

PHOTO: HENRIK OLUND

SCANDINAVIAN IN NEW YORK

Six of New York's Scandinavian chefs photographed on Manhattan's Lower West side. Once home to an industry that has all but disappeared today, this is where the trucks arrived from the main slaughterhouses of the Midwest, usually in the middle of the night, loaded with animal carcasses to be butchered and distributed. Like the Fulton fish market, which was re-located a few years ago, property in the area has become all-too expensive, and the industrial and quasi-red light district is rapidly losing its original color to become yet another tourist's mecca, with fancy restaurants and bars on every corner.



Ari Nieminen

Executive Chef, Water's Edge

Age: 42
Comes from: Northern part of Helsinki, close to Tampere.
How long have you been in NY? First as an exchange student 1979-1980, then came over to study in 1984 and stayed.

Why did you come here? To study to become a chef
Name a typical Finnish spice: cardamom
Describe Finnish food with one word: Natural
How do you translate Finnish food to suit Americans? You have to change things. This I learned as a chef at a Russian restaurant here in New York. And Finnish food, although it has Western influences, mainly from Sweden, also has influences from the Russian and the Russian-French cuisine that dominated Russia from the revolution till the 1970s. That food was very heavy. Now you have to tone it down. Even in Finland this has changed. Sourdough bread, for example, is less sour now. The heavy Karelian stew has gotten leaner since my childhood, with more vegetables. The trend is leaner. I notice that when I go back to Finland, tastes have changed. And for an American audience, you have to soft-coat it. You definitely have to tone it down a bit in order to get people to eat some dishes at all, like herring.

When you go out to eat, where do you go? It all depends on my mood. We recently moved, so my habits have changed. We used to go to Jo Jo's a lot, my wife and I. And for a big-ticket meal we'd go to a place like Daniel. But I would go to Jo Jo's often.

When you cook for yourself, what do you make? On my day off, I cook with my wife. We open a bottle of wine and enjoy cooking together. That way our daughter is exposed to family meals. Sundays I cook 2-3 meals for the coming week.
What is the most important characteristic a chef has to have? Determination. And a complete love for what you do. And to make sure you surround yourself with people as determined as yourself.

Would you recommend your daughter become a chef? I wouldn't recommend [that she] be anything. I want to show her many things, and hopefully she'll take from them what she wants. If she ends up in this business, we'll support her 100 percent.
What was your favorite food growing up? I loved everything. But especially fish. My best memories are from when we smoked cod during the spring and

summer. That was very special.
What/who inspires you? Life. Everything around me. New York is the best place. There are people from all over to inspire you.

For more info, see www.watersedgenyc.com



Jane Press

Flatotel

Age: 36
Comes from: Korea, adopted at age 2 1/2 by Danish parents. Grew up in Odense and Copenhagen.
How long have you been in NY? Since July 1.
Why did you come here? Significant other. My husband got a job with the Royal Danish Consulate
Name a typical Danish spice: Well, it's an herb, but parsley
Describe Danish food with one word: Hyggelig. Cozy.

How do you translate Danish food to suit Americans? It doesn't have to be translated. It's Mama's kind of cooking. Heavy food with a lot of gravy. A little bit like the South here. You don't have to do much with old-fashioned Danish food. It's meat and potatoes.

When you go out to eat, where do you go? Anywhere where they serve Mediterranean food. I like French, Italian and Spanish food. And of course I am a sucker for Japanese. The sushi...

When you cook for yourself, what do you make? Pasta.

Which is the most important characteristic a chef has to have? You must be a hard worker. Of course you have to like food, but you have to be able to work hard and be strong physically and emotionally. You will stand on your feet for many hours a day. You also have to have talent and a sense of flavors. Anyone can learn to be a decent chef. A good chef is someone who is a hard worker; a brilliant chef is a chef who is a hard worker and has talent.

Would you recommend your first-born become a chef? No! I don't recommend it to anybody. The hours are long, the pay is bad and the work environment is lousy. You get burned out easily. It's a calling. It's a bit like being an artist. If you can do anything else with your life, then do it! Only become a chef if you feel you must.

What was your favorite food growing up? Mama's meatballs – it still is.

What/who inspires you? Other professionals. My

colleagues. The guests who appreciate my cooking. I want to make people happy, so, of course, the guests; that's what keeps me going. But also my colleagues.

For more info, see www.flatotel.com (not an example of Danish cuisine)



Johan Svensson

Executive Chef, Riingo

Age: 34
Comes from: Torsö, Sweden
How long have you been in NY? 8 years
Why did you come here? Got a job at Aquavit. Came over for a 3-week trial period and stayed.
Name a typical Swedish spice: Chives
Describe Swedish food with one word: Rich in influences

How do you translate Swedish food to suit Americans? You must make bigger portions. And be careful that it's not too simple; people start thinking something is missing. You always have to change little things. If you make sushi for English people you change it a bit, too. It's a bit harder to please New Yorkers because of the diversity here. Everyone's from someplace else.

When you go out to eat, where do you go? Depends on my mood. I eat out a lot on the Lower East side, where I live. Momofuku is one place I like – great noodles, not overly expensive, and fast. My girlfriend and I like to go to simple places with good wines, good cheeses. "Nice dining" is something I do every day and it gets a bit boring.

When you cook for yourself, what do you make? That doesn't happen often! Maybe brunch, then, with scrambled eggs and muffins. I made chicken breast filled with Italian sausage the other day, with sautéed asparagus.

