing.com](mailto:martyn@chefpublishing.com)

**EDITOR**  
Ashley Day  
[ashley@chefpublishing.com](mailto:ashley@chefpublishing.com)  
+1 407 765 9610

**WRITERS**  
Lydia Dalby  
Ashley Day  
Andy Doubrava  
Morgan Goldberg  
Orla O'Hagan  
Michael Laiskonis  
AnnMarie Mattila  
Lauren Mowery  
Julie Qui  
Josh Sharkey  
Terri Peterson Smith  
Nicole Schnitzler  
Maki Yazawa

**FINANCE**  
[finance@chefpublishing.com](mailto:finance@chefpublishing.com)

**DESIGNERS**  
[elena@chefpublishing.com](mailto:elena@chefpublishing.com)

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**COVER PHOTO**  
by Erin Kincheloe

## CHOOSE HOSPITALITY

Summer in the service industry has emanated revival. We're on the hopeful side of restaurant relief and advocacy, open calls and new teams, booked reservations and full dining rooms. Outdoor dining is overflowing with a renewed energy in New York City, and there's so much possibility.

New cooks out of culinary school are experiencing Michelin-starred kitchens for the first time, long-standing professionals are resuming the fast pace with talent to develop and summer produce to invigorate, and diners have everything to anticipate. Openings are being met with relentless support, returns are being duly celebrated, and dare I mention pivots have been met with universal openness to change.

In this issue, we get a glimpse at Bryan Furman's Blue Hill at Stone Barns residency, an unprecedented pairing yet enlightening collaboration between the pitmaster and fine dining team. We look back at Gavin Kaysen's modern team management in Minneapolis, only illuminated when the pandemic peaked. And we hear how Anna Bolz stays inspired 10 years in with pastry at Per Se.

There's exploration into dry aging seafood and sourcing small-batch oysters, the case for appreciating America's lesser-known wines, and business wisdom from Rich Melman as his Chicago restaurant group, Lettuce Entertain You, celebrates 20 years.

As our UK flagship launches Choose Hospitality, an initiative showcasing the reasons we all pursued this professional path, we celebrate the same in each of these stories. The food system, flavor, creativity, connection, service, passion and camaraderie that called you.

I choose hospitality because it's always evolving. There's always a story, always more to learn – and taste and experience – and I'm excited to share the surprising and inspiring with you in each issue. Tell us why you #choosehospitality on Instagram @chefandrestaurant and savor this season. We're moving forward from survival mode.

Ashley Day



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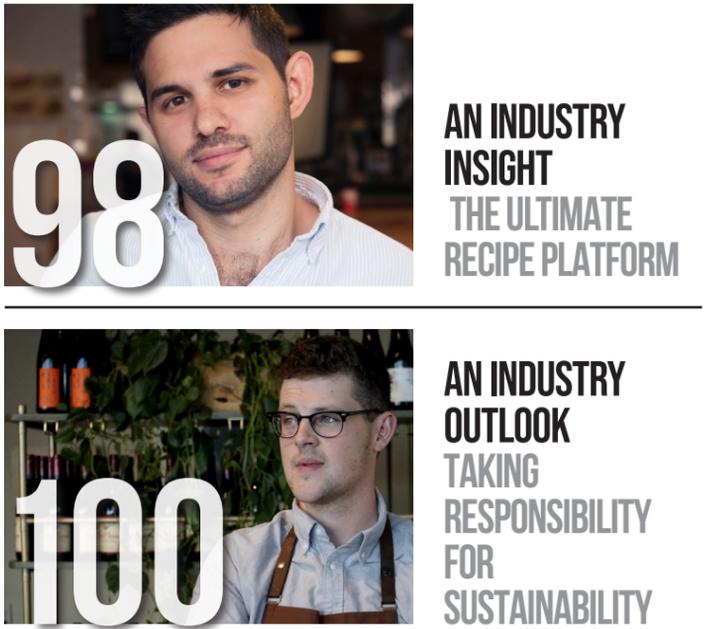
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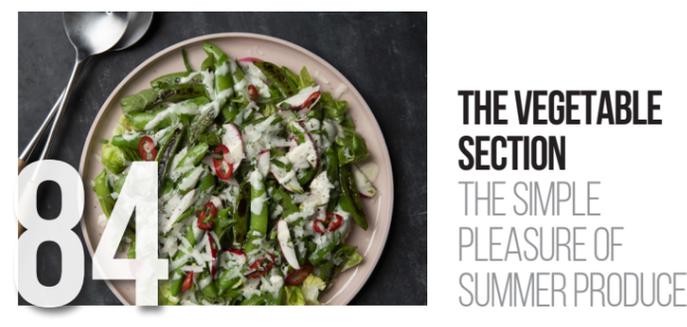
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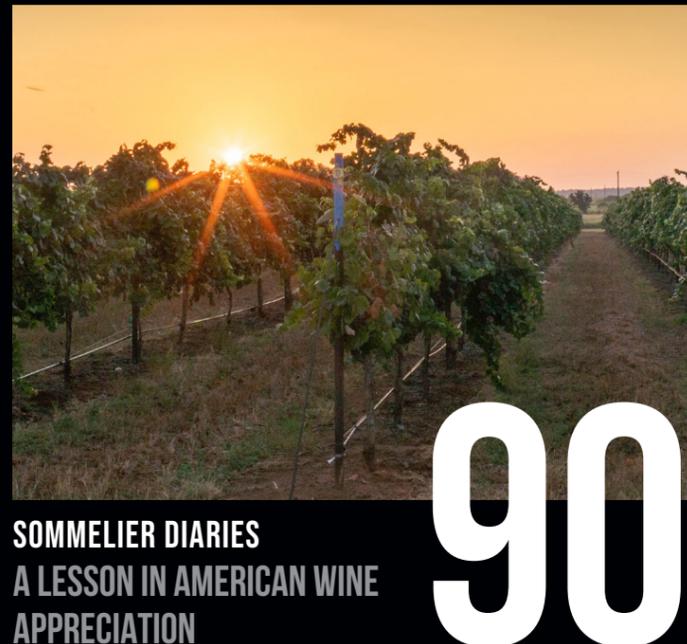
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YOGURT PANNA COTTA STRAWBERRY, BASIL, CELERY BY MICHAEL LAISKONIS

