

eat & drink

ALL BOTTLED UP P. 112 /// WHAT'S THE LATEST DISH? P. 114

Rob Ittner, left, and Barclay Dodge have teamed up to reintroduce a cooking school to Aspen.



Full Course

When it opens this spring, Aspen's newest culinary hub will serve up delectable and teachable moments.

STORY BY **AMANDA RAE**

PHOTO BY **C2 PHOTOGRAPHY**

WITH THEIR LATEST PROJECT, the Cooking School of Aspen, chef-restaurateurs Rob Ittner and Barclay Dodge are going back to the future. Fifteen years ago, both worked at Renaissance, which some culinary insiders remember fondly as the finest eatery Aspen has ever seen. At the time, Ittner was fresh to town and the hospitality scene; native Dodge served as chef de cuisine.

"I can remember it like yesterday," Ittner recalls. "Barclay saying, 'You know, we're gonna do something together someday.'"

And they certainly have. The self-proclaimed go-getters have collaborated on a restaurant opening (R Cuisine, in 2007) and also enjoyed their own successes (Ittner as owner of Rustique Bistro for more than a decade; Dodge as chef-owner of Mogador and executive chef of Pacifica). Their biggest venture together, the school, opens in March. ➤



The school's demonstration kitchen will have ample room for chefs and students alike.

IT'S ALSO INTENDED AS A GATHERING SPOT FOR CULINARY ENTHUSIASTS.

Reviving the concept behind the original Cooking School of Aspen, which opened in the late 1990s and ran for 13 years, the current iteration is a unique beast—literally. The 3,000-square-foot subterranean space (which once housed the Steak Pit) dwarfs its predecessor in both size and scope. At its heart is an impressive demonstration kitchen outfitted with state-of-the-art professional equipment (two ovens, three ranges, a microwave, and ample refrigeration) supplied by main sponsor Jenn-Air, plus KitchenAid appliances, pasta machines, mixers, food processors, and tools aplenty. There's ring-side seating for 24 students, with room for more during seminars and pairing events.

Day and evening classes led by local chefs and experts will comprise the majority of the schedule. Most focus on teaching basic skills in a variety of arenas—think pasta-making, dim sum, plant-based food, and the cuisines of Spain, India, and Southeast Asia. (Courses range from \$35 to \$200, all-inclusive.)

Ittner says, “Our hope is that we create an environment for advanced home cooks and professional cooks to [hone] their skills.” To that end, weeklong intensive retreats might cover, say, mastering stocks.

“In the restaurant industry, you don’t have much time to fine-tune your craft—it’s go-go-go,” Ittner adds. “We want to create a laboratory where we have that ability to buy a bunch of stuff and experiment.”

Though the name implies a specific objective—learn to cook—the Cooking School is also intended as a gathering spot for culinary enthusiasts. An adjoined dining room seats groups of 50 to 120 and accommodates up to 160 for cocktail parties and tastings, such as planned wine and chamber-music pairings this summer with the Aspen Music Festival and School.

“It’s smaller than a hotel grand ballroom but larger than a restaurant,” Dodge says. Equipped with a separate commercial banquet kitchen, the dining room will host in-house productions such as farm-to-table feasts, Michelin-style dinners, and pop-up restaurants. (One event already on our radar: Chef Bryan Nelson’s “Bring Back Pacifica Night,” which revives dishes from the former seafood restaurant on March 7.)

Also on the docket are two hotly anticipated entertainment series: “Late-Night Food Fight” chef throwdowns and Friday night improv with chef and comedian extraordinaire Glenn Smith.

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Cooking School of Aspen, 305 E. Hopkins Ave., 970-920-2002, cookingchoolofaspen.com

CRAFT WORKS

AFTER A CERTAIN AGE, most of us equate a bottle of booze with après-ski antics or, at the very least, an epic hangover. At **Marble Distilling Co.** on Carbondale’s Main Street, however, bottles are more about fostering community, having fun, and imparting some hands-on education.

The Carbondale craft distillery recently launched **volunteer bottling parties**, and with temperatures dipping into the single digits they’ve become a popular way to stay warm.

Bottlings are held up to twice a month, year-round, with a limit of eight people per session. (You can also book a private party for your own group of up to eight; 970-963-7008 or marbledistilling.com). For evident reasons, volunteers must be at least 21 years old. No experience is required—just a willingness to commit to three hours of work that ranges from filling, sealing, and labeling bottles to initialing and inscribing them with a batch number. In return, you’ll receive cocktails, lunch or dinner, and a bottle of vodka, liqueur, or whiskey to take home. And that’s decidedly grown up. —*Laurel Miller*



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