

Austin Cobb takes over as executive chef at The Strand House in Manhattan Beach

Michael Hixon May 23, 2017 (0)



photo by Michael Hixon



The Strand House's new Executive Chef Austin Cobb was raised in the kitchen and on PBS cooking shows.

"Saturday mornings weren't morning cartoons, it was PBS with Martin Yan and Julia Child and Martha Stewart, 'The Frugal Gourmet,' that was my Saturday morning," said Cobb, whose mother owned a catering company. "I always thought food was kind of magical. My mom and dad never ate out, which was great because I was in the kitchen every night eating dinner with mom and dad. My dad (and grandparents) was a good cook in his own right."

Cobb was recently appointed executive chef at The Strand House and quickly went to work creating a positive and cohesive team built on trust.

"If there's a burning building over there, it's my job to convince the cooks that we're going in it ... they have to be able to trust me," Cobb said. "I wouldn't tell a cook to do something I wouldn't do. I'm not above anything, whether that's cleaning the floor to washing dishes, the nitty-gritty ... I'm happy to peel potatoes, whatever it is."

Cobb, 33, was raised in Palos Verdes. He landed his first professional job just out of Peninsula High School where he worked under the tutelage of the "very passionate" Chef Robert Bell at Chez Melange in Redondo Beach. The hours, 3 to 10 p.m., allowed him to surf every morning.

"It definitely wasn't glamorous. It was a lot of grit, a lot of savage guys back there, tattoos ... intense personalities ... as a young man that was really attractive," Cobb said.

Cobb said Bell was a father figure. Bell encouraged him, telling the young cook that he was "past culinary school," to move to Avellino, Italy where he pursued his passion for pasta at the Michelin-starred restaurant Maremma. When Cobb arrived in Italy, he said he begged and pleaded for a job. He was stuck in a flat with the rest of the cooks, but the experience was valuable to his "techniques and discipline."

"I realized America is like the minor league farm system and over in Europe, it's like the major leagues," he said. "They take it more serious, they live, breath it,"

Cobb came back to the states in 2006 and was hired as Will and Jada Pinkett Smith's personal chef. He said working for them was a great experience, but more work than he anticipated. He was responsible for everything from shopping to washing dishes.

"It's a compound, there's Mr. and Mrs. Smith, they have two kids; he had a kid from his previous marriage," Cobb said. "They have a niece living there, a nephew living there, they have their assistants who live on site ... assistants have their own kids. There's security, housekeepers, housekeeper's kids. Lunch would be like 40 to 50 people ... there would be four different menus a day."

After spending more than a year cooking for the Smiths, Cobb joined Top Chef Master Neal Fraser at Grace restaurant where he spent nine years. In 2011, Cobb helped Fraser open The Strand House. Fraser moved on and opened Redbird in downtown Los Angeles and Cobb followed. But Cobb jumped at the chance to come back to The Strand House when the executive chef position opened following the promotion of Greg Hozinsky to chef partner, overseeing all of the Zislis Group's restaurants.

Cobb is an avid surfer, potter and baseball player. He currently is the manager, pitcher and outfielder for a men's league team in Long Beach. Cobb said he approaches being the executive chef in a similar way as manager of the baseball team.



"Chef means chief, it means you're in charge," Cobb said. "A great cook doesn't mean you're a great chef, you have to be a great leader ... I'm only as good as my cooks. It really comes down to my managerial skills and motivation skills."

The Strand House is located at 117 Manhattan Beach Blvd. in Manhattan Beach.

For more information, visit thestrandhousemb.com.