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Colorado's leading lifestyle magazine

THE
CHEFS
ISSUE

OTHER
INGREDIENTS

Meet the families, friends, and communities
behind Colorado's most-loved restaurants.

FRESH START

Chef Quincy Cherrett
introduces Madeline,
a refined restaurant
rooted in family
and hospitality.

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ON THE COVER: Chef Quincy Cherrett of Madeline. Photography by Joni Schrantz **feature**



44 BEYOND THE PLATE

How family shapes Colorado's restaurant culture.

HOMEGROWN Wildflower's garden rhubarb dish starts in chef Aiden Tibbetts' family garden, pg. 46.

A photograph of a kitchen interior. At the top, several large, dark, round pans hang from a rack. Below them, a small, shallow, fluted metal bowl sits on a dark surface. In the foreground, there are stacks of white plates and a clear plastic container filled with dark, possibly dried, ingredients. The lighting is warm and focused, creating a sense of depth and texture.

BEYOND THE PLATE

BEHIND SOME OF DENVER'S MOST-LOVED CHEFS ARE THE FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES
DOING THE WORK THAT MAKES THEIR RESTAURANTS POSSIBLE.

BY NICKOLAUS HINES | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JONI SCHRANTZ



Stories about restaurants tend to start and end with the chef. They get the credit for the glowing reviews, the awards, the rankings—and carry the weight of every bad night, every empty table, every scathing comment. It's instinctive to want to know the mind behind your favorite dishes, to learn the names, to follow the next move. But a restaurant is rarely one person's creation. It's almost always a collective effort, built by family, or the kind of people who become it.

Behind each of these chefs is a web of people doing the work that doesn't make the reservation page. In a terraced backyard in Aurora, a woman grows the produce that shapes her son's menus, a habit that goes back to his childhood when she'd send him to pick the night's dinner. Years of one chef's recipe development end in a clay bowl thrown by his son, the latest chapter in a family restaurant group 25 years deep. A husband and wife find refuge in a small town, build community and national recognition there, then bring that back to Denver. And in the old Fruition space, a family came together to open something new and put a one-year-old's name above the door.

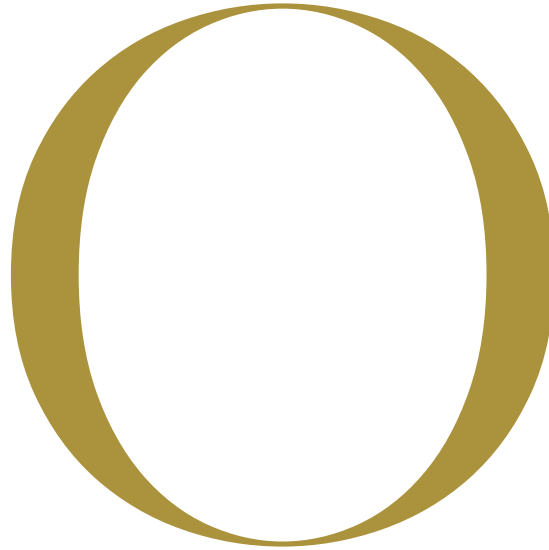
These four chefs are names you might already know. What you may not know is who showed up before the doors opened.



“WHAT I CAN GIVE HIM FRESH IS
WHAT HE USES, AND IF HE NEEDS
TO CHANGE A MENU ITEM, WE DO
THAT INSTEAD.” —Tracey Tibbetts

FAMILY HARVEST Three generations gather
in the garden that helps shape Wildflower's
seasonal menus. Chef Aiden is pictured
with his wife, Daina, and their son, Camden,
behind his parents, Tracey and Blake.





MOTHER TONGUE

At Wildflower in LoHi, chef Aiden Tibbetts cooks from his mother's backyard. The story started twenty years before he stepped into the kitchen.



On a rainy day in southeast Aurora, chef Aiden Tibbetts and his mom, Tracey, walked through the garden at her home, holding matching umbrellas as they checked on the season's progress. Seeds were in the ground, sprouts pushed through in the greenhouse, and an additional 1,000 square feet of garden beds waited for warmer soil and the next round of planting.

