



FOOD FANATIC

Restaurateur redefines Jackson dining scene

WORDS Kristen Pope | IMAGES Jeff Buydos

WHEN GAVIN FINE WAS GROWING UP IN CHICAGO, HE WAS FANATIC ABOUT TWO THINGS: CHICAGO SPORTS TEAMS—THE CUBS AND BULLS TO BE EXACT—AND FOOD.

Mealtime was an important part of family life, and Fine and his parents and two brothers went out to eat often.

“I loved the entertainment of food and the entertainment of a restaurant,” he says. “It enamored me as a little child.”

Fine was so enamored with food that his mother took him to “mommy and me” cooking classes—and he was almost always the only boy in the class.

Even family vacations were all about food for young Fine. His mother had her sons write in journals on these excursions, and his entries were chronicles of the best fries, burgers, and marsala he could find. “All my journals were all about food,” Fine recalls.



In high school, Fine and his friends started a supper club, assembling a menu and cooking for a crowd. He continued this tradition in college while at Cornell University’s Hotel and Restaurant Management School, where he was recruited to play soccer.

But a college semester in Spain opened his eyes to another way of life.

“It was life changing,” he says. “I loved the European way of eating, of drinking, of life. I loved the slow pace of life and was enamored with the culture and people.”

After graduation, Fine wanted to join Teach for America but, after missing an application deadline, he instead decided to look for a new adventure. So he and a friend drove his Buick LeSabre to Jackson.

“There’s nothing better than breaking bread with people.”

– Gavin Fine

Before he made the drive out, he wrote to the newly-opened Snake River Grill inquiring if they had a management rotation program available. He received a response saying they didn’t really do that sort of thing, but he was welcome to come out and work in the restaurant. So he went to work in the restaurant’s kitchen while balancing two other jobs as a barista and babysitter.

But even when cash was tight, Fine and his friends made an event of eating, saving up to dine at one of Jackson’s nicer restaurants, such as Blue Lion or Range, once a month or so.

After a time working at Snake River Grill, Fine took a sabbatical from Jackson and went to Italy and France, working in vineyards and at wine festivals. He also became trained as a sommelier.

He came back to Jackson with images of bistros and trattorias swirling in his mind, and he soon wrote a business plan for a local restaurant with a bistro concept. Working with Roger Freedman from Snake River Grill, Fine launched Rendezvous Bistro in 2001.

Fine and Freedman now have five local restaurants: Rendezvous Bistro, Il Villaggio Osteria, The Kitchen, Bin22, and Roadhouse Brewing Co. Pub & Eatery, in addition to a catering company and Teton Village’s Bodega—modeled after an Italian gas station. All are part of the Fine Dining Restaurant Group.

His latest addition is a new culinary complex on Gregory Lane that includes ice cream production facilities for Cream + Sugar, a sausage-making plant for Bovine + Swine, a catering kitchen, and a new Roadhouse Brewing production facility and tap room.

All these businesses keep Fine busy, but when he’s not working, he spends time with his wife, Lea, and their two young sons. For him, the restaurant business is all about family and connections.

“There’s nothing better than breaking bread with people,” he says. ■

