

Created by: Debra C. Argen

Chef for a Day



In the Kitchen with Chef Jordy Lavanderos! Debra spends the day with Chef Jordy Lavanderos in his new hip tapas restaurant, **Secretes** in New York City.

“If you can’t stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen”; thankfully, the heat does not bother me, because on June 14, 2005, when the mercury hit 91° F, I went to spend the day with **Chef Jordy Lavanderos** in his new hip tapas restaurant, **Secretes**, which opened on May 5, 2005 in the East Village of New York.



I met Chef Jordy at a party at his restaurant on May 19, 2005, given by James Turney of [Parador Selections, LLC](#) and **Secretes**, to celebrate the opening of the restaurant and Spanish wines and was immensely impressed with Chef Jordy’s tapas creations. I spoke with Chef Jordy about my idea for an article on the working life of a chef, and he graciously agreed to allow me to come and experience being a “chef for a day.”

Chef Jordy Lavanderos went to culinary school in New York at ICE (The Institute for Culinary Education), worked with Chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten at Jean-George’s restaurants, Mercer Kitchen and Vong, and worked in Spain with Ferran Adria and Juan Mari Arzak, who was his mentor. He also worked with fifteen 2 and 3-star Michelin chefs at the festival La Ronde des Mousquetaires in the South of France, and worked at the Dunmore Beach Club on Harbour Island in the Bahamas, before deciding it was time to open his own restaurant.

I have always been intrigued with cooking, yet I really had no idea what life as a real chef would be like, the hours involved, the paperwork, the staff management and the intense labor required to create those exquisite restaurant dishes.



As agreed, Jordy and I met at the restaurant at 10:15 am. I changed into my chef clothes: white J. Crew jeans, white t-shirt, and put on my white chef coat, yes; I really do have my own chef coat. He gave me a long white apron, which I added to my ensemble, tucked in a towel at my waist and I was ready to begin. Step 1: Look like a chef. The other steps required more work, but at least it was a start. Jordy introduced me to the restaurant staff, gave me a tour of his highly organized kitchen and refrigerator to acquaint me

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with my surroundings. He showed me the garde mange prep list, the food recipe list, and explained that as a chef/owner you must be on top of everything, know all the stations, communicate with the staff, and be very organized. Twice-weekly Jordy makes a batch of duck confit, and today he would make the duck confit. As he seasoned the duck, I noted that he used ginger and orange zest, different from most duck confit recipes, but it sounded heavenly. He placed the duck in the oven, and then it was time for me to begin my chef duties.



My first task was to make white chocolate truffles covered in ground pistachio nuts. The truffles would be a new item on the dessert menu. Jordy had already created the truffle mixture, my job was to cut the truffle mixture with a metal pastry scraper, hand-roll them into balls, and then roll the balls in ground pistachio nuts. Cutting and rolling truffles should have been very easy, but with the warm weather and humidity, I had to work quickly before they started to melt. This was a stop and start process as when the truffle mixture started getting too soft, I had to refrigerate it before I could continue.

While I was waiting for the truffle mixture to chill, Jordy asked me to make a crème pâtissière, (pastry cream) for his new frozen mousse cake that he was creating. Easy enough since I had made crème pâtissière many times, however now I had to use a scale and weigh out the ingredients in grams. Once the sugar, butter and milk were measured, I needed to separate the egg whites from the yolks. Just as I had almost finished, one of the yolks fell into the egg whites and broke apart. That was it for the egg whites, because they won't stiffen if there are any yolks mixed in. I told Jordy what had happened, and he told me to start again. I very carefully broke and separated the last of the eggs for the yolks for the crème pâtissière, labeled the container of the yolk mixed with egg whites and placed it in the refrigerator, where it could be used for another purpose. I mixed the egg yolks with the sugar, scalded the milk, added a little of the scalded milk to the yolk sugar mixture, then combined it with the rest of the scalded milk, and returned it to the stove to finish cooking. Stirring constantly, it was almost done, and then suddenly the crème pâtissière separated! A nightmare! I panicked, but Jordy, patient soul that he is, just told me to start over! At least I had the scale measurements down, knew where the ingredients were, and was able to separate the eggs quickly. We altered the recipe a little due to the humidity, and once again I was back at the stove, scalding the milk, adding it to the mixture of yolks and sugar, and watched it extremely carefully, until finally, I could breathe again, I had a crème pâtissière! While I created the crème pâtissière, Jordy created the new mousse recipe using turrÃ³n de jicna.