Tracey and her husband, Blake, built the original beds themselves, stone by stone. The garden was meant for the family table, but in 2022 it took on a new purpose for their son, the executive chef at the plant-forward restaurant Wildflower inside LoHi's Gravity Haus Denver hotel. Over the years, he's woven more and more of his family's produce into his menus, taking the idea of "home-grown" far more literally than most restaurants can claim. As Aiden's career has taken off, culminating in The MICHELIN Guide Colorado's 2025 Young Chef Award, an increasing share of the harvest has found its way into his kitchen under the business name T2 Garden. What was once a hobby, Tracey says, "has new importance."

In many ways, the garden's current role feels like a natural progression. Growing up, Aiden and his brother were homeschooled, and gardening was a constant wherever the family lived. There was a small garden in Washington, a larger one in Kansas, and eventually gardens at each home they occupied in Colorado. "I had to feed two young men, and they ate a lot," Tracey explains. "We didn't have a lot of money. I would ask Aiden and his brother to go out into the garden and pick whatever's ripe, and we'd make a meal out of it." For Aiden, those afternoons in the garden became the foundation of a cooking philosophy rooted in seasonality and a deep respect for ingredients.

→

WILDFLOWER



FRESH PICK Wildflower's garden rhubarb transforms Tracey's freshly harvested rhubarb into a savory celebration of the season's first stalks.



WHAT'S GROWING THIS SEASON



HERBS

- Basil
- Chives
- Thyme
- Cuban oregano

EDIBLE FLOWERS & BLOSSOMS

- Violas
- Marigolds
- Dahlias
- Nasturtiums
- Lilac blossoms
- Apple blossoms
- Crab apple blossoms
- Pear blossoms

PRODUCE

- Heirloom tomatoes
- Cucumbers
- Squash
- Eggplant
- Melons
- Carrots
- Asparagus

ILLUSTRATION BY ISTOCK.COM\ DARIA USTIUGOVA

Aiden trained as a chef in Colorado, on both coasts, and in France, where he developed an appreciation for letting exceptional produce take center stage. Vegetables and sauces often carry as much weight on his plates as the protein itself, a style of cooking that depends on sourcing the best ingredients possible.

That philosophy unexpectedly brought him back to his mother's garden. In 2022, drought and heat waves across California devastated the flower fields Wildflower relied on for edible blooms. Aiden asked Tracey if she had any marigolds. She did. He came back for more the next week and remembers thinking, "I really should pay you for this."

They filed the paperwork to turn T2 Garden into a raw-product supplier and began expanding the garden into something that could scale up from the small amount of flowers and herbs that started it all. Today, during peak season, Aiden picks up two coolers of flowers and produce most Sunday mornings, when nearly every dish

at Wildflower carries something grown at the family home.

Not only do the original seven terraced plots, along with the new beds added this season, shape the menu at Wildflower, the menu shapes the garden. Each winter, Aiden and Tracey pore over the pages of the Baker Creek seed catalog together, deciding what might earn a place in both the soil and on the plate. "I buy more seeds than he wants me to," Tracey says with a laugh, mentioning a variety of heirloom black pumpkins. "Sometimes I pick something, and he loves it, and we run with it."



That collaboration often requires some creative thinking, especially during Colorado's short and unpredictable growing season. One year, Aiden asked Tracey to grow cardoon, a thistle related to artichokes, for his take on Italian fritto misto. Aiden experimented with it in the kitchen, chasing the right texture and flavor, but nothing quite worked. "That went to hell," he jokes, "but the rest of it was used for a house-made amaro starting with fresh cardoon."

Failures rarely stay failures for long. The garden gives Wildflower room to take risks with ingredients that might otherwise be too costly or too risky to justify. The result is a more inventive menu, one that doesn't price out all but special occasion diners.

Even with T2 Garden's recent expansion, the operation remains intentionally small, scaled to what the family can manage themselves. The added beds allow Aiden to bring more of his mom's produce into the restaurant while still leaving plenty for the table at home.

"It's not profitable, and it's not easy," Aiden says. "But it's the right thing that I want to be cooking. That's why we're doing it."



