



Culinary Experts and Visionaries
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EXPERT INTERVIEW: DANA HERBERT

Chef, Desserts by Dana

What were your favorite foods growing up?

My favorite foods were my grandmothers potato salad, chocolate milk, pickles, and all the Italian Water Ice I could handle.

When did you decide you wanted to be a chef?

I decided I wanted to become a chef about my junior year in college at the University of Delaware. I always knew I wanted to be in the restaurant industry but it was then that I set my heart on being a chef. I had a great mentor Joe DiGregorio from Vita Nova Restaurant in Newark, DE. He really allowed me to grow.

Where and when did your career in food begin?

Like all "kids" I think I started out in fast food with McDonalds and then soon went on to other places like nursing homes and so forth but it wasn't until I worked at Vita Nova that I fell in love with food. That was my defining moment so to speak.

If you didn't become a chef, what would you be?

I would have like to be a race car driver. I love living on the edge and the adrenaline rush associated with risk. Just like our industry now, I love pressure and being put to the test and winning time and time again.

Who/what has shaped your cooking the most over the years?

Definitely the chef's that I have worked under and with-- Joe DiGregorio, Edward Nunn, Stephan Zareba.

What are your favorite culinary weapons in the kitchen?

My favorite culinary weapons are my torch, micro zester, and wire whip.

What influences your cooking style?

I would say life and the journeys that you go on influence our styles and views on food consistently. They say that the only thing that remains constant is change.

What is your favorite secret ingredient?

Vanilla Bean, lavender, and rosewater.

What is the one rule or value you try to instill in all of your staff?

I try to instill a whatever it takes mentality. Through sacrifice and hard work you can achieve great things.

If I'm trying to watch my weight and I'm eating at your restaurant, what am I ordering to eat?

The Chicken Miso Apple Salad would be a good choice for a light meal. You can find it in my cookbook. At the shop I would recommend a Fancy Apple Tart with Puff Pastry Cage.

What was the most challenging meal you had to make and why?

My most challenging single item was for the Chaine De Rotisseurs-- an affluent and decorated Chef society. I was the Pastry Chef at the Philadelphia Downtown Marriott at the time and was working for a great Chef named Edward Nunn. He was very driven. Until then I did not know who they were so I felt a lot of pressure to make myself as well as him look good as he was a member of the Chaine.

What was your worst restaurant disaster?

I believe my biggest kitchen mistake was when I was working on a sugar sculpture. I was in the early stages of learning to work with sugar to make pulled and blown sculptures. I was putting some finishing pieces on it and I heard a crack. I looked everywhere but saw no cracks, so I continued to build the piece and as I went to put the last dragon fly on the piece, it imploded and came crashing down in a thousand pieces. Luckily I had a few showpieces on my shelf in the office and was able to put one of them out without anyone knowing the wiser. But what a lesson. Always have a back up plan.

What is your least favorite food?

Liver. For some reason liver and I do not get along. Other pates are fine but not liver.

What is your beverage of choice?

This may sound crazy but above all beverages with or without alcohol, I love the old fashioned vanilla cream sodas that you used to be able to get at the diners and soda shops. My second favorite drink is a blackberry mojito.

What are some recent dining and culinary trends you have been observing?

Comfort foods have definitely been back for a little while now and smaller portions are definitely in at the moment.

When you are not eating at your own restaurant where are you eating?

Buddakan Restaurant in Philadelphia.

What is your best cooking tip for a home enthusiast?

Don't be afraid to try new things and experiment a little. We all do!!

What do you eat when you are home?

With a lot of my concentration being in the pastry field, I try to eat as much fruit as I can at home

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EXPERT PROFILE



Dana Herbert

Dana Herbert resides in Bear, Delaware; which has become home for his custom cakes and sugar artistry at Desserts by Dana. Chef Herbert lives and breathes in the sweet and artistic world of the pastry arts where flavor and color come to life in his wonderful wedding cakes, sugar sculptures and custom cakes for all occasions. Chef Dana also serves as the head chef for the Delaware River and Bay Authority in New Castle, Delaware. Chef Dana is unique in that he fully utilizes both of his skill sets and consistently develops a sweet and savory union in all his work. Chef Herbert has been featured on TLC's Ultimate Cake Off, WeTV's Wedding Cake Wars, NBC 10 Show, CN8 and more. He is quickly becoming an icon in area for his pastry work and recognized nationally.

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