

PROVIDENCE ^(/) MONTHLY

IN THE KITCHEN

Champe Speidel Is a Cut Above

The owner of Persimmon describes his technique, his butchering, and his love for fine details

Posted March 21, 2018



(/uploads/original/20180316-141748-phpvp0AgQ.jpg)

PHOTO BY ROBERT ISENBERG

By Robert Isenberg

*On paper, Champe Speidel is a rock star: He owns **Persimmon Restaurant** (<http://www.PersimmonRI.com>) on the East Side of Providence with his wife Lisa. He was a James Beard semifinalist for six years running. He even owned his own butcher shop in Barrington, Persimmon Provisions, before closing it in January. Raised in Florida, Speidel came to Providence in 1998 to study at Johnson & Wales, and he's drawn national attention for his meticulous dishes. But he can also be easygoing and dryly funny, speaking in the contemplative murmur of Marlon Brando. We sat down with Speidel to talk about the twists and turns of his culinary career.*

How did you get into cooking?

When I was young, I worked for a few years as a butcher. I knew my way around meat, how to sell it, how to market it. But I didn't know anything about cooking. My mother is a wonderful cook, and well trained. She never showed us a thing, not even making toast, but I read her cookbooks, and I fell in love. I thought, "Maybe I should go to school for this." I packed all my stuff up in a U-Haul, and I drove up from Florida, and I never looked back. I lived like a monk for three years, and I worked in as many restaurants in Providence as possible.

How did you cut your teeth in the local restaurant scene?

I had paid my dues in the meat industry. I had worked for some hardcore rednecks – certifiable. But I didn't know kitchen culture, so I had to learn that the hard way. I finished school and contemplated going back to Florida, but then I got a job at Gracie's, on Federal Hill. Within three weeks, the chef just happened to leave. He went to a wedding and never came back. The owners were like, "Hey, can you run the restaurant?" So I did. I took all the time in the world to do things properly. I really love those fussy plates, what they used to call "fine dining."

A lot of critics have noted your attention to detail.

When I was a kid, I wanted to be a graphic artist. I love the placement, and that's what drew me to food. You know when something looks right. Persimmon was born in 2005, in Bristol. There were only 37 seats. I didn't plan to be some kind of well-known chef. We just wanted to focus on the hospitality – the food and the service.

Tell me about Persimmon Provisions.

So in 2010, I started getting restless. We had a nice rhythm [at the restaurant], but we felt like we were flattening out. We were reading about people going back to the small-town butcher. We had relationships with farmers and livestock producers. So I talked to my wife and said, "What if we opened a butcher shop?" We opened it, and for five years, we were gangbusters.

Why did you decide to close the shop?

We had two guys who helped me open [the butcher shop], and they were awesome. They could sell a rack of ribs to anyone. But they moved on, and there was no one to fill their shoes. The restaurant was getting busier. We were getting some national recognition. And the shop just fell to the wayside. I loved the shop, the customers were great, but it started to be this burden. So when our lease was up, we said, "It's been five years. It's been a good run." I wanted to focus more on [Persimmon]. I have a great crew. I only work with people who are obviously happy.

Persimmon (<http://www.PersimmonRI.com>)

99 Hope Street • 432-7422

 Tweet  Share 235  Share

OTHER ITEMS THAT MAY INTEREST YOU

The World in a Glass (</stories/the-world-in-a-glass,26846>)

Shop Local? There's an App for That (</stories/shop-local-theres-an-app-for-that,26845>)

The Knickerbocker's New Jam (</stories/the-knickerbockers-new-jam,26844>)

Rocco's Bistro Carves the Right Niche (</stories/roccos-bistro-carves-the-right-niche,26843>)

Comments

[Report an inappropriate comment \(/report_item.html?sub_id=26716&referring_url=%2Fstories%2Fchampe-speidel-is-a-cut-above%2C26716\)](/report_item.html?sub_id=26716&referring_url=%2Fstories%2Fchampe-speidel-is-a-cut-above%2C26716)





(http://providenceonline.ads.communityq.com/www/delivery/ck.php?

oaparams=2_bannerid=580_zoneid=102_cb=77ce366705_oadest=http%3A%2F%2Frifac.com%2F)



(http://providenceonline.ads.communityq.com/www/delivery/ck.php?

oaparams=2_bannerid=591_zoneid=102_cb=32570b338e_oadest=http%3A%2F%2Fbit.ly%2FMakeSchoolVacationRock)



(http://providenceonline.ads.communityq.com/www/delivery/ck.php?

oaparams=2_bannerid=591_zoneid=102_cb=32570b338e_oadest=http%3A%2F%2Fbit.ly%2FMakeSchoolVacationRock)



(http://providenceonline.ads.communityq.com/www/delivery/ck.php?