What is the most important characteristic a chef has to have? You must be stubborn. Because you work long hours and you have to put your personal life aside. It's very intense. You have to be on the go all the time. And being meticulous.

Would you recommend your first-born become a chef? Hell, no! No son or daughter of mine will ever, EVER stand in a kitchen! I started when I was 19 or 20. The days are long and there are many nights, and your youth is somehow taken from you. I don't regret anything, but I don't want that kind of life for my child. Stay away from the kitchen!

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What was your favorite food growing up? Fried pork with onion sauce – and it still is. But my Mom has to make it. I grew up in the country, and there wasn't that much to do. My Mom was always cooking and I was the youngest, so I was always with her. Now when I go back, I always cook because I know my Mom doesn't like to do it all the time. I grew up with food, but I barely passed "Home Economics!"
What/who inspires you? Everything! New York is great! I get inspired just by opening the door. The smells and everything!

For more info, see www.riingo.com



Morten Sohlberg

Chef/Smörgåschef

Age: 35
Comes from: Oslo, Norway
How long have you been in NY? Almost 12 years.
Why did you come here? I came here originally to study and to work as a designer.
Name a typical Norwegian spice: Juniper berry, which is very good in sauces for game.

Describe Norwegian food with one word: Hearty
How do you translate Norwegian food to suit Americans? It can't be used entirely the way it is. We certainly make certain compromises and concessions at our restaurant. Several restaurants have tried putting smorgasbords together, for example, and failed because they didn't understand the concept. When we serve Jansson's Frestelse (Jansson's Temptation), we use a slightly milder combination of herring anchovies so it doesn't have such a fishy flavor. You have to be a bit more subtle. You don't want people to wonder, "Has this fish gone bad?" So what we do is we don't stress the ingredients in this dish; we call it a gratin and serve it as a side. With the result that it is very popular.

When you go out to eat, where do you go? I like Mediterranean and Turkish food. Moroccan food. I like almost anything, and I eat out a lot because I have to in my work

When you cook for yourself, what do you make? I usually make open-faced sandwiches. They're easy to make in small quantities, and you can make them taller by adding things like shrimp. So it's a nice, tasty, attractive meal where you use whatever ingredients you have at hand.

Which is the most important characteristic a chef has to have? A chef is someone who is in charge of

the kitchen, so you have to have a sense of leadership and knowledge of food preparation. You have to have the ability to manage the kitchen, manage different relationships, understand usage of food in an intelligent way, and be able to deal with tricky people. It's a huge human resources challenge. Having a restaurant is not just about being able to cook good food.

Would you recommend your first-born become a chef? I'm of the opinion that my child should do whatever he likes. But I can say one thing: being a chef is brutal 90 percent of the time. It's hard work with not necessarily good pay, the hours are unpleasant, and you lose a lot of days. It's less glamorous than you'd think. And I don't want that for my child.

What was your favorite food growing up? Norwegian fishballs with curry sauce that my Mom used to make. My sister and I always requested this dish for Christmas. It's more of a poor man's dish, bland enough to appeal to children.

What/who inspires you? My stomach! I used to live in Italy, studying design, and I didn't have a lot of money. So I had to cook, since I couldn't afford going out. I learned that way. I would ask the chefs how they'd prepare their pasta and then I'd go home and replicate that for myself. It's inspiring to try to find ways to create good food. A love for all kinds of food inspires me.

For more info, see www.smorgaschef.com



Nils Noren

Executive Chef, Aquavit

Age: 38
Comes from: Born in Stockholm, grew up in Gävle.
How long have you been in New York? Back and forth for 10 years.
Why did you come here? To cook.
Name a typical Swedish spice: Dill.
Describe Swedish food with one word: Oh, that's impossible. I could say "rustic," but that's not really true. That's very difficult to say.

How do you translate Swedish food to suit American? You don't really have to translate it. Just serve it as genuinely as possible.

When you go out to eat, where do you go? I like a Malaysian restaurant here where I live on Grand Street.
When you cook for yourself, what do you make? Spaghetti Carbonara

What is the most important characteristic a chef has to have? Being organized.

Would you recommend your first-born become a chef? Absolutely! I've never regretted it!

What was your favorite food growing up? Hot dogs.

Who/What inspires you? My colleagues. Other cultures and restaurants.

For more info, see www.aquavit.org



Petra Hauff

Cake Maker

Age: 31
Comes from: Kungsäng, Stockholm
How long have you been in NY? In the U.S. 13 years, in NY 7 years.

Why did you come here? To play college basketball
How did you get started? It was on a dare. My brother told me he was getting married, and I just blurted out "I'll make the cake!" even though I had never made a cake before. Later on they started saying "We'd better order a cake," but I stuck to it and started practicing and made my brother's wedding cake a year later.

When you eat pastries or cake yourself, what do you like? I don't really like sweet things; I like salty things. I also don't like how sweet cakes are over here. I want my cakes to be really tasty and to look great, fluffy and va-va-voom.

How many cakes do you make each week? I make about one cake a week. I make it either in my own kitchen or in some restaurant kitchen.

What is the most important characteristic a cake maker has to have? I think you have to be very patient and a little bit crazy! It takes quite a long time, so you also have to be a bit of a perfectionist.

Would you recommend your first-born become a cake maker? Sure! It's a lot of fun!

What/who inspires you? The fact that it is a close-ended project. There are so many things in life that just keep going and going. But with a cake, there's a deadline to meet. Day one I bake it, day two I decorate it, and after that I should be able to stand back and just say "Wow!" Day three is when I deliver it.

For more info on Petra's cakes, see: www.petrahauff.com