

As Seen In January 2008

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Flavor Master

Henry Gonzalez, chef and owner of Spaggi's in Upland, explains what led him to his career.

Henry Gonzalez may have the seduction of the sea to thank for his career as a professional chef and owner of Spaggi's in Upland.

When he was nine, his older brother opted for a day at the beach instead of a day of washing dishes in the restaurant where their father, Eoro, worked as a chef. Getting word that big brother had abandoned ship, Henry grabbed his white shirt and black pants and slipped into the back of the restaurant, taking his brother's place in the busy kitchen at lunchtime.

Having waited patiently for his chance to work alongside his dad, Henry kept up the pace and no one seemed to notice the wrong Gonzalez boy was on board—until the lunch crowd died down.

"When my dad discovered it was me, he told me to go home," Henry recalls. But the owner of the restaurant intervened.

"God bless him, let him stay," Henry recalls her saying, noting that while kids weren't really supposed to be working, he was allowed to help with dishwashing.

"It became something they used against me—if I didn't make good grades, I didn't get to work," he laughs.

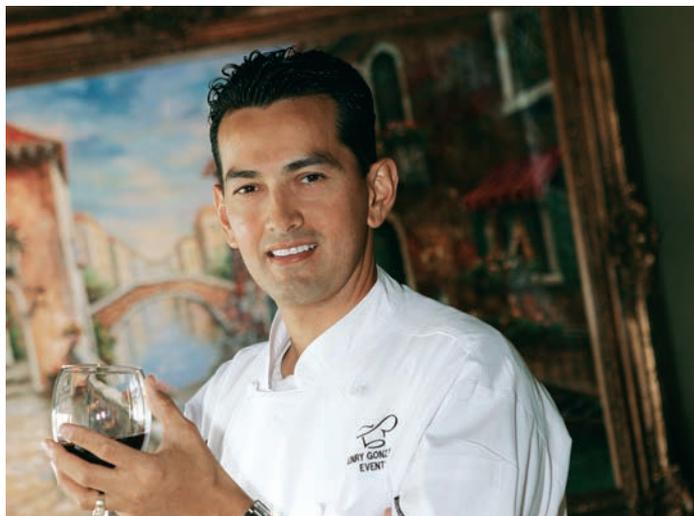
As an adult, Gonzalez worked in Rosa's in Baldwin Park where he was quickly moved to head chef. He also attended the L.A. Culinary Institute (the forerunner of the California School of Culinary Arts in Pasadena) under chef Raymond Hofmeister, and later worked at Rosa's in Ontario before opening Spaggi's where he has a team of seven chefs.

The trend this year will be more organic food and lighter fare on the menu to keep up with the health-conscious desires of a growing number of customers.

"People like to go out and eat, but they want to stick to their healthy eating habits. So we have some heart-healthy entrées that are low in fat," he says.

Choosing his own favorite dish would be "like asking a parent to choose between his children. I like them all," he says.

BY TAMMY MINN



PHOTOGRAPHY: PRISCILLA IEZZI