



View from the Top

Interview with Top Chef's Jamie Lauren

Erin Quinn Robison

All of us at M Magazine are big fans of Bravo TV's hit show *Top Chef*, and we were lucky enough to have a chance to chat with talented Bay Area *Top Chef* Contender and Executive Chef of San Francisco's Absinthe Restaurant, Jamie Lauren. Here she shares with us her thoughts on cooking, eating, and of course, her experience as a *Top Chef*.

M: What was your favorite food as a kid?

JL: Hot dogs from Papaya King in NYC. But, I also really liked eating Indian food when I was really young...so it could be a toss up for me...

M: What's your favorite food now?

JL: Lately I have been crushing big time on Soon Tofu. It's a tofu soup that is popular in Korea. There is a restaurant in Japantown that does a delicious variation of the soup with dumplings and rice cake in it, it makes me so happy.

M: What is your favorite Bay Area restaurant and why?

JL: Probably my favorite overall is the Slanted Door. It is consistently good and I am a sucker for consistency. The food is fresh, seasonal and well prepared and I think the bar is one of the best places in the city to sit and have a casual meal. Plus, I don't think I could live without the Daikon Rice Cakes...they are just ridiculous.

M: What's in your refrigerator?

JL: This is not a lie: Two bottles of hot sauce, pickled okra, pickled green beans, olives, two slices of American cheese, Caesar salad dressing, feta cheese, a bag of baby carrots, a bottle of rose champagne and some unsalted butter.

M: What was the most challenging aspect of being on Top Chef?

JL: Well, I think all of it was challenging, but definitely living together was pretty challenging for sure. I mean, I haven't lived with people like that since I was in college. I'm 31 years old! I mean, I had to ask to go to the bathroom. That part was difficult.

M: What kind of things did you cook while living in the loft?

JL: I actually didn't cook much in the house. I just didn't have the patience for it. I had Top Ramen. I don't have it normally, but we were shooting all these crazy hours by the time we got back to the apartment, I didn't WANT to cook anything. Stefan and Fabio ate a lot of onion sandwiches.



Executive Chef Jamie Lauren

Photos courtesy of Absinthe

M: Moms deal with "Quickfire Challenges" in everyday life. Are there any tips you can give us?

JL: Oh man, I would kill myself! I don't know, I guess I would say keep it simple. That is the best way to deal with a Quickfire...keep it simple. Stick to the basics. Anything too complicated will just get you stressed out.

M: Favorite guest judge?

JL: Martha Stewart was my favorite. I was kinda star-struck by her. She's awesome! We weren't really allowed to spend much time with the judges, so I can't really say I have a favorite because I didn't really talk to them. That's why I chose Martha Stewart because she was the one who walked in and I was like, "Wow! That's Martha Stewart!"

M: What inspired you to become a chef?

JL: I was in college studying journalism and I got a job working at a local restaurant. I started as a cashier and then was moved to the prep dungeon. After that I ended up on the line as a line cook. The woman I was working for saw something in me and suggested I give culinary school a shot, so I listened. Once I started culinary school I knew that this is what I was meant to do...it all fell into place after that. But, I've loved food my whole life, so it's not abnormal that I have ended up as a chef—it seems meant to be.

M: Do you want to talk about scallops since you've been teased about them on the show?

JL: I don't really know what else to say about them (laughing)... yes, I like scallops but they're not the only thing I can cook! At all!



Jamie's winning scallop recipe

Seared Sea Scallops with a Salad of Shaved Fennel, Mint, Oranges and Cerrigola Olives

Prep Time: About 1 Hour
Serves: 5-7

SALAD

INGREDIENTS:

2 heads fennel, shaved thin using a micro plane
20 leaves mint, chiffonade
2 oranges, segmented and chopped
1 orange, juiced
1/2 cup ceriggola olives, sliced thin
1/4 cup lemon oil
salt to taste
fennel fronds, chopped

METHOD:

1. Combine ingredients about 10 minutes before serving.
2. Season with orange juice and lemon oil.
3. Adjust seasoning with salt.

SCALLOPS

INGREDIENTS:

15ea scallops (3 scallops per person)

METHOD:

1. Drain and rinse the scallops thoroughly, then pat them dry with paper towels.
2. Season the scallops with salt and pepper and toss lightly in oil.
3. Sear the scallops until medium rare – medium.
4. Place the scallops in the center of the plate.
5. Top scallops with fennel salad.
6. Drizzle with a little lemon oil and serve.