



Eric Hammond
Executive Chef: Coco Pazzo Cafe
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Eric Hammond is a daunting presence with his muscular stature and serious look. He firmly believes in eating healthy, working out, spending time with his family...and the simplicity and style of Tuscan cuisine. When he talks about any of these, he warms like the Tuscan sun and the words flow freely.

Eric grew up in New York City and for many years, pursued a career in the music business. Realizing he needed a break, he vacationed in Scandinavia. It was on the frozen coast of Helsinki that he reached a decision that would change the direction of his life. He wanted to become a chef.

Eric graduated first in his class from the French Culinary Institute in New York City in 1997. He trained with notable chefs Jacques Pepin, Andre Soltner, and the chef he calls his mentor, Alain Sailhac. He worked at some of New York's finest restaurants including La Colombe d'Or, L'Ecole and Campagna. In 2001 Eric moved to Chicago to become executive chef of Coco Pazzo Café. Wishing to meld his Italian culinary background with his experience in fine dining, Eric joined Va Pensiero in 2004. And, in 2008 he returned to Coco Pazzo Café as Executive Chef.

Eric says, "Tuscan cuisine is food the way it should be, simple, honest and full of flavor". And with a wink, says it's all in the preparation. His favorite ingredients include pork, ramps and octopus because of their versatility and flavor. He believes the freshness of ingredients is the key to authentic Tuscan flavor. Everyday, Eric thrives on preparing the flavors of Tuscany for the patrons of Coco Pazzo Café. Like the cuisine he creates, Eric is simplicity with style.