

CHEF  
*Peter Armellino*  
 OF THE *PLUMED HORSE*  
 KEEPS IT SIMPLY PERFECT.

# FOOD from the HEART

Words By LAURA NESS Photos By CHRIS SCHMAUCH

**P**eter Armellino is a man with joy in his heart. He's doing what he loves and it shows. The twinkle in his eye reveals a self-deprecating confidence that keeps him at the top of a game only he can play.

The twinkle signals that the wheels are turning, perhaps mulling over the latest barrel tasting he did at Testarossa, where he works with Bill Brosseau to craft his own wines for the Plumed Horse's wine list, named one of *Wine Spectator's* best every year since 2008.



Then again, he might be thinking about the pottery class he's taking in hopes of making his own line of dishes. In this new endeavor he's like an artist who insists on framing his own paintings, or a musician who hand-carves his own flutes. Only in this way can he present his creations via a hand-wrought, personal medium that befits his culinary adventures.

None of this is to fan the flame of fame. It is simply to extend and share his gift. And isn't that what we all live for, fundamentally—to share our gifts?

Despite the fact that he is well known far beyond the Bay Area, everything about Armellino is as genuine and heartwarming as his cuisine. And that's saying something in this celebrity-obsessed world, where out-sized personalities and egos to match are the rule. In that world, Armellino, who grew up on Long Island, is a welcome exception.

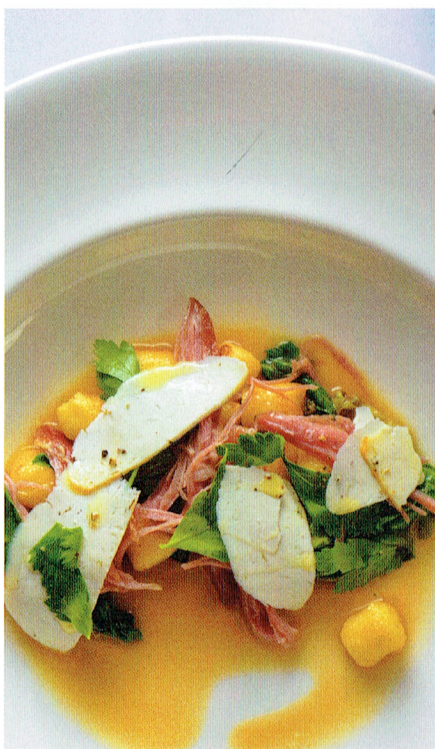
Even though he's a Michelin star chef who recently wowed a roomful of culinary wizards as guest chef at a sensational James Beard dinner in New York, he's accommodating and pleasant through endless photo shoots and interviews. In fact, he seems to love having photographers in his kitchen. "It's so clean and organized," he points out. "The line is like clockwork. I want people to see it."

Armellino and business partner Josh Weeks, who has been a part of the Plumed Horse landscape since the age of 16, take great pride in delivering an exemplary fine dining experience. And they are succeeding wildly. Their Saratoga restaurant is consistently rated one of the top dining establishments in California, and its sterling reputation draws aspiring culinary staff from all over.

Some, says Weeks, come only to have the experience for their resumes. Adds Armellino: "They think they only want to stay six months, but they go out into the real world and then come back. They realize what a great place this is. Many members of our team have been here for years."



**'I DECIDED TO BE AROUND THE BEST IN THE FIELD, AND UNCONSCIOUSLY SET MYSELF UP FOR SUCCESS.'**



Armellino and Weeks have built a team in a way that only people who have a clear mission can. Armellino and Weeks believe that every time you dine at the Plumed Horse, you should feel that you have just had an unrepeatable experience—until the next time you return.

Longevity builds, and is built of, consistency, but the real fire here is the passion. True passion that shows in every action and result: from the choice of best ingredients to the simple manner in which they are prepared and the thoughtfully choreographed presentation of each dish. It's a top-down infusion of respect for every link in the food chain, with the primary focus always on the customer.

"Eating at the Plumed Horse is an event," Weeks says. Which is just what great dining should be.

#### Fresh Start

Armellino was raised in a fairly typical Italian household within earshot of the Long Island Expressway, amid truck farms growing fresh vegetables. Yet, when shopping in the local grocery store, there wasn't a fresh vegetable to be found.