CITRUS OLIVE OIL CAKE WITH DARK CHOCOLATE MOUSSE BY JIM W HUTCHISON

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MINNEAPOLIS CHEF AND RESTAURATEUR GAVIN KAYSEN  
STRIVES TO OPEN CAREER PATHS FOR HIS STAFF AND  
FOSTER A MORE PROFESSIONAL INDUSTRY.

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Diners and fans watch Minneapolis chef Gavin Kaysen in his “GK at Home” online cooking classes and want to join him in the kitchen, virtual sous chefs. He appears casual, a fun-loving smart aleck, as he interacts with his team of stars, such as pastry chef and repeat James Beard Award nominee Diane Moua, as they show viewers how to create a vanilla crepe cake, a signature dessert at his restaurant, Spoon and Stable. They banter over the intricacies of brown butter (warning cooks not to pour it into a plastic container), the importance of sifting, and the challenges of flipping crepes with your fingers. So much fun.

Yet the levity that makes it so enjoyable for the audience to watch and cook with Kaysen belies the gravity with which the New York chef views cuisine and the business. “He’s a very serious chef,” says Chef Daniel Boulud,

for whom Kaysen worked as chef de cuisine at Cafe Boulud. There, he helped the restaurant earn a Michelin star and, at 28, earned for himself the 2008 James Beard Rising Star Award.

#### **BUILDING A CAREER**

Before joining Boulud, Kaysen attended the New England Culinary Institute in Montpelier, Vermont, and then rose through the ranks cooking at places such as Domaine Chandon in Yountville, California; L’Auberge de Lavaux in Lausanne, Switzerland; and L’Escargot in London. “He was a talented chef before he came to me,” Boulud adds. “But he hadn’t had the opportunity to work in a challenging city like New York.”

At Boulud’s side for seven years, Kaysen learned the business aspects of the industry – finance, marketing, guest relations and more – at a new level. Ambitious and a self-described “old soul,”

Kaysen returned to Minneapolis where he grew up cooking with his grandmother, and in 2014, opened his own restaurant, Spoon and Stable (a name derived from his love of collecting spoons and the restaurant’s location in a former stable). The food reflects the chef – classic French technique but casual. Not compelled to be a provocateur to differentiate himself, “Gavin is not a hipster chef,” Boulud says. Think pot roast rather than lobster foam. And with a kitchen open to the dining room, guests may watch their food prepared with symphony-like precision and timing. Raves came quickly for the restaurant – and nationally. In 2015, Food and Wine named Spoon and Stable one of its Restaurants of the Year. The James Beard Awards and Bon Appetit both gave it Best New Restaurant nominations.

