



Photograph by Erik Kellar

## More than *“just desserts”*

An Interview with Chef Nathaniel Reid

If asked what goes into the making of a superb dessert or pastry creation, most of us would cite the quality of the ingredients, the critical timing involved, and the training and experience of the chef. When it comes to Chef Nathaniel Reid, Executive Pastry Chef of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, St. Louis, the main ingredient might well be imagination.

A graduate of Le Cordon Bleu in Paris with a Grand Diploma in Culinary and Pastry Arts, Chef Nathaniel's creations have won honors in competitions throughout the world. In June 2012, *Dessert Professional* magazine recognized him as one of the Top 10 Pastry Chefs in America. Other honors include his selection as winner of the U.S. Pastry Competition and Pastry

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**spotlight**



## Corporate compatibility

In his very entertaining book on American business in the 1960s (titled “The Go-Go Years”), financial historian John Brooks describes what was then called “merger mania.” For no sound reason, companies began to gobble each other up, even where their businesses were widely divergent. The so-called “conglomerates,” which included such names as Litton Industries, ITT, and Ling-Temco-Vought (LTV), gave multiple reasons for the acquisitions including “contracyclical strategy” and diversification. Of course, ultimately, the bubble burst, and most of the acquired companies were spun off—usually with huge losses.

More than any business strategy, the merger mania was the function of executive ego. Corporate heads subscribed to the doctrine then being articulated by the Harvard Business School and elsewhere that all businesses were fundamentally the same and that a talented executive was capable of effortlessly transitioning from one industry to another. As a result, the larger—and more bloated—their companies became, more status the conglomerateurs, as they were known, enjoyed. But only for a while.

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## food for thought

by David Rolston  
President and CEO

## on the menu

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# FOOD ALLERGIES

## An Update

The Fall 2007 issue of *Hot Topics* included a feature dealing with food allergies. Since that time, many positive developments have occurred, and we are pleased to bring you this update.

**A**mong both the general public and the foodservice industry, there is increasing awareness of the prevalence and the danger of food allergies. According to the latest estimates, some 15 million Americans are subject to a food allergy. The problems caused by allergic reactions to certain foods or substances in foods can range from severe discomfort to potentially fatal Anaphylaxis. As with other foodborne illnesses caused by bacteria, the first step in dealing with food allergies involves educating foodservice personnel on possible causes and symptoms.

### The Basics

Among the most common causes of allergic reactions are milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts (walnuts, cashews, etc.), fish, shellfish, soy, and wheat. It is important to note that allergies can be triggered not just by these foods themselves but by their presence in other more complex dishes. The use of a mixing vessel or a frying oil that has contained an allergen has the potential of triggering a reaction.

Common symptoms of an allergic reaction include:

- Stomach pain and vomiting
- Hives or swelling of the skin
- Loss of consciousness
- Trouble breathing or difficulty swallowing
- Skin becoming pale

Symptoms can appear individually or in combination and require immediate attention.

### Taking Action

As the problem of food allergies became better known, a number of organizations were created to assist allergy sufferers, the foodservice industry, and food producers. One of the first was FAAN (Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network), founded by Anne Muñoz-Furlong, the mother of a child diagnosed with allergies. Initiatives included broadening awareness of food allergies, encouraging more comprehensive labeling of foods and detailing not only ingredients but whether they were prepared in an environment where allergens were present, assisting the foodservice industry in dealing with the problem, and providing allergy sufferers with improved means of dealing with their conditions.

In 2012, FAAN and the Food Allergy Initiative, a like-minded organization, merged into a new organization called FARE (Food Allergy Research & Education). Through their website [www.foodallergy.org](http://www.foodallergy.org) and through aggressive initiatives, FARE has become the leading group for disseminating information regarding all aspects of the problem.

In 2013, the National Restaurant Association (NRA) worked with FARE in the development of the ServeSafe® Allergens Online Course (at [www.servsafe.com](http://www.servsafe.com)) designed to help front- and back-of-the-house employees better accommodate the growing number of guests with food allergies. The interactive course is an excellent resource for foodservice personnel at all levels of the industry. Additionally, the SafeFARE program (provided by FARE) offers a “Find a Restaurant” searchable database of allergy-aware restaurants. Restaurants employing individuals who completed the appropriate classes can add their restaurant to the database at [www.safefare.org](http://www.safefare.org).

Other initiatives include identification cards for those with allergies that can be presented at restaurants to inform staff of specific food sensitivities.

### Other Actions

For those foodservice operators who have not yet completed any of the above training programs, the following recommendations—originally developed by FAAN—are a critical starting point:

- **Take food allergies seriously.** They are a medical issue, and it is crucial that all employees treat them as such.
- **Assign responsibility.** Consider having each shift manager take charge of delicate orders on a case-by-case basis.
- **Share your information.** Present your customer with all the information you have about the dish they’re considering.
- **Ask the question.** Put a note on your menu or a sign in your restaurant asking patrons to advise you right away if they have food allergies.
- **Consider the benefits.** When customers with food allergies find a place where they feel safe, they frequently return as loyal customers.