oaparams=2_bannerid=584_zoneid=102_cb=223f54721c_oadest=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.debatecamp.com%2Fprovidence)

learners today ✨ leaders tomorrow



Admissions Events, 6:00 - 7:00 pm

Tuesday, April 10: Middle School, Grades 5-8

Wednesday, April 11: Kindergarten

Wednesday, April 25: Lower School, Grades 1-4

St. Michael's Country Day School

(<http://providenceonline.ads.communityq.com/www/delivery/ck.php?>

oaparams=2__bannerid=586__zoneid=102__cb=5a1eb2c90c__oadest=http%3A%2F%2Fsmcads.org%2Fadmissions-events%2F)

learners today ✨ leaders tomorrow



Admissions Events, 6:00 - 7:00 pm

Tuesday, April 10: Middle School, Grades 5-8

Wednesday, April 11: Kindergarten

Wednesday, April 25: Lower School, Grades 1-4

St. Michael's Country Day School

(<http://providenceonline.ads.communityq.com/www/delivery/ck.php?>

oaparams=2__bannerid=586__zoneid=102__cb=5a1eb2c90c__oadest=http%3A%2F%2Fsmcads.org%2Fadmissions-events%2F)



(<http://providenceonline.ads.communityq.com/www/delivery/ck.php?>

oaparams=2__bannerid=587__zoneid=102__cb=c82020da0e__oadest=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.mosesbrown.org%2Fschool%2Fcamps%2F)



(<http://providenceonline.ads.communityq.com/www/delivery/ck.php?>

oaparams=2__bannerid=587__zoneid=102__cb=47006fd2c6__oadest=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.mosesbrown.org%2Fschool%2Fcamps%2F)



(<http://providenceonline.ads.communityq.com/www/delivery/ck.php?>

oaparams=2__bannerid=587__zoneid=102__cb=47006fd2c6__oadest=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.mosesbrown.org%2Fschool%2Fcamps%2F

TONY
BENNETT
In Concert

With very special guest
ANTONIA
BENNETT

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 11 AT 7:30P

PROVIDENCE PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

BUY TICKETS

(<http://providenceonline.ads.communityq.com/www/delivery/ck.php?>

oaparams=2__bannerid=590__zoneid=101__cb=15d45dd4c2__oadest=https%3A%2F%2Fgoo.gl%2Ff2ioZ7)



(<http://providenceonline.ads.communityq.com/www/delivery/ck.php?>



oaparams=2_bannerid=588_zoneid=101_cb=bfe20369f6_oadest=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.provlib.org%2Fprograms-exhibitions%2F)



(<http://providenceonline.ads.communityq.com/www/delivery/ck.php?>



COVER STORY



21 Things to Do With Your Kids in Providence... Before They Grow Up (/stories/21-things-to-do-with-your-kids-in-providence-before-they-grow-up,26053)

From ice skating to cinema to getting hands on with science

Tweets by @PVDMonthly

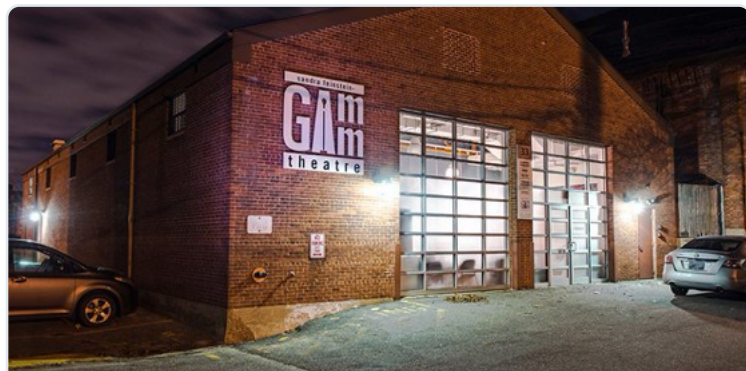


Providence Monthly

@PVDMonthly



The Gamm prepares for an exciting new stage in Warwick, but not without a bittersweet last bow in their hometown: ow.ly/jKXS30jibHi



[Embed](#)

[View on Twitter](#)

FEATURE



Newport and Chill (/stories/newport-and-chill,26052)

A guide to off-season fun in the City by the Sea

14 Wicked Romantic Things to do in RI (/stories/14-wicked-romantic-things-to-do-in-ri,26229)

From candlelit dinners to 80's dance parties and more this Valentine's Day



© 2018, PROVIDENCE MEDIA · 1070 MAIN STREET, SUITE 302 · PAWTUCKET, RI 02860 · 401-305-3391
POWERED BY CREATIVE CIRCLE MEDIA SOLUTIONS ([HTTP://CREATIVECIRCLEMEDIA.COM](http://creativecirclemedia.com))