

LONG ISLAND
PULSE

<http://bit.ly/2vqqYHB>

July 11, 2017

Step Into the Kitchen With Top Long Island Chef



Chef Guy Reuge grew up in the Normandy region of France and began studying to become a chef in 1966 at the age of 14. He opened [Restaurant Mirabelle](#) in 1983 and, like a fine wine, appears to only get better with age. People still flock to the Stony Brook staple for Reuge's refined French cuisine and white table cloth setting.

But when Reuge, who also serves as the executive chef of Lessing's-owned Sandbar, has a rare day off, he gets a taste of home on the North Fork.

"When I came to Long Island I rediscovered a bit of my childhood when I came to the [North Fork]," Reuge said. "The water, the open space with the fields surrounded by wood. It's exactly like where I grew up."

Reuge jumped at the chance to come out Sunday, Aug. 6 when *Pulse* hosts its first North Fork Summer Social, an afternoon of food, cocktails and wine, at [The Vineyards at Aquebogue](#). The Lessing's-owned venue, recently refurbished to include farm-wood tables for a more rustic feel, sits at the gateway to Long Island wine country and is home to a gorgeous vineyard view. When he's not enjoying the sights and bites, he'll be putting on a live cooking display. Though he wouldn't say what he'll be making, he gave a few hints on what to expect.

Tell me a bit about your background and why you decided to become a chef.

I've wanted to be a chef for quite a few years <laughs>. It started with my mother's cooking. I loved the feel of everything that had to do with food so I decided this was what I would do...I opened Mirabelle in 1983. I had it for 25 years and in 2008 I merged my business with the Lessing's Group. My restaurant was getting old and tired and I was getting tired as well. Then two years ago Steve Lessing decided to open another restaurant, a nice one in Cold Spring Harbor...Sandbar. That's been running for two years and is very successful.

What was your favorite dish your mother made?

My mother's cooking was simple and often included a rabbit stew with wild mushrooms or a roast of pork with dried fruits, and in the winter a boiled beef dish call "pot au feu." More often than not there was a fruit tart for dessert. [It had] cherries, apple or pears depending on the season.

Many of your [protégées](#) have gone on to become an executive chef themselves, like Tate Morris and Jonathan Contes of Mosaic in St. James. What do you think it is about you that makes you such a great teacher?

I'm not going to tell you I'm a great teacher. I love to teach. I love to make people understand the ABCs of cooking. To me, it's very important for a new cook to understand what they are doing. I hate asking a cook, "Why do you do it this way?" And they say, "The last chef I worked for did it that way." But that's not what I'm asking. I'm asking, "Why do you do it?" The reason is usually technical or scientific. I want people who work for me to be able to make decisions.

What advice would you give to aspiring cooks?

You need passion. I've seen a lot of people go to school for a couple years and they realize it's too hard, that it's not the type of life they want to live and they give up on it. I know this for a fact. When I was 19, I had been working for five years...I worked on the weekends when my friends were off. It starts to get to you. I decided to change careers. I took some classes to try to go into computers.

What got you back into the kitchen?

I took [classes] for six months and I was bored. I was missing the kitchen. I thought, "I'm going to do this. I love it. I don't care if I'm not off on the weekend. This is going to be life."

You'll be stepping out of the kitchen and interacting with clients when you put on a live cooking display at our North Fork Summer Social. What are those like for you?

I am much more comfortable with it than I used to be. I love the interaction with people. I always have them ask questions about what we are doing or things they struggle with when they cook.

When you have a chance to dine out somewhere else, where do you like to go?

For a long time, restaurants on Long Island weren't that great and I would go to New York City for dinner. I still like to go to New York but I also like to go to the East End, the North [Fork] or the South [Fork]. North Fork Table & Inn—I go once or twice a year. Eleven Madison Park just opened. My son-in-law works for them so I'm sure we will be going there. There's [also] Nick & Toni's.

What's your favorite food memory?

When you are younger, you worship some chefs and want to become like them. They are like a mantle for you. It's about the quality of food they make. You read about them, buy their cookbook. One of them was Freddy Girardet. I got to meet him. That was a great experience. I even remember the meal.

What was it?

We had sweet bread with cinnamon and a small gratin of turnips and roasted wild duck carved tableside. [For dessert], ice creams, sorbets were handmade, served tableside and scooped with one spoon. There were no less than 12 breads baked twice a day to choose from and a cart full of delicious sweets, candies, pastries and fruit compotes. It was so, so good.