### Positive Results

Thanks to the efforts of many involved people and organizations, the attention to the problem of food allergies has increased among food processors, marketers, the foodservice industry, and the public in general. However, more remains to be done. The combination of employee turnover and new people entering our industry daily make continuing education a mandatory practice.

We invite your involvement with, and your support of, the organizations that are helping us make a positive difference in the lives of those with food allergies. ■





# the big tickets



## TRADE EXHIBITIONS

### June 2014

- Manila Food & Beverage Expo  
**June 11 - 13**  
World Trade Center Metro Manila  
Manila, Philippines
- Foodservice at Retail Exchange  
**June 16 - 18**  
Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Center  
Dallas/Fort Worth, TX, USA  
Booth #402
- Fispal Food Service  
**June 24 - 27**  
Expo Center Norte  
São Paulo, Brazil

### July 2014

- Concession & Hospitality Expo  
**July 15 - 18**  
Denver Marriott City Center  
Denver, CO, USA  
Booth #317

### August 2014

- Hogatec  
**August 31 - September 3**  
Essen Exhibition Centre (Messe Essen)  
Essen, Germany

### September 2014

- Abastur  
**September 1 - 4**  
Centro Banamex  
Mexico City, Mexico
- Food & Hotel Thailand  
**September 10 - 13**  
Bangkok International Trade & Exhibition Centre  
Bangkok, Thailand

## A "jam session" with Chef Nathaniel Reid



Photograph by Erik Kollar



Photograph by Luis Alonso

Jams are one of the most versatile sweets. Most commonly used to flavor toast or muffins, they make excellent fillings for candies and combine well with ice creams, puddings, and other textures.

Known for his imaginative creations, Chef Nathaniel Reid has provided *Hot Topics* readers with one of his favorite recipes. Raspberry-Orange Blossom Water Jam includes easily available ingredients and can be prepared in about 30 minutes. When finished, we suggest that you exercise your creativity in how you use it.

With a starting point this flavorful, you can't possibly go wrong! ■

### Raspberry-Orange Blossom Water Jam

Preparation Time: 30 minutes

#### Ingredients:

- 13 oz. (370g) raspberries
- 12 oz. (340g) sugar
- 3.5 oz. (100g) spring water
- 20 drops orange blossom water



#### Instructions:

Boil the sugar and water together in a heavy bottomed saucepot. Add raspberries, and continue to boil on medium heat. When the raspberries start to break apart, strain the jam through a sieve to remove the seeds. Return the strained jam along with  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the seeds back to the saucepot. Cook the raspberry jam to 221°F (105°C) on a candy thermometer, stirring vigorously. Remove from the heat, and add the orange blossom water. Fill into clean and sterilized jam jars, and close with a lid immediately.





Photograph by Brishen Lee-Combs

Chef Nathaniel Reid's Scarlett Cake

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Chef of the Year 2010 in New York City (the country's most prestigious pastry championship). He has been selected as Guest Chef by the Cirque Culinaire at the Peninsula Hotel in Tokyo, Japan. In 2009, he placed first with the Best Chocolate/Confection U.S.A. at the PastryScoop.com Golden Scoop Awards and accepted third place at the International Patisserie Grand Prix in Tokyo as a member of Team U.S.A.

**Hot Topics:** What do you consider the most important attributes for what you do?

**Chef Nathaniel:** In the first place, I love all facets of my craft. Some chefs favor one particular aspect over another, but I like to do everything, including sweets (confections), pastry, ice cream, jams, and chocolates, among others. Also, I love the challenge of working with people to discover what will really please a particular client and then defining how to do it.

Once I've envisioned the end product, I can begin to create the elements that go into it. At the Ritz-Carlton, I have creative freedom in working toward that goal because we make most things from scratch.

**HT:** You studied in Europe and you've been active in competitions around the world. When it comes to the sweets and pastries, are tastes different from place to place?

**Chef N.:** Absolutely. For instance, in the Middle East, people prefer a sweeter dessert. In Asia, they like things less sweet than Americans do. It's similar with specific ingredients. Chestnut is very popular in France but not here. One of the exceptions to the rule is caramel. It's a very basic flavor and is accepted worldwide.

**HT:** Many of your creations, especially when it comes to competitions, are extremely imaginative. How do you go about developing them?

**Chef N.:** When it comes to something entirely new, I isolate myself from any other influence and create an idea that's both original and unique.

**HT:** Many of your creations look extremely complex. Do you require a large amount of equipment to work with?

**Chef N.:** I believe that a good chef works as simply as he or she can. Actually, most creations can be accomplished with a refrigerator or freezer, a mixer, and an oven and stove. Of course, specialty items do require more tools, but the art consists of making what is at heart simple look complex.