UGLY DELICIOUS

It's about nutrition and the food system as much as flavor. Tracey grows heirloom tomatoes, the kind with blemishes, delicate skins, and a depth of flavor that would never survive two weeks on a truck. For years, she's used them to teach her sons a simple lesson about food. "A tomato from mom's garden does not taste like the tomato from the store," Aiden adds. Long before he became a chef, he understood that ingredients grown for flavor often look very different from those grown for shelf life.

T2 TOMATO VARIETIES

- Green Zebra
- Mr. Striped
- Indigo Blue Chocolate
- Queen of the Night
- Napa Chardonnay Blush
- Pink Fang
- Blue Cream Berries
- Sart Roloise
- Riesentraube
- California Tulip
- Prairie Fire
- Apricot Zebra
- Ananas Noir
- Orange Accordion
- Berkeley Tie-Dye Green
- Chocolate Pear
- Cherokee Purple
- Yellow Pear



NATIVE CLAY

The Bonanno family built Denver's dining scene. Their son found his place at the pottery wheel.



Wearing a loose black shirt, sitting in front of a wall of wine at Mizuna, Luca Bonanno holds up a small bowl he made—smooth-walled, the seafoam-green glaze thick at the rim and thinning to a band of speckles before it gives way to tan clay. The extra coats, he says, are part of why his pieces hold up to the wear of a working restaurant. His next challenge is bigger: 30-plus ramen bowls for his father's new restaurant, Rōmyō, opening later this year in Larimer Square.

"Making bowls is easy," he notes, "making 30 that look close to each other? That's the biggest hurdle I'm trying to get over."

His mom and dad, Jacqueline and Frank Bonanno, are two of the biggest names in Denver's culinary scene. Their Bonanno Concepts group started 25 years ago with Mizuna, a Capitol Hill eatery built on French cooking, and has grown to include Vesper Lounge, Salita, and two spots named for their sons, Luca and Osteria Marco. They've been widely featured on TV and in the national food press, helped shape Denver's dining resurgence, and have served people like Anthony Bourdain, Michelle Obama, and U2. Rōmyō is the group's newest addition, set in downtown's historic Miller Building, with Luca's pottery as some of the primary serveware.



FAMILY FLAVOR Above: Chicken katsu piccata with bonito beurre blanc and charred lemon. Jacqueline, Frank and Luca on the right.



“I WANT TO KEEP AUTHENTICITY, BUT IT’S ALWAYS
GOING TO BE MY SPIN ON IT.” —Chef Frank Bonanno





AT THE WHEEL

You can already eat off Luca's pottery without waiting for Rōmyō. His bowls hold the chawanmushi at Mizuna, and the cups in the restaurant's sorbet flight are his, too. The ramen bowls he's throwing will debut this summer.



SAY IT RIGHT Rōmyō is a portmanteau of Rome and Tokyo—and yes, it’s pronounced “Romeo.” The mash-up suits the menu, where a dumpling gets treated as a cousin of the ravioli and a sushi roll might be built around Roman fried artichokes.



BOLD BITES Left: Japanese pancake smothered with Nutella, raspberries, and chantilly. Right: Caprese maki with heirloom tomato, house-stretched mozzarella, fresh basil, and sweet soy.

Frank is quick to contextualize Rōmyō’s concept. “I’m not Japanese,” he explains, so “I’m not going to come in and do the best sushi. It’s my interpretation of that cuisine, married with another.” When we spoke, the menu was still being finalized. He’d already spent months in development with cooks from Mizuna and Luca, working through dishes like tagliarini in sea urchin butter and truffle, a sushi roll built around fried baby artichokes with lemon aioli, and a buckwheat malfaldini built to mimic soba noodles. The day after we spoke, he, Jacqueline, and Luca left for a month of travel across Japan with stops in Osaka, Kyoto, Tokyo, and Hiroshima, gathering the inspiration that would finalize both the menu and the space.