By last year, Kaysen’s Soigné Hospitality Group had expanded to include Demi, an





intimate 20-seat eatery with a tasting menu-only experience just around the block from Spoon and Stable and Bellecour, a French restaurant in a Minneapolis suburb that featured the popular Bellecour Bakery inside (before closing this year), among many other partnerships and projects. For example, he collaborated with fellow Minneapolis resident Andrew Zimmern on KZ ProVising, which prepares customized meal plans for the players and coaching staff of the Minnesota Timberwolves, Lynx and Wild sports teams.

### CULTIVATING A PROFESSION

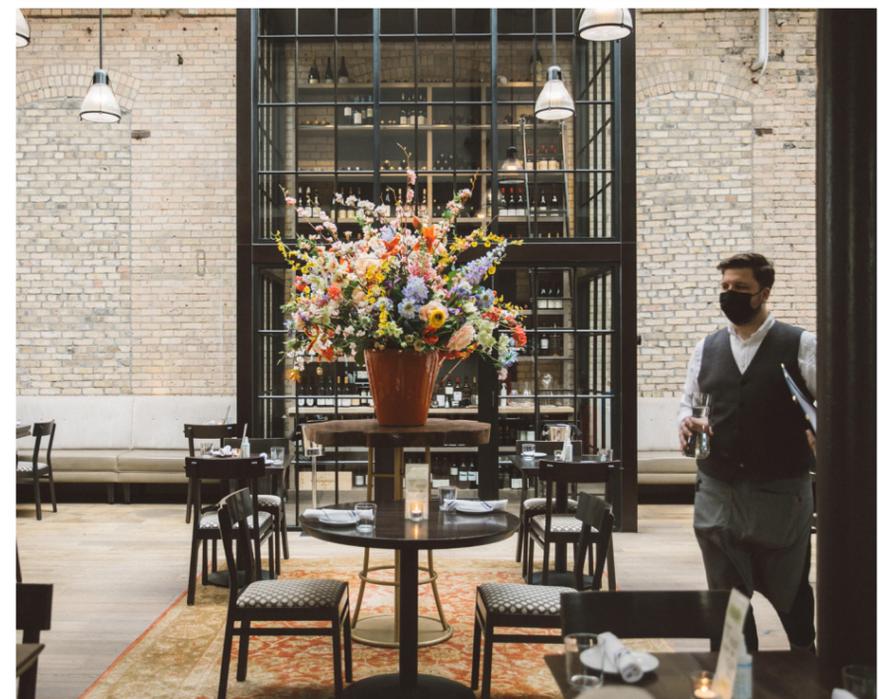
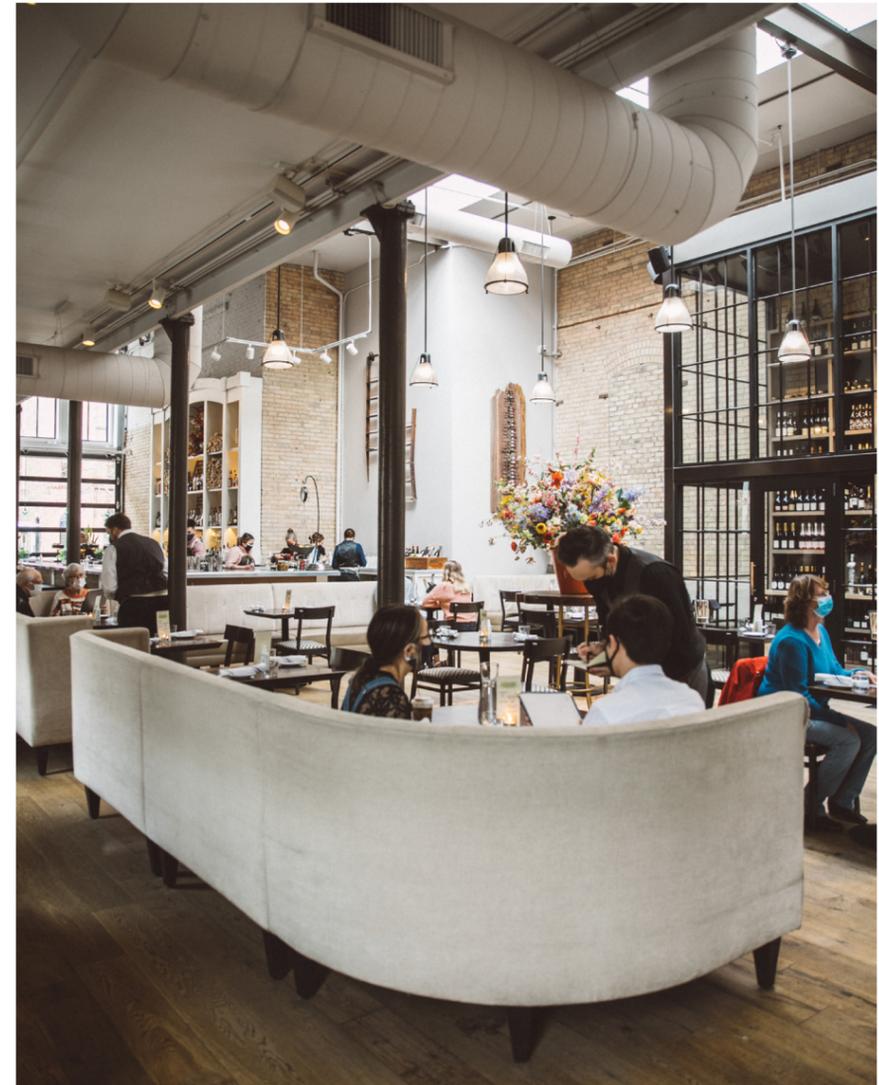
Success in this industry requires what Kaysen calls "a fascinating balance." And balance, he says "means different things to different people. For me, being able to leave work and see my sons' games, having them see me there, fills my soul bucket."