**HT:** When it comes to sweets and desserts, Americans have become extremely diet-conscious. Have these trends affected the way you work?

**Chef N.:** We're very much aware of current trends, but in reality, I've always favored

moderation and simple portions. Also, we use a lot of fruit for natural sweetness and can select from different sugars and other sweeteners to achieve the taste that our client expects without being unduly high in calorie content.

**HT:** You mentioned how much you enjoy working with individual clients. How do you decide on the right dessert for a banquet or other large gathering involving many people?

**Chef N.:** I work with clients to define the menu with respect to generational, ethnic or other preferences. We're also aware of any special dietary restrictions. Then I tailor the dessert to the meal. For instance, if the main course includes, say, spiced lamb or another strongly flavored dish, we will present a dessert that offers a pleasing contrast so as to provide a seamless transition to the entire dining experience.

**HT:** Your accomplishments range from the creation of award-winning confections based on themes ranging from book titles ("The Jungle Book") to the Winter Olympics to creating signature desserts, jams, and ice creams.

**What part of your background do you feel is responsible for encouraging such versatility?**

**Chef N.:** Other than my training with very good teachers, I would have to say that the time I spent in charge of a retail establishment really widened my horizons. I was able to talk to customers and get direct feedback about what they liked or didn't like. Every day, I could see what had sold and what hadn't. And, perhaps most important, I learned about balancing appearance and



Chef Nathaniel Reid with Hatco Glo-Ray™ Warmer pulling sugar for a sugar showpiece



presentation with flavor. No matter how attractive a sweet or dessert appears, it must appeal to the customer's taste as well as to the eyes. It's both a left-brained and a right-brained challenge.



Chef Nathaniel Reid's sugar showpiece — Borneo



Chef Nathaniel Reid's Kalea Tart

Photograph by Erik Kellar

**HT:** So, when all is said and done, what is your own personal dessert preference?

**Chef N.:** I really enjoy combining ice cream and sorbet together with fresh whipped cream. Contrasting textures and flavors are an exquisite mixture. I'm also partial to chocolate with caramelized hazelnuts. As much as I enjoy finding exotic combinations, sometimes the simple flavors are the best.

**HT:** There's an old saying, "Life is short. Eat dessert first." When it comes to Chef Nathaniel's creations, that is especially true. *Hot Topics* thanks Chef Nathaniel for sharing his thoughts with our readers.

*Readers living near to or planning a visit to St. Louis can enjoy Chef Nathaniel Reid's handiwork at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, St. Louis (100 Carondelet Plaza, phone 314-863-6300). You'll find his specialty jams and chocolate bars for sale in the lobby. Also, be sure to visit his website [www.chefnathanielreid.com](http://www.chefnathanielreid.com). ■*

*"food for thought" from page 1*

The reality is that successful businesses, especially mature ones, have unique attributes. Today, the term for that might be "corporate culture." As in a marriage, a successful merger or acquisition requires a mutual awareness of, and respect for, the unique properties inherent in each company. Failure to take this into account can result in the destruction of the elements that made the acquired company desirable in the first place. This can happen in a variety of ways, from alienating the key people whose ideas and experience are critical to success, to attempting to graft an expense structure that it is incapable of sustaining onto a smaller company.

Here at Hatco, we take pride in the fact that our people, past and present, have built a very individual corporate culture. Our approach and our value system are in no small part responsible for the success that we continue to enjoy and that we bring to our customers, employees, and associates. It is not, however, everyone's culture.

Even before we recently acquired Ovention, we were immediately aware of the fact that their people, products, and systems were different from us. So, rather than try to graft them onto Hatco, we saw fit to give them a great deal of independence and let them evolve on their own. While we overlap with them in some areas, as we did before the acquisition, our relationship is collegial and we take pride in our mutual success.

I believe one of the things that has made this possible has to do with the core Hatco value—and that is our sense of humor. This may come as a surprise, but you can't have a good sense of humor without humility. Much of what is funny comes from an appreciation of foibles and shortcomings—our own as well as others. Several people who've read our corporate history have mentioned that we included a chapter on products that were "a little less than the best." Other companies might have considered these to have been failures and

made no mention of them. But our people saw them for the learning experience they provided and weren't afraid to laugh.

The foodservice industry, as we've often commented, is one that is filled with risk. A change in menu, a new product introduction, the opening of another location, and partnering with or acquiring another company all carry the possibility of unforeseen consequences. By embracing the humility that opens a clearer vision of yourself, your company, and those you're working with, you will be much better able to come to a realistic assessment of the situation and to avoid the problems of ego that blinded the merger maniacs of the 1960s—and afterward.

Most importantly, if the worst happens, you will later be able to laugh about it.

*David Rolston*  
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product profile

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