



The Sweet Life

Chef Andrew Manchester knows his way around the kitchen. From sourdough bread to high-end scones, this Tennessean and Capitol Grille pastry chef can satisfy any sweet tooth. TEXT Andrew Abernathy | PHOTOGRAPHY Courtesy of Capitol Grille

Andrew Manchester, executive pastry chef at Nashville's Capitol Grille at the Hermitage Hotel, didn't always plan on making his career in the kitchen. In fact, this Georgia native originally planned to follow in his father's footsteps and pursue a career in medicine before realizing it was his mother's love of baking that evoked his true calling. Today, more than 10 years after enrolling in his first culinary course, the 31-year-old artisan of tempting confections is feeling his career truly take off as he works around the clock—sometimes more than 80 hours a week—to satisfy sweet-lovers' cravings in Tennessee's capital city.

"Growing up, my mother was always in the kitchen," Manchester says. "She did everything from scratch—even ground the wheat for her bread. She learned to cook from my great grandmother who was a right-off-the-boat German immigrant. So I guess I kind of grew up appreciating the importance of cooking and good food."

However, this chef notes that no one is simply born into the baking profession; it has taken a lot of work to get where he is today. Manchester's first kitchen job was at a pizzeria in college, but he learned the pastry craft working at the Four Seasons in Atlanta, where, as he views it, he truly became a chef. "I was working in the kitchen and taking culinary classes at the Arts Institute, when my boss told me that I should stop wasting my time and get in the

kitchen to learn." So that's just what he's done the past decade.

And why did he choose pastries over other specialties? The answer is simpler than you might expect.

"Hot food is...well, hot," he says. "Seriously I see guys working on the line sweating and think to myself, 'man, what I'm doing over here is a whole lot more fun.'"

While Manchester has a special love for sourdough bread recipes (of which he claims to be most proud), ensuring that the dessert menu is full of creative options requires a wide range. On any given day he could be working on a batch of French macaroons, citrus scones with Devonshire cream, an assortment of tea cakes, baked apples or crème brûlée. Quite honestly, he could be preparing just about anything with sugar, he points out. Although high volume doesn't get this chef out of the detail work; it's the garnishes that separate the good desserts from the great ones. "Whether it's just a piece of chocolate or gold leaf or tiny spirals of sugar, I think the customer takes notice," he says. "Even if I'm doing chocolates on a buffet I'll try and garnish at least every other one."

While the restaurant business (especially in hotels), is more a lifestyle than a day job for Manchester, he wouldn't trade in his chef's coat for anything—even when the dinner rush gets out of hand. "When working in the kitchen, it's easy to really get in the moment, and when things are busy, this can re-

ally be a rush," he says. "I have a room service menu with four dessert items, a lunch menu with five and a dinner menu with six, we do banquets, we do bread service, we do it all."

Although you might expect the diet of a pastry chef to be loaded with sugar and covered in chocolate, working in cocoa, sugar and dough doesn't always incite a sweet tooth. "I taste everything to make sure it's what it should be," he says. "But sometimes when I get home at the end of the day all I want is salt, so I'll grab a bag of popcorn."

The city of Nashville holds a special appeal for Manchester. It's large enough to have a vibrant culture and night life, but easy to escape as well. "Thirty minutes in the car and I can be hiking or canoeing," he says. "I really like the outdoors. If I had to choose something to be doing other than cooking it would be just being outdoors."

However, working in an upscale hotel is a plus in Manchester's book as well—no matter how busy it can get. Founded in 1910, the Hermitage Hotel—renovated for \$17 million in 2003—was initially named after President Andrew Jackson's Hermitage estate and today this five-star hotel houses the Capitol Grille, known for its upscale southern cuisine. The building's "beaux-designed" architecture is accented by features such as Italian sienna marble, Russian walnut panels, Persian rugs and a stained-glass vaulted ceiling which stands over the building, where a number of influential leaders and

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groups have worked and stayed, including six former presidents, the 1914 National American Women's Suffrage Association's National Convention, prominent actors, gangsters and the longest-running hotel musical act on the books: The Francis Craig Orchestra.

As for the present, this chef is content to keep Capitol Grille customers happy with their choice of pastries, but one day he'd like to be his own boss. "The dream is to own your own, upscale bakery," he says. "But I'm good at what I do now. To come into the kitchen every day and joke and have fun with good people around good food all day is great. Being in the kitchen...It's a rush."

Citrus Scones

Recipe Courtesy of Chef Andrew Manchester, Capitol Grille

2 (6 oz.) packages all-purpose flour
2.5 oz granulated sugar
1 orange, zested
1 lemon, zested
2 tsp. baking powder
2 tsp. baking soda
pinch salt
2 sticks cold unsalted butter
1 c. plus 2 Tbsp. buttermilk
2 eggs
1 Tbsp. vanilla extract, preferably pure

1. Combine all dry ingredients including zest. Cut butter into 1/2 inch cubes and add to dry ingredients.
2. In a mixer with a paddle attachment cut butter until it is pea-sized. Add all buttermilk, eggs and vanilla. Mix until just combined.
3. Turn out onto a floured surface, roll to desired thickness and cut into desired shapes such as triangles (Cook's note: You can do any shape you like. Also, the zest can be omitted and nuts, dried fruit like cranberries, cherries or currants can be added.)
4. Let scones rest for 20 minutes in the freezer or until needed. They keep well in the freezer for a couple weeks if stored properly.
5. Before baking at 350 ° for 12-15 minutes, egg wash scones and sprinkle with sugar such as turbinado or any sanding sugar.

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