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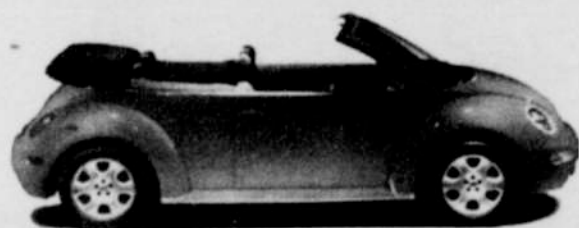
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NORTHWEST news

**THE FLAVOR
OF CAPRIAL'S BISTRO**

Executive chef sets the taste for popular gourmet dining

by Jaymee R. Cuti

Mark Dowers, executive chef for Caprial's Bistro, is responsible for the smoothness of the sauces, the complexity of the soups and even the harmonious flavors of the accompaniments to his main courses.

Dowers has worked at Caprial's Bistro for 11 years. The bistro has existed for 13. The flavor associated with the upscale gourmet restaurant in Southeast Portland's Sellwood neighborhood is Dowers' own taste and talent.

"I usually refer to it as worldly cuisine using seasonal and local ingredients as much as possible," said Dowers, who is gay.

Dowers graduated from Horst Mager Culinary Institute, which is now Western Culinary Institute.

"That's where I got my formal training. The

As the head chef, Dowers has the reputation of being cool as a cucumber in his bustling kitchen.

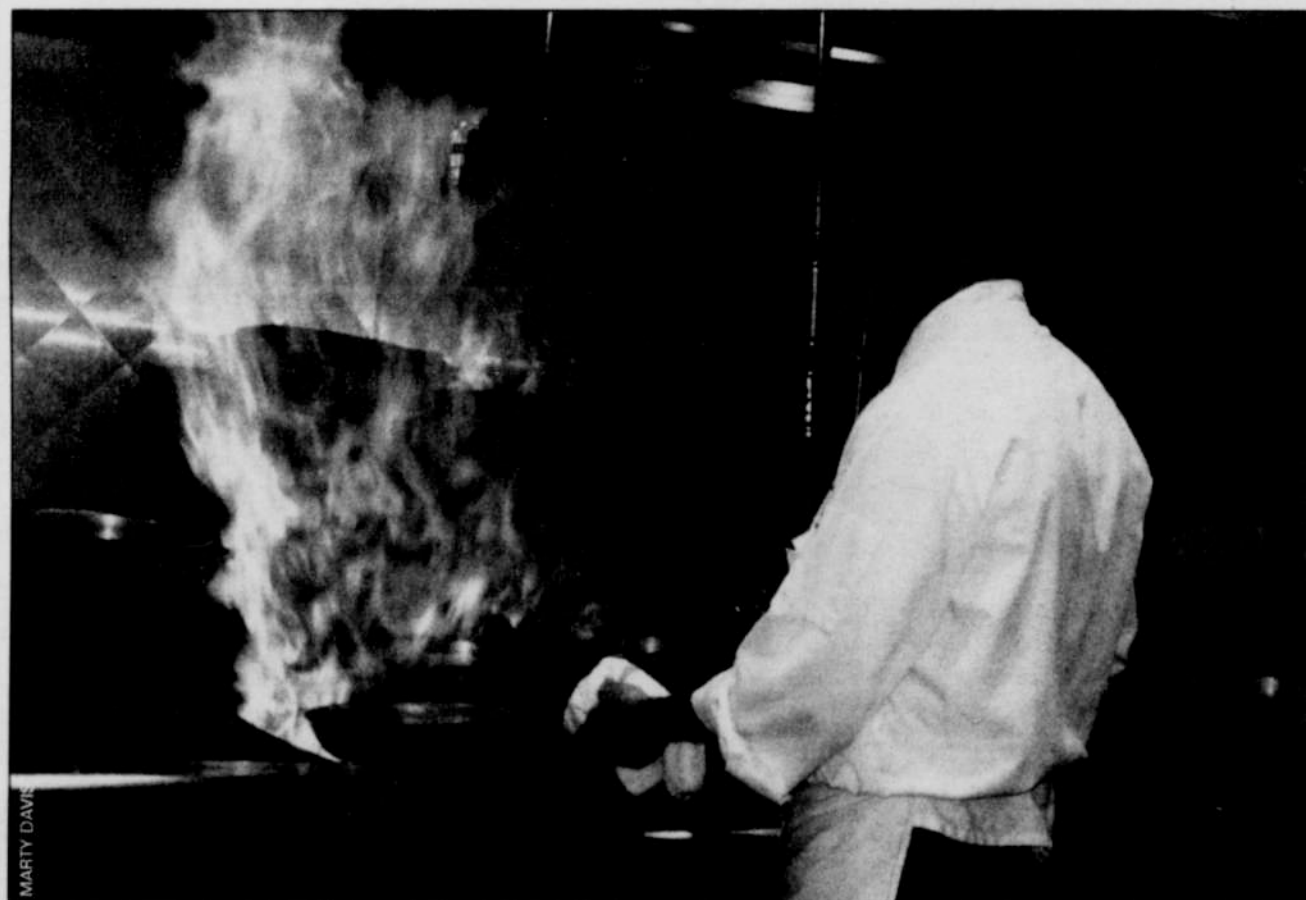
"He's sort of the steady force in the restaurant," said Caprial Pence, restaurant namesake and co-owner.

