



CHEF FERNANDO OCAMPO



COMPANY: Fernando Ocampo, LLC

EDUCATION: Metropolitan State College of Denver – Double Major in Hospitality Management and Spanish. Art Institute of Colorado – Associate of Applied Science Degree in Culinary Arts.

It's a scene right out of a Norman Rockwell painting: little 5-year-old Fernando Ocampo wobbling, atop a small stool, in a picturesque kitchen and stretching just enough to get his spoon into a steamy pot on the stovetop – his grandma watching with love and a warm smile.

"Yeah, one of my fondest memories, for sure," Fernando says. "I was raised by my mother and my grandmother. But when mom had to be at work, I spent a lot of time with grandma in the kitchen. I have to give her credit because she's the one who showed me that cooking wasn't hard but something really fun."

Fernando has been having fun ever since. In fact, his formal education started early. He recalls a few cooking classes in his kindergarten.

"We had a garden just outside that we took care of, and when some vegetables were ready to pick, we'd take them to the kitchen and cook with them."

Fernando admits the memories are a little vague now. "I don't remember everything we did with the vegetables, but one thing's for sure: I remember always being super excited when we had a day in the kitchen. I'd go home and share what we did with grandma and when I could, I'd get my hands dirty in her kitchen too."

He also remembers watching a cooking show on TV for ideas for new dishes. "My brother made for the perfect guinea pig," he says with a laugh.

Fernando says when he was 10-years-old, his grandma died. "That's when I found myself cooking whenever I could. When mom was out working, I'd always have dinner ready for her when she got home."

Fernando has gone on to lay an impressive path of experience. He's served as a chef at La Sandia Mexican Kitchen, worked as a sous chef with Balfour Senior Living, was the back captain for Epicurean Catering, served as assistant pastry chef for Club Med in Port St. Luci, Fla. and handled sous chef responsibilities for the Hilltop Café in Golden, Colo.

At one point in his career, Fernando worked for a chef who was opening several restaurants. "As each one opened, I'd always train the cooks, some had experience and some didn't. So I found myself as both a chef and teacher. I was just doing my job without realizing that sharing the passion can mean more than the training itself. Somehow, I was also able to create a team out of complete strangers that worked towards the same goal."

Fernando's fervor for food has only grown over the years. "I'm passionate about food because it matters, you are what you eat. We've been given this great opportunity to teach children how to nourish themselves the right way. It's a true blessing for me to use my passion for food as a tool for change."

A chef I used to work with told me to love what I did and that I'd never have to work another day in my life. At this point in my career, I couldn't agree more with that. This is work with a greater purpose." 🍌



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