

New York
RESIDENT

*What the Professionals Buy
at the Greenmarket*

October 23, 2007-Dining

By Sylvie Bigar



It's a rainy Wednesday morning in October and the only patch of brightness is chef Philippe Bertineau's slick red rain jacket at the corner of 17th Street and Park Avenue. But then he starts walking towards the Union Square Market and the colors of the fall explode around him.

Two or three times a week, Bertineau, the executive chef at Payard Pâtisserie and Bistro on Lexington Avenue, leaves the Lower East Side apartment he shares with his wife Odette Fada, executive chef at San Domenico on Central Park South, to shop, on his own, at the Greenmarket. In this era of celebrity chefs that never seem to stay put for long, Bertineau is an oddity for steadiness. Since 1993, this lanky young man with wide blue eyes has been helping the bistro tucked behind the chocolate éclairs, the opera cakes and the croissants Payard is best known for.

Born on a farm in the Poitou-Charentes region of France, Bertineau was eating locally long before it became trendy. In the kitchen of Payard, he changes menus several times a year and offers specials, sometimes different ones at lunch and dinner, depending on what he finds at the market. The chef is known among connoisseurs and foodies for authentic dishes, sophisticated and earthy at the same time. Try his warm Maine crab salad with Bartlett pear, celery root rémoulade, mâche and hazelnuts or the braised wild boar shank coq au vin with red cabbage and local quince. He has developed a following for his traditional bouillabaisse as well as his twice-baked upside down cheese soufflé with white truffle oil.

Today, he first stops at the Eckerton Hill Farm, but he doesn't line up at the stall, he goes directly to the truck. That's where the chefs are. He looks for small heirloom tomatoes; red, yellow, orange and even purple. He touches a few, pressing his thumb against their skin to make sure they are ripe. The plan is to serve them halved, marinated

in a small salad.

Next is Mountain Sweet Berry Farm. "So did you go hiking?" asks Nicole Bishop, one of the owners. "No," says Bertineau, "I got sick and spent the whole day in bed." He bites on the baby arugula, smiles and buys three pounds. He will deliver the third pound to his wife at San Domenico. "How many different kinds of potatoes do you have?" he asks. "Oh my goodness," she says. The chef decides on the "24 karat" buttery nuggets, the size of marbles.

Someone stops him, "Hi Philippe." It's chef Peter Hoffman from Savoy, busy preparing for the opening of his new eatery Back Forty on Avenue B. The mini-van with the Jean-Georges logo looms in the distance; Joel Hough, chef de cuisine at Cookshop, examines the many varieties of squash. "If you know exactly what you're looking for," says Bertineau, "it's best to call the farm in advance and reserve your stuff. You don't want to come to the market and find out it's all gone to Gramercy Tavern."

The colorful tent of Alex Paffenroth of Paffenroth Garden is chef central. The scent of the herbs, a combination of rosemary, tarragon, thyme and mint, just to name a few, is intoxicating, redolent of luscious dishes to come.

Bertineau picks Hokkaido green squash he will serve as a side with sautéed barramundi accompanied by baby brussel sprouts, oyster mushrooms, salsifies and sage smoked squash broth. Today, he has spent about \$300 but can spend up to \$500 any given run. He picks up the pad lying inside the truck and proceeds to write the bill himself. "You have to know how to do everything," he laughs.

By then, Bertineau is carrying several crates, one on top of the other, while large colorful bags hang from both arms. He drops his treasure along the fence, at the north end of the market and goes around to pay last week's bill.

The Jean-Georges van is full by now, chefs are walking around with aides rolling wheel barrows full to the gills but Bertineau, a modest maestro, is still on his own, hailing a taxi in the rain.

Photo: Chef Philippe Bertineau shopping. Credit: Mimi Giboin