

## **KAYSEN TO REPRESENT EVERY U.S. CHEF AT PREMIER INTERNATIONAL COOK-OFF JAN. 24**

### **Blodgett-Pitco helps to send a young “culinary sensation” to the 2007 Bocuse d’Or in France**

By Brent T. Frei

On Wednesday, January 24, all eyes in the nation—and, indeed, the world—will be on a 27-year-old cook from San Diego as he represents all American chefs in one of the most prestigious cooking competitions in the world.

Rare is the American cook under the age of 30 who has garnered the respect that only those who have spent countless years of toil and sweat behind the commercial stove can claim they’ve earned. Yet Gavin Kaysen is one of them. Humble and articulate beyond his age, Kaysen’s bearing and skill in back of the house belie his age and paint him as much older, much more seasoned.

It’s a good thing, because this young man, with his apprentice, will defend the honor of every chef in the United States at the 20<sup>th</sup>-anniversary Bocuse d’Or World Cuisine Competition in Lyon, France, next week. No American chef has won the coveted Gold Bocuse award since the United States began participating in the biennial event in 1987. According to those at home and abroad who’ve witnessed what Kaysen can do, there’s a gamble he might turn that tide in 2007.

Blodgett-Pitco is proud to support Kaysen as he “goes for the gold” following more than a year of constant practice fraught with trial and error and the sacrifice of any activity not directly related to his job and the competition in France that will attract the attention of every cook around the globe. Says Blodgett-Pitco’s corporate chef, Tim Klauder, the company wholeheartedly resolved to help finance Kaysen’s effort in France because of the young man’s indomitable spirit coupled with his superb skill and an attitude denoting a winner.

Kaysen, chef de cuisine at El Bizcocho at the four-star, four-diamond Rancho Bernardo Inn in San Diego, secured the Bocuse d’Or USA title in Chicago last May after qualifying among the top three chefs in the national semi-finals earlier in 2006. At El Bizcocho, Kaysen has earned a name for himself using fresh local ingredients and handcrafted artisan products as a backdrop for his innovative, contemporary cuisine. Indeed, El Bizcocho was recently named the Critic’s Choice for “Best of the Best” by *San Diego* magazine and voted the city’s highest-rated restaurant by Zagat Survey.

For the competition in Lyon, Kaysen will compete against 23 nations such as Argentina, Denmark and Russia—not to mention France—for the top prize. The competition will take place in conjunction with SIRHA, the 13th International Hotel Catering & Food Trade Exhibition, in the new Alto area of Eurexpo. SIRHA attracts more than 164,000 attendees from around the world.

“What makes the Bocuse d’Or magic is the opportunity to review all the gastronomic cultures of the world in just two days,” says the competition’s namesake and founder, Paul Bocuse of Lyon—arguably the best-known chef in the world. “As the public watches, everyday products become authentic masterpieces. A spell is cast, which will turn three new master chefs into internationally famous names.” Blodgett-Pitco, along with the rest of America, hopes to see Kaysen and the nation’s cuisine he represents rise to historic heights globally as a result of his participation in the Bocuse d’Or. Already Kaysen has been profiled in esteemed media outlets, including NBC-TV’s “The Today Show” and *Time* magazine, and in May 2006 he was *Restaurant Hospitality* magazine’s “Rising Star Chef.” In April, he’ll be the featured demo chef at *Santé* magazine’s 2007 Restaurant Symposium in Vermont.

The Bocuse d'Or was the creation of Chef Paul Bocuse, one of the early proponents of nouvelle cuisine and owner of several restaurants in Lyon (including the world-famous Restaurant Paul Bocuse at l'Auberge du Pont de Collonges), and Albert Romain, the organizer of the International Food Trade Exhibition. The two Frenchmen aimed to create a gastronomic contest that would bring the greatest chefs out from behind closed doors onto a world stage. They wanted to share the atmosphere and life of a great kitchen and give an international audience a choice seat at the master chef's table.

Each chef competing in the 2007 event will have five-and-a-half hours to prepare one meat dish featuring Bresse chicken and one fish dish featuring Norwegian white halibut and Norwegian king crab. Says Kaysen, the U.S. entry will be "100% American." Each platter must be presented with three different garnishes. Each dish, with its 12 servings, is served on one platter. The 13th and 14th portions will be presented on individual plates to demonstrate presentation for the maitre d'hotel and for the official photograph.

Every competitor has the potential to score 60 points—40 points for taste and 20 points for presentation—for each of the two dishes. In addition, the kitchen-supervision committee gives competitors up to 20 additional points for hygiene and cleanliness; these points are added to a competitor's total in the event of a tie. The winner is the chef with the best overall score.

