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Greenbrier chef goes for culinary gold



Chris Dorst

**Greenbrier Executive Chef Richard Rosendale is a finalist in the Bocuse d'Or USA competition in New York in January.**

By Rosalie Earle

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Richard Rosendale demonstrates sautéing a lamb rib-eye in butter and garlic. The executive chef at The Greenbrier advises popping bulbs of garlic to release the flavor, but to leave the skins on to protect them from burning.

WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS, W.Va. -- Excuse the pun, but Chef Richard Rosendale has a lot on his plate.

The executive chef of The Greenbrier is training to compete in culinary finals that could lead to the most challenging culinary competition in the world.

Rosendale has hired a personal trainer to help him prepare. "I have to keep my endurance up. I have a big job here, my personal life and my training. I can't get sick."

Last month, Rosendale was selected as one of four finalists to compete in the Bocuse d'Or USA National Competition at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y. Should he win, he would advance to the 2013 Bocuse d'Or World Cuisine Competition, which has been described as the Super Bowl of cooking competition. "It's the pinnacle," Rosendale said.

He has attended the international competition in Lyon, France. He said bleachers are set up where fans can watch chefs from 24 countries compete. "They wear T-shirts, wave flags, have noisemakers and their faces painted. It's important that chefs can keep their focus. That's why I am training with loud music playing."

But like the football cliché, he has to concentrate on the next game -- the U.S. finals in late January.

Rosendale was selected by a panel of top U.S. chefs, such as Thomas Keller of the French Laundry in Napa Valley. He didn't have to cook a thing.

"They know I can cook," explained Rosendale. After all, he was certified last fall after a 130-hour cooking exam as a master chef by the Culinary Institute of America, only one of 66 in the country to hold that designation.

Instead, he was required to fill out pages of questions quizzing him on such issues as his philosophy on food, his style of cooking and his greatest influences. The panel gave him a list of ingredients, the main one being salmon, and he was instructed to create a full menu, including vegetables and garnishes.

He had to come up with drawings on how his menu would be presented on the huge silver platters used at Bocuse d'Or competition. The native of Uniontown, Pa., said was inspired by nearby Fallingwater, Frank Lloyd Wright's famous cantilevered house, and arranged his food in various levels and layers.

Although the salmon menu was hypothetical, the menu he prepares during January competition will be in real time and it won't be salmon. The finalists have been told they will make a cod dish and a chicken dish. And not just any cod or chicken, but specific brands.

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There is a closed kitchen on The Greenbrier grounds that Rosendale has commandeered to practice on his own time creating new recipes for cod and for chicken. Each dish will have three garnishes, intricate garnishes -- "it can't be like mashed potatoes," he said. In the coming months, Rosendale must practice preparing the recipes he has created within the 5 1/2-hour time limit. He'll be able to take one assistant, who has to be age 23 or younger.

Out of a possible 60 points, taste will account for 40 points; presentation 20 points.

At age 36, Rosendale has already competed in 50 culinary competitions. He was captain of the U.S. Culinary Olympic Team that won three gold medals, and was on the team that won the hot kitchen competition.

Rosendale said his interest in cooking began when he took home economics in high school. He didn't worry about being one of just two males in the class, as he also ran track, played ice hockey and was a running back and linebacker on the Uniontown High School football team. And he already had a girlfriend. He and his wife, Laura, have known each other since seventh grade and now have a 3-year-old son, Lawrence.

Once he set his sights on a culinary career, "there was no stopping me," Rosendale said. He enrolled in Westmoreland County Community College, earning an associate degree. Two days a week, he attended classes from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. and worked at Nemacolin Woodlands Resort in its apprentice program for three years.

Rosendale also put in three years at in the culinary apprentice program at The Greenbrier, where from 2001 to 2005 he was chef de cuisine in the Tavern Room. He later opened his own restaurant in Columbus, Ohio. He returned two years ago, and now oversees 135 to 140 chefs and about 90 kitchen workers, a few months after Jim Justice bought the 200-year-old resort.

"Jim Justice has effused an energy back into the place," Rosendale said.

And with Justice's ownership came his 40-acre farm.

"The farm's a chef's dream," Rosendale said, pointing out that The Greenbrier restaurants have access to an abundance and a variety of produce from late spring to fall. The Greenbrier Cattle Farm supplies limousin beef for the hotel's Prime 44 restaurant. The Greenbrier even has its own smokehouse to cure sausages and hams.

Rosendale is considering showcasing the resort by using some of its products such as preserves of roasted peppers from the farm in his competition recipes.

He said he likes the competitions -- not to collect medals, but because they make him committed to practicing and honing his skills. He brings his success and knowledge back to The Greenbrier -- to its dining room and restaurants -- where, he points out, every day the guests are the culinary judges.