The idea didn’t come out of nowhere. For five years, Frank has run a dinner series out of Luca he calls “play dates,” pairing Italian cooking with cuisines from Japan, Spain, Morocco, Germany, and elsewhere. He extended the experiment at Dumplin’, a 26-seat spot on West 32nd Avenue that recently closed. It was a proof of concept that Denver diners would be interested in this form of Italian-Japanese fusion. It worked, but “we always knew we wanted to do something bigger,”

he explains. Luca worked the floor there and at Mizuna, and his bowls were already in rotation, holding chawanmushi, a savory Japanese steamed egg custard, during popups. Frank thinks the dishware will be a signature at Rōmyō, and that feels right: a father’s restaurant, the son’s hands.

Luca, 24, came to pottery through a class at the University of Wyoming, and continued courses at CU Boulder, where he graduated in 2025. Over time, he switched his focus from 2D art to ceramics. It’s a corner of the creative world that’s entirely his own within his family. Frank can correct a line cook on a steak and knows what he likes in his serveware, but the ins and outs of pottery are Luca’s domain. That distance has produced some happy accidents. When Frank asked for cups for an intermezzo course, Luca brought back cups that were too tall. “It didn’t fit what my intended use was,” Frank says, “but I could see a vision for using them.” They ended up in the sorbet flight.

Luca has another advantage most potters don’t: he’s seen his own pieces in service, watched servers stack and clear them, and hasn’t seen a chip yet. That firsthand insight shapes every design decision. “He’s getting experience in the back of the house,” Frank says. “A lot of potters don’t get that.”

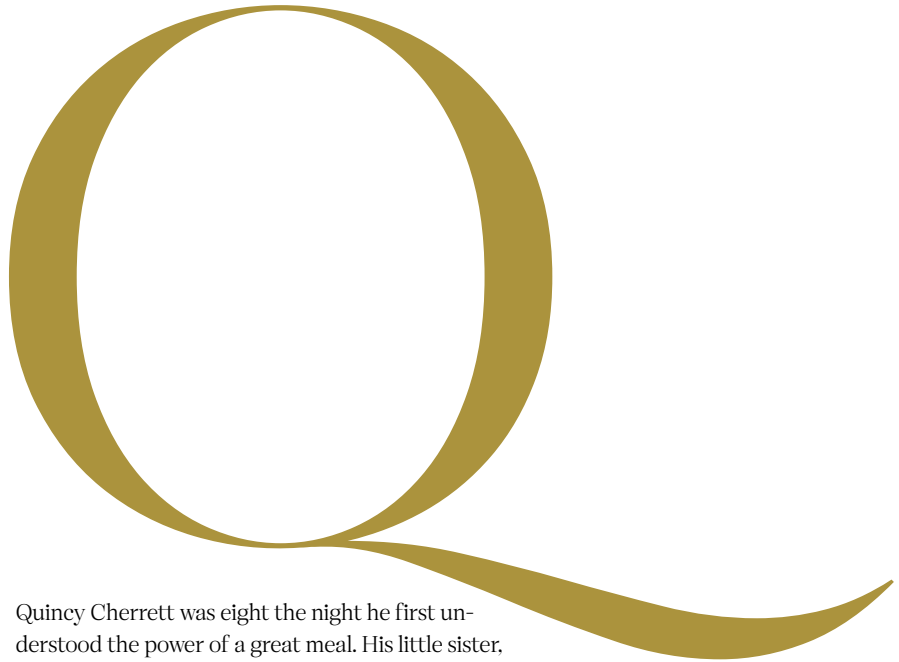
It’s a long way from a conventional path into the restaurant industry, and Frank knows that. “You’d never want your kids to go into this business,” he says. “But they grew up in it.” When Rōmyō opens, Luca’s ramen bowls will hit the tables his father built a career around. “I’m not in his realm,” Frank says of the pottery, “so I think it’s a good partnership.” The vision, he adds, will always be Luca’s.

 **RÖMYŌ** | 1401 Larimer St. | romyodenver.com

“HOSPITALITY AND FOOD ARE WOVEN INTO THE
FABRIC OF OUR FAMILY.” —Maureen Scott

A family portrait of chef Quincy and his family in a restaurant setting. Quincy is seated in the foreground, wearing a blue apron over a light blue shirt and red pants. He is looking up and to the right. Behind him stand his parents, Paul and Colleen, and his sister, Maureen. Maureen is holding a baby, Madeline. The background shows a restaurant interior with wooden furniture and warm lighting.

