

Michael Cimarusti, Providence and Connie & Ted's

Los Angeles, California

Tell us a bit about your career. How did you get into the work you do, and what are you doing currently?

I've been cooking ever since I was young. I started washing as a dishwasher, in a professional kitchen. I went to school for cooking at the Culinary Institute of America, way back when I was a much younger person, and then just started working my way through restaurants in New York and Paris, then here in Los Angeles. Eventually, in 2005, we opened Providence — we're now in our 18th year.

Ever since I can remember, I've been fishing. I guess I started when I was 4 or 5 years old. I was just immediately hooked. I would go pretty much every day. There was a little farm pond up the street from my house, and I'd just walk there after school and go fishing till dark or until I had something else to do. I still fish as often as I can. I think my love for fishing and wild fish in the ocean all just kind of culminated into an obsession with the fish.

What does responsible seafood mean to you? How does that fit into your business?

We try to source as much as we can locally. We use seafood from other countries and other states; but for the most part, we use domestic seafood and we do buy from people that we know. People that we trust. People that have similar objectives to my own, which is to say they understand that what we're dealing with is a finite resource. I buy from people that are as invested as we are in trying to preserve the wild fisheries that we still have here in this country and on this planet.

What's the most important thing you think your customers should know about the seafood they're eating?

That everything we bring into the house has been carefully considered for sourcing and its method of catch — everything. We really try to build a menu filled with- for the most part- zero input farm raised shellfish. Things like oysters, clams, and mussels. For the fin fish we choose to have on the menu, I always try to work with people I know and people that are harvesting sustainably ... [and] work with species that are coming from healthy fisheries. I try to be as informed as possible about everything that we buy.

Why is it important to you to take time out of your busy schedule to share your story and raise awareness about seafood responsibility?

I think it's important that people learn as much as they can about these kinds of things.

If you're going to eat out at restaurants, or if you're buying seafood to cook at home, it's good to make informed choices.

Making good seafood choices is equally as important as the choice you might make buying that electric car or putting solar panels on your roof. You can either use your power in the market to move the needle in a positive direction or in a different direction. ...

I believe most people would rather make choices that are better for this planet as a whole.

The more that organizations like Oceana talk about it, and the more people like myself talk about it, the better off everybody is.

What does the future of seafood look like to you?

First and foremost, I think that we as Americans need to understand the value of our wild fisheries — and not just in the monetary sense, but their value to our own ecosystems.

Every fish that's out there in the sea is a renewable resource, and it's up to us to manage that resource and harvest it to a point that works for ourselves, works for the market, and works for the fishery itself. We need to understand that, by having an appetite for certain species, we should ensure those species will be around for centuries to come.

What I'd love to see in this country is better choices when it comes to seafood that we actually allow to be imported into the country. I feel like we create unfair competition for American fishermen by flooding the market with inferior products farm raised in other countries.

What is your favorite seafood preparation?

I'm a sucker for raw oysters and raw clams. ... Oysters and clams from Massachusetts for some reason just taste better to me, maybe because it's one of my favorite places in the world.