His mother, like many of the era, relied on canned and packaged goods to feed the family. "It was mostly in shelves, in cupboards," Armellino says. "My mother was a terrible cook!"

So he basically began wielding pots and pans in the kitchen out of survival. He especially liked cooking breakfast for his four siblings. "My dad was always helping me in the kitchen," he recalls. "He says I invented the Egg McMuffin concept."

Armellino's Italian paternal grandmother was a good cook, though, and from her he learned to love cooking pasta and making Sunday gravy with sausage and meatballs, which is still a favorite.

Beginning at age 17, Armellino worked at small restaurants on the Island, where he garnered tricks of the trade. He says he learned to make Manhattan clam chowder at a







German restaurant, and to this day doesn't care for New England-style. At home he watched cooking shows on TV and was inspired by the likes of Jacques Pepin. He also went through a Chef Paul Prudhomme phase, during which, he says with a laugh, "I blackened everything!"

Eventually he hit New York City, where he opened Park Avenue Café in 1992. That was followed by Gotham Bar & Grill and Gramercy Tavern. In 1999, Armellino came to San Francisco for a sous chef position at Jardinière. There, he worked with Chef Douglas Keane, then with Chef Laurent Manrique at Campton Place and Aqua.

Discovered by Chef Traci des Jardins, Armellino found himself, appropriately, on a TV cooking show: the Food Network's competitive cook-off *Iron Chef*. There he prevailed in an epic battle over shrimp with superstar chef Mario

Batali. But Armellino doesn't talk about his accomplishments: only his experiences and the people who inspired him.

"I wanted to work for the people I admired," he says. "I chose who and where rather than what title or benefits. Those turned out to be the best opportunities. I decided to be around the best in the field, and unconsciously set myself up for success."

**The Right Stuff**

Why is the food at the Plumed Horse so exceptional? It's the ingredients.

"Colleagues ask me why I spend so much on product," he says. "They ask, 'Do you think people notice?' I always want the best. I'll go for the guy who charges more money just to get the best ingredients. Thank God I have Josh making the business decisions so we avoid bankruptcy!"

Armellino favors simply prepared dishes that show restraint, likening it to a Japanese landscape.

"We like things to exist in as natural a state as possible, with minimal intervention," he says. "Younger cooks don't cook the same way. I rely on the highest quality ingredients."

And the Plumed Horse has their very own produce suppliers in the Saratoga hills. They use the same small abalone farm in Davenport they've used since the restaurant's beginning. They use only Mount Hood morels; they use only Prosciutto de Parma.

And then there are the things Armellino insists on making in-house: their own cheese, their own bread, his own hams. It's the same reason he's attempting to make his own pottery.

"I don't know if I'll ever be any good at it!" he laughs. "I love it, though. It's a craft."

# Michael Nevis



**SOLD**

SARATOGA | \$5,498,000

**SOLD**

LOS GATOS | \$4,595,000

**SALE PENDING**

LOS GATOS | \$3,300,000

**SOLD**

LOS GATOS | \$3,295,000

**SOLD**

LOS GATOS | \$1,670,000

**SOLD**

SARATOGA | \$870,000



## Exceptional Real Estate Representation

- ADVICE | SAVVY, COMPREHENSIVE, STRATEGIC AND TAILORED TO YOUR NEEDS
- STAGING | EXPERT DESIGN, BEAUTIFULLY EXECUTED. INTERIORS, EXTERIORS, LANDSCAPE
- MULTI-MEDIA MARKETING | AGGRESSIVE WORLDWIDE EXPOSURE, PREMIUM PLACEMENT
- EXPERIENCE | 25 YEARS TOP PRODUCER. LUXURY ESTATES, HILLSIDE PROPERTIES, VINTAGE HOMES
- KNOWLEDGE | RELEVANT, INTIMATE NEIGHBORHOOD & COMMUNITY INSIGHT

Are you ready for results? Call me for a customized plan!

[MichaelNevis.com](http://MichaelNevis.com)

MNevis@apr.com | 408.781.0779 | 5-Star Reviews