Gold, silver and bronze Bocuse trophies and cash prizes are awarded to the top-three-scoring chefs. The Gold Bocuse winner will receive 20,000 euros (about US\$25,900); the Silver Bocuse winner will receive 15,000 euros (about US\$19,400); and the Bronze Bocuse winner will receive 10,000 euros (about US\$13,000). In addition, prizes will be awarded for the best fish and meat dishes, best apprentice and best brochure and poster.

Every country sends one chef and his/her apprentice (who must be 22 years old or younger), and a judge. Chef John Folse of John Folse & Company in southern Louisiana will be the 2007 U.S. judge sitting on the 24-member Bocuse d'Or jury. Folse, who also has a namesake culinary program training students at Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, La., is currently president of the Atlanta-based Research Chefs Association.

### **Born to Cook Professionally**

A Minnesota native, Kaysen knew he wanted to cook at age 15, when a mentor took him under his wing. "When you're in high school, you go through a million emotions," Kaysen says. "Cooking was my release and a way to express myself in a different way. So when my friends were going to parties, I was doing 250 covers."

He graduated from New England Culinary Institute in Montpelier, Vt., in 2001, and sought additional training from such respected chefs as Jacky Vuillet at Auberge de Lavaux in Lausanne, Switzerland, and Marco Pierre White at the Michelin-starred L'Escargot in London, England. In 2002, Kaysen returned to the United States and began working under chef de cuisine Patrick Ponsaty at El Bizcocho. Kaysen was named chef de cuisine in 2004, and made his first appearance at the esteemed James Beard House in New York in 2005.

Kaysen represented the United States against 16 other nations at the International Trophy of Cuisine and Pastry in Paris in 2003, and placed third overall in the world. (His fish entry won first place.) With that achievement under his belt, Kaysen set his sights on the Bocuse d'Or. "I thought it was necessary to go and see what it was about," he says, so he flew to Lyon for the 2005 event. "Until you're actually there and feel it, there's nothing like it. I watched the way the judges would taste the food, took pictures of the ovens and stoves, figuring that if I'm in this position someday, I would know how much space I'd have for my mise en place, etc. The biggest thing in this competition is to eliminate risk before you get there. I met the right people."

Kaysen and one of his cooks at El Bizcocho, Brandon, applied for and were granted a spot to compete in the semi-finals of the 2007 Bocuse d'Or USA in Chicago in early 2006. Kaysen placed

second, and immediately he and Brandon, who would serve as his apprentice in the final competition, began planning their menu for France. Since then the two have focused on little else besides their work at El Bizcocho. Kaysen is grateful for the tremendous support from his wife and the management of Rancho Bernardo Inn and such patrons as Blodgett-Pitco and the American Institute of Wine & Food, among others.

The best placement the United States has ever achieved in the Bocuse d'Or is sixth. Why does Kaysen feel he has a chance to change history?

"I can't tell you how well I'll do until it's over," Kaysen says. "This competition, like every competition, holds something deeper inside of you than you realize. The chef who wins that day is the chef who finds it. I'm going in with confidence because that's the only way I *can* go in. It still gives me chills up and down my spine to think about it. There are so many people who have pushed me and helped me. People come up to me and ask if I'm nervous, and I say no, I'm just scared. My nerves are dead. I know how to cook; the fear is losing. It's an incredible honor to be part of the competition, and I'm blown away to have gotten this far. But I want to win. One of my cooks used to train with Lance Armstrong, and even lived with him for a year. When he was in the Tour de France, he was afraid of *everybody*. People ask who's my biggest competition, Norway, France, etc., but if you ask those countries, and if they don't say we're *their* competition, that's good for the United States, because the other countries don't expect us to win."

Kaysen is young to have this yoke set upon his shoulders, and his apprentice in the competition, Brandon, is only 21. But Kaysen shrugs his youth off as immaterial.

"It doesn't matter if you're 27 or 52, if you've got heart, you've got it," Kaysen says. "My GM reminded me that the Beatles did their best music before they were 30. This is an incredible opportunity to harness your skill. You don't have many times in your life to practice the same thing over and over again. We're stoked and honored to go over there, and Brandon and I still pinch each other. When we hit that competition ring in Lyon, we'll just cook. We know what to do. I've basically lived with Brandon for the last year. We know each other's moves so well, it's literally like watching a choreographed musical. And we know we're getting the opportunity of a lifetime."

Chefs and cooks in every cooking establishment in the United States turn their eyes toward France, and this young American who will cook on their behalf on January 24 in his quest for the gold.