FULL HOUSE Madeline was a family effort from the beginning. Pictured are chef Quincy with his parents, Paul and Colleen, his sister, Maureen, and the restaurant's namesake, baby Madeline.



FAMILY STYLE

Chef Quincy Cherrett named his first restaurant after his infant niece—then his sister, his father, and his mother helped him build it.

Quincy Cherrett was eight the night he first understood the power of a great meal. His little sister, Maureen, was in a nice dress, Quincy in a suit, and the two were sitting across from their dad, Paul, who was general manager at the Four Seasons in Austin. Also at the table was a food writer for *The New York Times*, and every bite he tasted, Quincy did too.

“I fell in love with this beautiful, chaotic ballet,” he says—the yelling, the knives, the fire, the certainty that nothing could come together, and then every picture-perfect plate landing at once.

Twenty-some years later, the kid tasting plates alongside a critic now sends them out. In May, Quincy opened Madeline, a fusion of all of Quincy’s food influences inside the former Fruition space on Sixth Avenue. It was a family affair from the start. His mother, Colleen, holds everything together behind the scenes and serves as the resident florist, delivering fresh flowers every week. Paul took an advisory role, “I would be lying if I didn’t say I was wringing my hands sometimes,” he says. “In the beginning, I wanted to step in and give him the answer or try to make something happen for them, but that wasn’t my role.” Maureen first handled the marketing, later taking on the project manager role for the opening—her real job, however, is a therapist. And Maureen’s daughter, just months old at the time, contributed the most lasting thing: her name on the door.

“The perspectives that my dad, my brother, and I brought created this, I wouldn’t say perfect, but nice mix of talents,” Maureen says. “We got to see how we all pieced together to build this family restaurant.”

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BAR NOTES

One of the cocktails that best represents Madeline is named after tanuki, the Japanese raccoon dog, says general manager Bryan Trott. Statues of the tanuki sit outside restaurants across Japan to bring the business good fortune, and Bryan's version in drink form—Nikka Coffey gin, Lillet Blanc, Licor 43, yuzu, and basil—is the menu's most popular cocktail. The blend of Japanese, French, and Spanish ingredients embody Madeline's ethos of using worldly flavors and classic techniques to create something new, yet familiar. Another standout example is the Silk Road, which pairs bourbon with pandan simple syrup and Chartreuse Vegetable bitters.