His day begins early, making breakfast for his two boys, ages 9 and 11. Four days a week, once they're off to school, he goes to the gym before work. Then, at work he carefully balances his time between the backstage business side of Soigne and the culinary side that the public experiences. Until mid-afternoon, he works with business staff who handle accounting, development and more. "My name is on the door, like any CEO, but there are so many people in the organization you don't see," he says.

Around 3 p.m. or 4 p.m., he gets on the line to prep at Spoon and Stable, which offers the opportunity to interact with the culinary staff to instruct, coach and inspire. At 6:30 p.m., he heads to Demi for the beginning of the service then trots back to Spoon and Stable around 7:30 p.m., where he eats and works, then returns to Demi and gets home between 10 p.m. and 11:30 p.m.

The key ingredient on both sides of this effort: the staff. Kaysen has long recognized the need to create a more professional restaurant industry. He says that requires a professional pay scale, benefits such as health insurance and a 401K program. It also demands education and a career path that allows upward mobility in the company.

Kaysen recognizes that big-time mentors such as Boulud and Thomas Keller have played a significant role in his career and works to similarly pass on opportunities, network access and connections to a new generation of chefs in his own business and beyond. For example, he created the Synergy Series, which invites top chefs from across the country to visit, cook and educate at Spoon and Stable. The public gets the chance to attend ticketed dinners, which over the years have featured the likes of Grant Achatz,



Sean Brock, Dominique Crenn and many others. A portion of the proceeds go to charity. Each dinner experience varies with the chef, the season and the style, from tasting menus to family-style service. Equally important: Those chefs bring along staff members, from maitre d's to mixologists to present sessions with the Soigne staff, somewhat like an artist-in-residence program.

Kaysen pitches in to educate on a larger stage, too. Thomas Keller and Daniel Boulud selected him to be the head coach of the Bocuse d'Or USA team in 2013 and 2015, and he serves on the board of Ment'or (formerly called the Bocuse d'Or USA Foundation), which offers young chefs grants for continuing educational opportunities around the world. The organization identifies and promotes young chefs through competitions. It also selects and trains the most promising young chefs to represent the USA team at the world's most prestigious culinary competition, Bocuse d'Or in France.



Still, he says advancement requires a commitment from both employer *and* employee. He says no amount of mentoring will make someone successful without certain critical qualities. When hiring employees, he seeks first not culinary skills but kindness. "I look for loyalty, leadership and curiosity. You can't teach curiosity and without it you won't get to the station next to you. But most of all kindness."

#### **VULNERABILITY EXPOSED**

All these efforts crashed to a halt when the pandemic shattered the industry. Minneapolis eateries were particularly hard hit with shutdowns, the George Floyd protests, and a winter climate that made outdoor dining unsavory no matter how tasty the food. "I worried about how to protect the team, their health insurance, the company," Kaysen says.

"Gavin is someone who cares — about his team, his business, family, and the community, all together," Boulud says.