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While the crème pâtissière cooled, I measured out the egg whites (the good ones from the second batch), and the sugar, set the egg whites in the mixer to make a meringue, added the sugar, and finally they were ready. Jordy made the mousse with the turrón de jicón, meringue, and the crème pâtissière. We tasted it and it was delicious. Tasting is the best part of cooking! I cut the torrone cake that Jordy had made for the base of the mousse. Easy, except with the humidity, the cake was a bit sticky to cut. I wet the cutter, and it was easier to cut the cake. I put the cut cake rounds in the refrigerator. At this point, Jordy told me that it was time that we took a break, get some fresh air and get inspired. We changed into our street clothes, and I noticed that it was now 3:30 pm! Where did the time go?

Over lunch I got to know this dynamic chef. Jordy grew up in Mexico City and Tuscany, spent time in Tuscany, was the youngest of 3 children, and the only son. He was greatly influenced by his grandfather, who he honors on his Secretes trademark with the number 1909, his grandfather's birth date. Food is in his blood; he has always enjoyed cooking for friends and at the industrious age of 16 he had his own taqueria. As a chef, he likes to break rules and create his own rules, so if you are looking to replicate your tapas experience in Spain at Secretes, you might be surprised at his creations, because he likes to adapt his recipes to today's lifestyles and tastes. When not cooking, he makes time to go to the gym, enjoys cigars and ice cream, of which his favorite flavors are Cherries Garcia and Pistachio, and he loves nuts. He is passionate about art, music, photography and cooking. He also enjoys risky sports like hang-gliding, which fits his image.

We walked back to Secretes, changed into our chef clothes, and it was time to finish the cake. I cut the cake rounds in half while Jordy lined the multi-segment pastry form with acetate liners. Working side-by-side, I put the cake in the bottom of the form while Jordy piped in the mousse. I followed him and made an indentation in the center of the mousse trying to spread the mixture evenly to cover all of the acetate so the cake would not have any air pockets. I added a mix of Kahlua caramelized nuts to the indentation, and then he piped more mousse on top, smoothed the top of the mousse cake and placed it in the freezer. As delectable as this cake would be, hours of prep, cooking and finishing time were involved, plus 2 people to make it. I finished making the rest of the truffles while Jordy decided to alter the cake recipe. He made a new cake, which of course we sampled when it cooled. This one was a winner. It cut perfectly, had a crunchy exterior and creamy interior, with the turrón taste that he was looking for. He recorded the new recipe changes. We counted the new cake rounds, so that the cost could be accounted for, and then stored the cut cake in the freezer for the next batch of frozen mousse cakes. Cooking is often trial and error, you need to try new ideas, and then alter them sometimes to make them work.

I relaxed a minute before the guests started arriving. The staff had dinner and tried the new truffles, and proclaimed "my" truffles to be perfectly decadent. It was now 6:00 pm. The servers, Anamaria and Alexis had set the restaurant tables, the red Matisse-like lights gave the brick exposed wall a warm sexy ambience, the dark wood tables glowed with red and white chunky candles set into the recesses of the high tables with tall stools, and the crystal wine glasses sparkled on the tables. The music set the mood, Victor Vega, line chef, and sous chef prepared for the evening. Jordy changed from his white coat to his black coat, and showed the sous chef how to set-up the lobster gazpacho, of which I had the pleasure of eating.

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The lobster gazpacho served in a glass on a free-form red glass plate was gorgeous with its chili Serrano foam crown, garnished with one of Jordy's dehydrated slices of green apple. The foam added a bit of layered mild heat to the gazpacho, the apple added a delightful sweet/tartness, and the gazpacho was full of surprises of diced vegetables, with the ultimate finale of succulent lobster at the bottom of the glass. It was the perfect refreshing soup for a hot summer evening.



Showtime! The guests started arriving, the servers bustled about, the chefs were busy creating tapas, and I just stood back in awe. Each of the tapas presentations were delightful to the eye and delectable to the palate. I watched as the servers delivered Duck confit on baby watercress, Cucumber spaghetti with tropical fruits, Garlic soup croquettes, stuffed Zucchini flowers, and Marinated octopus to the tables, and the list kept growing all evening.

The last guests finished their desserts, and Jordy and I finally stopped to have dinner at his Chef's table. We ordered my favorite Zucchini flowers and Stuffed Squid, and enjoyed glasses of wine. Finally we relaxed. We changed into street clothes, and at 11:00 pm we left the restaurant. I had spent a thoroughly enjoyable, yet very long, hard day, and had come away with a new appreciation for the magicians in the kitchen – the often under-appreciated chefs. I would like to give an enormous thank you to Chef Jordy Lavanderos for allowing me to experience life as a chef for a day! I wish him much success with his new restaurant, Secretes, because this is one secret that is too good to keep to oneself.

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