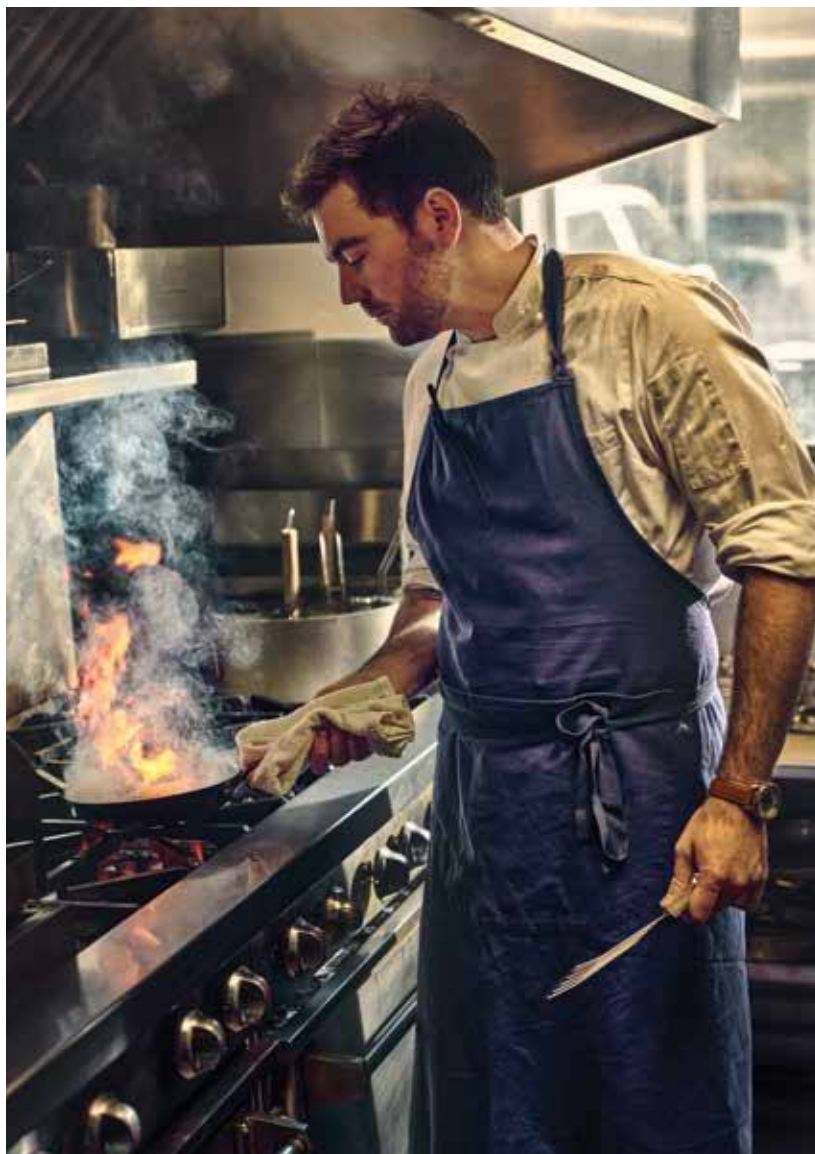
The wine list also shows the world. Trott stocks small, low-intervention producers alongside legendary Burgundy estates—a \$70 dry Riesling that stands up to the halibut, or a Grand Cru for a special occasion. "We have bottles for wine nerds and collectors, as well as approachable wines featuring familiar grape varietals that punch well above their weight class," he says. Madeline is a place for everyone, and the wine list reflects that from top to bottom."

But anyone who has worked alongside family members knows it isn't always seamless. "My love language is clear expectations and direct communication," Maureen jokes. But when Quincy told her the restaurant would be named Madeline, words weren't necessary. She cried. Quincy named a previous concept *Eloise*, a nod to Maureen's favorite childhood book about a six-year-old girl who lived in a fancy hotel, which, given how much of their childhood was spent in exactly that, doesn't seem like much of a coincidence. Quincy and Maureen grew up moving frequently for their father's career, sometimes living in the hotels themselves during the transition. In every new city, the one constant was each other.

That life left a mark on Quincy in ways Paul didn't anticipate. And though it was a childhood that pointed straight to hospitality, his dad wasn't a fan. When Quincy, just a teenager at the time, got accepted into the Culinary Institute of America, he wrote a letter making his case. "I had to step aside and let him follow his passion," Paul says.

He made his way through some of Denver's most formative kitchens—chef de cuisine at Death & Co., executive chef at Izakaya Den, chef de cuisine and head butcher at Colt & Gray. One of the most influential stops came early, at Teton Thai in Jackson Hole, where he absorbed Thai cooking styles both in the kitchen and on a trip through the country. The people he worked with there, he'll tell you, are still family.

All of that shows up on the plate. The menu at Madeline changes seasonally, blending his travels and training with family favorites. Sticky toffee pudding is Maureen's, tom yum toast a nod to those early days in



Jackson Hole. He swaps in at least one pasta a season and leans on Colorado produce when it's in its peak. The space itself carries its own history: Fruition occupied the same address for 18 years and helped define Denver's farm-to-table movement.

The restaurant's namesake is just past one. Madeline had pad Thai at six months and foie gras butter on her first Thanksgiving turkey, which puts her slightly ahead of her uncle, who was eating escargot before five. The name on the door, Maureen figures, gives her a stake in all of it. Her husband already jokes about the girl's first job: the dish pit.



MADLINE

1313 E. 6th Ave. | restaurantmadeline.com

THE FAMILY ORDER

In the Cherrett house, there was no kids' menu. Quincy and Maureen ordered off the regular list wherever the family ate, free to try anything without pressure—and if a dish didn't land, they could fall back on chicken fingers. When one of them hesitated, Paul had a standing answer: "If it wasn't good, it wouldn't be on the menu."