Kaysen took inspiration from Danny Meyer's creation of a relief fund for his employees and five days after the restaurants closed, he and Soine Director of Development Alison Arth created their own foundation, Heart of the House. Kaysen and his wife, Linda, contributed the initial \$10,000 to the fund and the rest came from individuals, a few corporations, past employees and guests. It allowed Soigne employees to apply for grants to keep them going while the restaurants were closed.

"One person said, 'I don't have time to apply for a grant. I need the money right away to feed my children,'" Kaysen says. "We said come right in." The Foundation gave away \$275,000 and is now looking at new ways to carry out its work in the future.

He says the pandemic exposed the fragility of the restaurant business and the jobs it provides to the public. Previously, for guests who dined there, restaurants often looked busy, like they must have been raking in the dough. That

fostered an image of success, especially if one had to book a table far in advance. But guests couldn't see the expenses.

"We've done ourselves a disservice by not making clear to the public all the costs of running a restaurant, the things they never see such as rent, taxes or city pollution fees. We've been afraid to show all of our cards for fear of exposing our vulnerability."

#### RETHINKING EVERYTHING

The adage that "adversity is a terrible thing to waste," surely applied to Kaysen's team when the crisis hit. They took the opportunity to reflect, evaluate their entire business and think about how they could operate differently and better. Fortunately, he says, he could rely on his staff to assess the financial situation and to evaluate the many scenarios before them. "The burden has been on many shoulders," he says.

They decided to permanently close Bellecour restaurant, which he calls a "healthy," proactive



decision." They took the pandemic period as a time to experiment. They offered takeout meals. "You couldn't take out the experience of sitting in our dining room," Kaysen says. So, they featured Italian- and French-themed takeout meals that were entirely different from Spoon and Stable's normal fare so customers could weave memories of travel into dining at home.

The group also sought new revenue streams to provide greater stability for the business, among them the "GK at Home" online interactive cooking classes such as the crepe cake class with Diane Moua. Williams-Sonoma and All-Clad became sponsors. Classes cost \$35 each with a season pass available for customers to watch classes live or on demand. Spoon and Stable ingredients for the class are available for purchase before the session. The

classes grew to as many as 800 viewers at a time with participants from across the country. They'll continue on an even larger scale using the promotion power of Williams-Sonoma.

Kaysen and company also launched a pop-up bakery to offer the baked goods so popular at Bellecour Bakery. The project met such success that they partnered with Cooks of Crocus Hill, a shop and cooking school across the street from Spoon and Stable, to re-grow a permanent Bellecour Bakery at Cooks of Crocus Hill. The collaboration blended Bellecour's expertise, bakers and French pastry with Cooks' space, neighborhood and sense of community, a match made in croissant heaven.

That success has led to a second Bellecour Bakery, this time at Cooks of Crocus Hill's St.

Paul location. And, speaking of career paths and mentorship, the expansion opened new opportunities for the bakery staff. Diane Moua, who has been with the company since Spoon and Stable opened, became pastry chef of Bellecour Bakery at Cooks where she will exclusively focus on developing the Bellecour Bakery concept and new opportunities for its growth.

"His encouragement and empowerment helped me believe in my own abilities in order to elevate myself." In turn, she's fostering the company's mentoring culture for her staff. "I believe in my staff instead of judging them. I want to create an environment where my staff can display their individual skills and grow. I've seen a positive shift in attitude and staff retention."

Alexandra Motz, another long-term Spoon and Stable employee, moved up to assume Moua's position as pastry chef at Spoon and Stable. "It's rewarding to see someone you've mentored grow into their own," Moua says about Motz. "I'm excited for us both in these new roles."

"The pandemic changed our business forever," Kaysen says. Spoon and Stable has re-opened sans tipping. "We've always had a hospitality charge of 21% at Demi," he explains. Now the system applies at Spoon and Stable, along with a new pay scale. That allows a living wage for the entire staff with pay more equitably distributed between the front and the back of the house. While servers may pocket less in tips, he says, they should come out better because a higher hourly wage provides more money that can be contributed to their 401K accounts, where the company matches contributions dollar-for-dollar up to 25%. Previously, only servers' wages of around \$11.25 an hour could go into 401K savings, not tips. "We plan to have a continuing, open-ended conversation on all this," he says.

He can't say much yet, but Kaysen has a major project in the offing. He'll open two eateries — a fine dining restaurant and casual café — in Minneapolis's new Four Seasons hotel in spring 2022.

It's that "fascinating balance" — between elite restaurateur and family man, creativity and people management, the present and the future — that has propelled Kaysen to culinary stardom in the Midwest. **Q**