Dowers' calm manner has been invaluable in the restaurant, according to Doyle.

"He never talks down to you, and if you're not well informed, he'll educate you. He would never ask you to do something he wouldn't do himself," said Doyle.

Dowers said that training in European cuisine often meant suffering humiliation from his instructors. He vowed to leave the attitude out of his kitchen.

"It's all about really good communication skills, and I don't believe I have to be mean or humiliating to get my ideas across," he said. "My



Dowers makes flames in creating an entree at the Portland gourmet restaurant.

rest is from exposure and experience," said Dowers, a former chef at Eddie Lee's Bistro of Portland's culinary past.

Dowers says he's been cooking for as long as he could reach the stove and attributes his natural talent to his mother.

His style has also been shaped by travels to Indonesia, France and Italy and collaboration with a tightly knit group of foodies with whom he has regular dinner parties.

"I always try to get invited to Mark's house for dinner," said Loris Doyle, a former bar manager at Caprial's Bistro. "He's got a great group of friends, good wine to drink, lots to talk about and good food. You can't go wrong."

Dowers often helped Doyle design signature drinks to accompany his entrees.

"He informs me about what fresh produce is in season, and he has a very refined palate," said Doyle. "Herbal or Asian flair cocktails work really well with Mark's menu."

Doyle attributed Dowers' professional guidance to her ascension from busser to hostess to server to bar manager.

"I've learned a lot from Mark, and that's helped me get ahead," she said.

personality is on the mellow side, which is not typical for a head chef."

Dowers' delicacies have earned a reputation among Caprial's regulars. He has been lauded for seared duck with black bean glaze and Chinese mustard vinaigrette. However, Dowers is chiefly known as a *saucier*.

"Sauces and soups are my two main signature dishes," said Dowers, who has a list of people to call when he cooks a batch of Mark's Gumbo, as it's modestly listed on the menu.

In fact, Dowers landed his position at the bistro by dazzling Pence and her co-owner husband, John, with squash bisque with chorizo sausage and cinnamon croutons.

"We knew we had a keeper," said Pence. "I never worry about the food."

Together, she and Dowers penned a cookbook titled *Caprial's Soups & Sandwiches*.

"It's a great little book. It sold pretty well. It's out of print, but Powell's still has copies," said Dowers.

The Pencés have launched their love of unfussy food into a culinary empire with the restaurant and a public television cooking show. They recently closed a cooking school and