ON THE MENU From tom yum toast to halibut and sticky toffee pudding, the menu balances global inspiration with seasonal Colorado ingredients.



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THE LONG WAY BACK

Chef Theo Adley built a destination restaurant in a town of 2,000-some. Now he's bringing that same logic to Denver.



Sometime around 2013, chef Theo Adley and his wife Jaclyn had a mantra. They'd say it to each other half-joking, usually when the restaurant industry was wearing them down: all they needed was a cute little restaurant in the middle of the woods, where people would just leave it alone.

It wasn't just talk. Theo had spent two decades in Colorado kitchens, including Flagstaff House and Aspen's The Little Nell, and when COVID shifted him into private chef work, he and Jaclyn started looking for a space of their own. The criteria were clear: an economic structure that could actually work, and a town where a restaurant would matter and not "disappear into the fray." Boulder priced them out. Denver wasn't surfacing much. Then Jaclyn pulled up a Zillow listing for a Lyons property that had been live for a couple of days. They drove up the next morning, looked at the space, and that was it.

Marigold opened in July 2022 on Main Street in the tiny town of Lyons, with about 40 seats and a cook team that has stayed largely intact since day one. Two James Beard semifinalist nods for Best Chef: Mountain followed, in 2024 and 2026.

Many of Marigold's guests drive in from Denver, an hour-plus each way, often for an anniversary or birthday. The rest live close enough to walk home. Lyons regulars post up at the bar with a plate of pasta and a glass or two of wine, then head out. Theo calls Marigold "a destination-worthy neighborhood restaurant," and the two audiences keep him honest. The Denver crowd, he notes, is the tougher one. "An



A photograph of a woman and a chef sitting at a restaurant table. The woman, on the left, has long brown hair and wears glasses and a blue patterned top. The chef, on the right, has a beard and wears a white chef's hat and a white short-sleeved shirt. They are both smiling at the camera. The table in front of them is set with white plates, folded white napkins, and glasses of water. There are also small amber-colored candles on the table. In the background, there is a window with white curtains, a wall-mounted light fixture, and a framed abstract painting. The overall atmosphere is warm and inviting.

“I’M TRYING TO CREATE
AN ENJOYABLE AND
SUSTAINABLE MODEL.
IT JUST SO HAPPENS TO
BE WITH REALLY DELI-
CIOUS FOOD AND GREAT
PEOPLE.” —Chef Theo Adley

TWO WAYS TO DO HERETIK

The menu is built to be taken at any speed. You can stop in for a gin and tonic and a half-dozen oysters and be out the door, or stack courses across the raw bar and rotisserie and open a bottle that runs anywhere from \$40 to \$350.



hour and a half is a hell of a long time to talk smack on the drive home and fly off a half-dozen negative Yelp reviews.”

That reputation built, he brought the same logic back to the city he'd left behind. Heretik opened in May in RiNo, in a space Theo took over from Johnny Curiel, one of Denver's most celebrated chefs. He wrote the menu almost immediately. “This is a restaurant that I've had in my heart for a very long time,” he says. A handful of tables, a six-seat bar wrapping a small open kitchen, oysters on ice, a raw bar, and a rotisserie spinning poultry. The menu's reference points are northeast Spain and southern France, particularly the Basque coast.



MARIGOLD

405 Main St. B, Lyons
marigoldlyons.com

HERETIK

1441 26th St.
maisonheretik.com

Theo calls it “a seafood restaurant hiding as a chicken rotisserie spot.” The core of the menu, he says, comes down to three things: a dozen oysters, a green salad, and a rotisserie chicken with French fries, adding “that's my deathbed meal, if I had to choose.”

Like Marigold, Heretik is built to last, not to trend. “These restaurants are supposed to be around for a really long time,” Theo says. He's not interested in being the hot new thing, just the reliable old one.

“I'm 43 years old. I have two beautiful daughters at home. I have a lovely wife. I really love restaurants, and I'm blessed to be able to do this for a living.” The cute little restaurant in the middle of the woods, it turns out, was never really about the woods. **OLW**