

{ from the **kitchen** }

## CACHE CACHE, TWICE AS NICE

*Chef Chris Lanter transforms local foods into an Aspen culinary art form*

By Paul Andersen • Photographs by Karen Glenn

Cache Cache is located at 205 S. Mill St. in the highest concentration of restaurants in Aspen, an open-air courtyard blooming with umbrellas that takes up half a city block. The name is a French derivation for "hide and seek," but connoisseurs have no trouble finding Cache Cache. Its reputation is magnetic, attracting a stimulating blend of locals, celebrities and discriminating visitors who give Cache Cache a lively buzz and a long wait list on busy nights.

The interior defines clean modernity with sharp lines and pleasant colors, the visual equivalent to the soft jazz background music that floods the space. An eye-catching wall of wine emanates an ice blue light and highlights the elevated viticulture for which Cache Cache is renowned, thanks to French-born Sommelier Alex Harvier, who stocks over 5,000 bottles of inventory, valued at \$300,000, for a wine list of over 100 pages and 1,000 labels.

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The wine stock is impressive because it serves as an appropriate complement to the alchemy performed in the kitchen, a domain ruled with benevolent mastery by Chef Chris Lanter. This gregarious bear of a man exudes total confidence as he commands a compact cooking space that's all hustle-bustle as Cache Cache produces up to 400 dinners a night, each of them tailored to Lanter's French-trained palate.

"Consistency" is the byword for discerning Cache Cache patrons who have come to expect nothing less than a superb dining experience. Random interviews of patrons on a busy Saturday night in mid-summer elicited frank and simple praise that belies the complexities of marrying food and drink with style, grace and taste.

One man, who introduced himself as a partner in the Roaring Fork Club, said with authority, "The core of the restaurant is consistency in food, menu, wait staff and ownership. That's what attracts people here."

"This is a unique culture," stated another. "It comes from consistency

in food and service. That's what Cache Cache is all about."

A woman savoring a dish of rainbow trout said she prefers the bar "because the food is less expensive, and the crowd is local, hip and sophisticated. It's fun to be here."

For Chef Lanter, it all starts in the storage lockers in the basement of the bank building across the street. He rummages through boxes in a walk-in cooler and displays colorful heirloom tomatoes, stubby organic carrots, dark green beans, yellow squash, and Tuscan zucchinis.

"All this comes from Palisade and Paonia," Lanter explains of the Colorado-grown produce he buys from small farmers of the rural Western Slope. Their goods cost more, but Lanter values their flavor and freshness and how they dress a plate in concert with other dishes. "Going local is what it's all about," he smiles. "It's the future of food, and it's really cool to know these growers personally. We don't always have all the choices people ask for, but it's all fresh and it's all local."

Chef de Cuisine Nathan King, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, goes one step further. On his hikes in the mountains around Aspen, he sometimes returns with bags full of fungal treasures, which he incorporates into special, non-menu dishes like fresh porcini farfalla. Sampling these savory morsels, one can almost smell the mossy fragrance of a deep spruce-fir forest.

A refreshing salad incorporating heirloom tomatoes and farro, spiced with organic arugula, red onion, chives and curry, is invigorating and has roots in Paonia, about 100 miles from Aspen. Local rabbit ravioli and Colorado rack of lamb are also indigenous to the state and reflect Lanter's commitment to the locavore movement.

When asked why, he shrugs and smiles, implying there is no other sane choice than staying local: "This is me. This is what I'm about. This is what I do." When a dish comes out of his thrumming, redolent kitchen, it carries the highest ideal in food preparation, reflecting Lanter's values and his palate, which was honed over several years' immersion in French cooking at Auvergne in the South of France, on the Île de Groix in Brittany and in Paris at Chez Toutoune, where he worked 90-hour weeks as an unpaid assistant doing stages.

A native of Atlanta, he returned to his hometown during the 1996 Olympics to work in several prominent restaurants before moving to Aspen in 1998, where a friend helped him land a job





Executive Chef Chris Lanter in the kitchen with local fruits and vegetables, most from Rendezvous Farm.







Clockwise from left: Chef Lanter holding a dish of local rabbit ravioli with fresh peas and favas. Co-owner Jodi Larner, with Sommelier Alex Harvier. Simple elegance. Chef de Cuisine Nathan King.

making pastries at the Ritz-Carlton. When the Ritz closed a year later, Lanter opened Campo de Fiori in Vail, where he met his future wife. Today they live in Snowmass with their two children, 9 and 8. Lanter is an avid skier and mountain biker who equates fitness with personal health. He pursues an aerobically active lifestyle that is both "addictive and fun."

He brings this vital physical energy to Cache Cache, adding to the magic of a unique blend of personalities in staff and management. The resulting chemistry charges the air with the pleasure of excellence, which bonds a cohesive team motivated by shared pride and dependable employment. Regular patrons feel the vibe in the unabashed desire to please, and they reciprocate with loyalty.

Cache Cache is co-owned by Chris Lanter, who became executive chef in 2000, and Jodi Larner, who has been a partner in the business

since 1989, two years after its doors opened in October 1987. While Lanter lords over the kitchen, Larner cultivates patrons who are faithful to Cache Cache and ultimately underwrite its success. Assiduous managerial oversight marshals the choreographed kitchen team and the highly attuned wait staff into a combination that makes food and wine presentation an art form. The culmination provides not only consistency, but a flavor that is particularly Aspen. ●

#### GO FIND IT!

*Cache Cache*  
205 S. Mill St., Aspen  
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## Alaskan Halibut

- 4 (6 ounce) pieces of cleaned Alaskan halibut filet
  - Salt and black pepper
  - 3 cups mixed mushrooms (we like maitakes and shiitakes but one could use any variety)
  - 4 tablespoons white or yellow sweet onion, thinly sliced
  - 6 tablespoons local Olathe sweet corn, off cob
  - 2 cups mushroom stock (simmer roasted mushroom stems with chicken stock for 2 hours; strain)
  - 2 teaspoons sherry wine vinegar or to taste
  - 2 teaspoons black truffle oil
  - 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1. Season halibut with salt and pepper and pan sear. Put in oven at 400° and cook until just cooked through.
  2. While fish is cooking, in large sauté pan over medium heat, sauté mushrooms, onions and corn. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
  3. Add stock and reduce by one-third. Finish with sherry vinegar, truffle oil and butter.
  4. Serve with your favorite side. Delicious with whipped potatoes. Serves 4.

*Recipe by Chef de Cuisine Nathan King, Cache Cache*



## Vichyssoise à Lovage

Use local potatoes, leeks, lovage, edible flowers and apple when possible.

- 4 cups potatoes, peeled and diced
  - 4 cups chopped leeks
  - ½ cup chopped lovage stems
  - 4 tablespoons butter
  - 6 cups vegetable stock
  - 1 cup heavy cream
  - Salt and ground white pepper
  - 1 teaspoon lemon juice
  - 6 lovage leaves
  - 8 ounces smoked salmon mousse (smoked salmon blended with touch of heavy cream)
  - Crème fraîche
  - Edible flower buds
  - 1-2 apples, julienned or cut into small sticks
1. Combine potatoes, leeks, lovage stems and butter over low heat. Add stock and cream; simmer until potatoes are soft.
  2. Add white pepper, lemon juice and lovage leaves; blend with hand mixer. If needed, adjust consistency with vegetable stock. Salt to taste. Chill.
  3. Serve chilled with about 1 ounce cold salmon mousse, 1 teaspoon crème fraîche, 3 edible flowers and about 1 ounce of julienned apple per serving. Serves 6 to 8.

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