



2 South Main Street
Rockland, ME 04841

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Melissa Kelly is the Executive Chef and proprietor of Primo, a restaurant located in mid-coast Maine. She is the 2013 James Beard Foundation Award winner of the American Express Best Chef: Northeast Award. She also received this award in 1999, making her the first 2-time winner of the same award.

Chef Kelly grew up on Long Island. Her earliest cooking lessons took place in her Italian grandmother's kitchen. In fact, she still favors Mediterranean accented foods. First in her 1988 graduating class from The Culinary Institute of America, Melissa earned both the Richard T. Keating Award and the American Hotel Foundation Scholarship. She also received two CIA scholarships for scholastic achievement. Prior to attending the Culinary Institute, Melissa studied business administration at SUNY Farmingdale, New York and at the University of Maine.

Melissa's post-graduate education took place in some of the top restaurant kitchens in the Country. Her first position was Rounds Man at the Tavern Room of the American Restaurant at the Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. She was soon selected to be the assistant to the Greenbrier Cooking School.

After this, Melissa returned to New York to work as a grill cook for Larry Forgione at his highly acclaimed New York eatery, An American Place. Melissa moved with Chef Forgione to his new location on 32nd Street, holding the position of Garde Manger. In 1990 she was named Sous Chef at An American Place. In 1991, she earned the title of Executive Chef for Larry Forgione's Beekman 1766 Tavern. After two successful years at The Beekman, Chef Forgione put Melissa in charge of opening An American Place Waterside, in Miami, Florida.

Continuing to broaden her culinary skills, Melissa moved west to work with Reed Heron of restaurant Lulu and the legendary Alice Waters. Of her boss at Chez Panisse, Melissa says, "I didn't have a style when I got there. By the time I left, I did: simplicity, seasonality, freshness."

Melissa also spent time in the Southwest working with Melvin Masters in Denver, Colorado. Her travels have taken her to Barbados and the South of France to create culinary feasts for private families, as well as to Japan where she assisted in the opening of a satellite An American Place.

Chef Kelly was named one of the upcoming new chefs of the 90's by Food & Wine Magazine. Nation's Restaurant News, Bon Appetit, Gourmet, Chocolatier, The New York Times, The Boston Globe, Travel and Leisure, Conde Nast Traveler, Town and Country and New York Magazine, among others, have all recognized her culinary talents. The Old Chatham Shepherding Company Inn, where Melissa was



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Executive Chef before opening Primo in 2000, was named one of “The Best New Restaurants” by Esquire Magazine and both “Gourmet Retreat of the Year” and a “Grand Winner” by Andrew Harper’s Hideaway Report.

The menu changes every day to ensure that the highest quality ingredients are being served. Melissa has spent the last 20 years expanding the farm situated on Primo’s 4.5 acres. What started with a greenhouse, 2 acres of organic gardens, and 2 pigs has evolved to include broiler and layer chickens, ducks, guinea hens and 9 pigs. At peak season about 80% of the ingredients used in the Primo Kitchen are sourced from the farm. The choice to open a restaurant in Maine was driven by the fact that Maine has the largest Farmer and Garden Association (MOFGA) and the proximity to the coast for seafood. Fresh and local ingredients are key to Primo’s success. Melissa describes the availability of ingredients fresh from the Primo farm as “the dream way to cook.” Melissa also takes pride in the lessons she is able to impart to young cooks about where food comes from and the true farm to table experience that Primo offers. The farm not only provides fresh ingredients but allows kitchen waste to be recycled; it is a unique full circle relationship that is very important to Melissa. In 2003, she partnered with J.W. Marriot to open a 2nd Primo location in Orlando, Florida and since then a 3rd in Tucson, Arizona both based on the same farm to table philosophy.

Primo was named one of the top 22 new restaurants of 2000, by Esquire Magazine’s John Mariani, and has been featured in Gourmet, Wine Spectator, Art Culinaire, Travel and Leisure, Oprah Magazine and many more! Melissa was honored with the 2002 “Golden Whisk” Award from Women Chefs and Restaurateurs... for women who demonstrate excellence in the kitchen.

Chef Kelly’s farm fresh regional cuisine with Mediterranean accents can be summed up best in the words of one reviewer, “worth a drive from just about anywhere.”