

LODGING F&B

who's who

F&B leaders



Clark Wolf, discussing a restaurant redo or a new restaurant, grows enthusiastic simply describing a tablecloth, saltshaker, or special tabletop item he just discovered. "I love the whole project, and the opportunity to make it special and convey a strong message," he says. "Tabletop is a major part of it."

Wolf speaks in the fast-paced language of someone who has a million ideas and knows how to implement them. As a major player in the freestanding restaurant and hotel market, Wolf is the inspirational force behind a host of well-known restaurants and hotels including Mandalay Bay Casino & Resort, Loews Hotels and Resorts, the Canal House and Grand Bar at the Soho Grand, and Church Bar at the Tribeca Grand Hotel.

A new project includes the Loews Royal Pacific Resort in Orlando, scheduled to open next year. Wolf plans to design the property's dining areas to resemble the type of luxury restaurants found only on cruise ships. He hopes to find materials that have the look he is trying to achieve without being the most extravagant of purchases. With this project, for example, he is using hollowware instead of significantly more expensive silver.

Wolf did not simply fall into his current position. First, and maybe foremost, he earned his place at the food table by being knowledgeable about all aspects of the industry, which makes it easier for him to share his talent for developing new concepts. He was mentored by many of the nation's culinary stars, such as cookbook author Marian Cunningham, executive chef/owner of Berkeley, California's famous Chez Panisse restaurant, Alice Waters, and maybe most significantly, James Beard.

Wolf's climb up the culinary ladder started with his grandparents, who grew fruit and made fresh cheese and introduced him to exceptional products. His interest in the field was sparked by an advertisement in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which read, "You should have a Dungeness crab freshly steamed on this newspaper, and eat it with a bottle of Chenin Blanc." For Wolf, this simple, albeit unusual, suggestion was "an entire cultural experience and a true turning point" that compelled him to pursue the field of restaurant design.

Each project Wolf tackles starts with a well-outlined scheme. With a slim staff of four and occasional outside help, he works with chefs to create the language of the menu and does the overall design, uniform review, and all aspects of tabletop. (He loves tabletop. "It allows the final emotional adjustment. If the room is too grand, flatware can bring it to earth. Tabletop is the adjustment knob.")

Title: President, Clark Wolf Company, a New York City-based food and restaurant consultancy

Education: B.A., English literature, San Francisco State University

Greatest accomplishment: Some early projects received top media praise, such as the Sign of the Dove restaurant, which earned a three-star *New York Times* rating. The Post House at the Lowell Hotel was the most satisfying review, and a steak house at a Relais Chateaux property earned top recognition. "I am also very proud of the Library at the Regency Hotel and am incredibly proud of the department I helped redefine at New York University, the nutrition and food studies program."

Toughest challenge: "Getting people to understand cross-disciplinary work. It is very tricky to be taken seriously on my own terms."

These days, Wolf has a new sense of confidence in his work. "The more I listen to myself, the less trouble there is for all," he says. "My job is to tell the truth as a consultant, and I have to be honest with myself, too."

—Judy Liberson