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BORN IN THE LOS ANGELES



David Schoen

KNIFE & GRILL

# CHEF DAVID SCHOEN

Restaurant owner and culinary explorer takes us into his world of cuisine

**WRITTEN BY:** HANNAH MCKINNEY

**INTERVIEWED BY:** NATALIE T. STEGER

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** COURTESY OF DAVID SCHOEN

RAISED IN LATIN AMERICA AND EUROPE, Chef David Schoen is known as a culinary explorer. Schoen describes his life as a kid as constantly moving with his family to new places before landing in Chicago, where his father is originally from. These experiences have all influenced his culinary journey, though he would say that he is “more Panamanian than anything.” Schoen’s first real connection with food was during this time in Chicago. He tells us about his father’s interest in grilling and close relationship to a local butcher; this led to Schoen’s interest in food and grilling. Later, when Schoen was in high school, he began watching shows on the Food Network and loved the personalities shown on the channel. This is where he started to have the idea that he could apply himself to an area that was interesting to him, unlike many subjects he endured in school. During the interview, Schoen tells us how going through school affected his self-esteem, saying: “They don’t tap into other things like, maybe this person is more of an artist and different things. And this, I think, the time we’re living in now, there’s more awareness. There was no awareness about that before. I had no fucking clue I was even creative.” Schoen recalls a trip he took

with his parents right after college to the West Coast: “We started in San Diego, and we went all the way up North. And along the way, we went to all these fancy restaurants. I think that trip was really what sealed the deal with my loving obsession with all things food and the joy that people show when they are gathered around a table eating something they love”.

After college, Schoen became Chef David Schoen, immersing himself in the restaurant business, starting as a waiter for many restaurants. Along with waiting tables, Schoen bartended at various high-volume and upscale places to get a feel for every aspect of the restaurant and hospitality business. Around when he was 23, Schoen opened his first restaurant, Pangea, with his partner Richard McLaughlin. Schoen describes Pangea as his “blank canvas to do whatever I wanted, including naming it Pangea.” His inspiration behind the name came from the idea of unity. Opening this restaurant was the beginning of another creative part of himself he did not know he had. At this time, Schoen was not a professional in the kitchen, so he hired a pro chef to do his menu for Pangea. A few years later, in 2004, he went on to open Wasabi Sushi Lounge

in Panama City, Panama, collaborating with Japanese Master Chef Hideo Ishii-San in designing an authentic Japanese menu. In 2010, Schoen moved to Los Angeles, California, and started working as a private chef for Hollywood’s elite. At this time, he describes his work as “doing just the best version that I could do of my favorite things” rather than anything cutting edge.

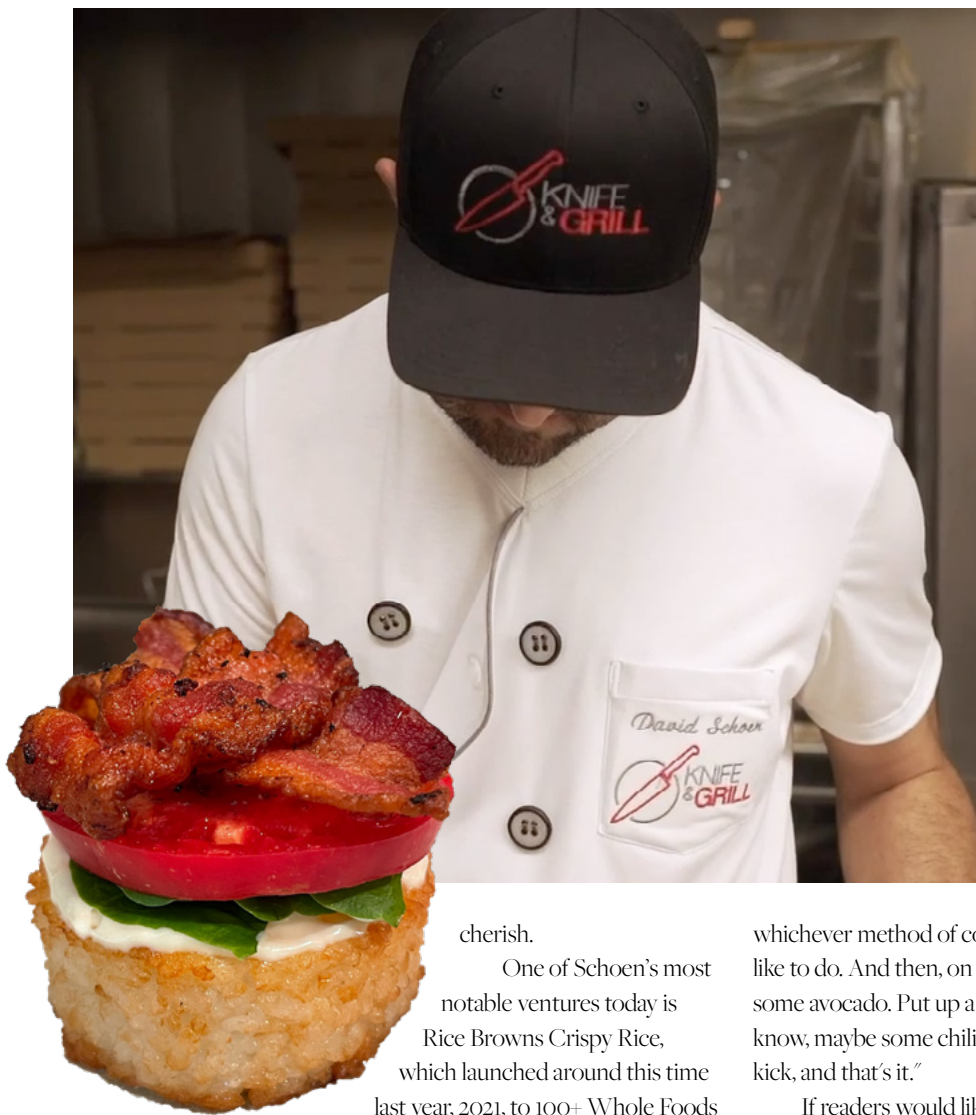
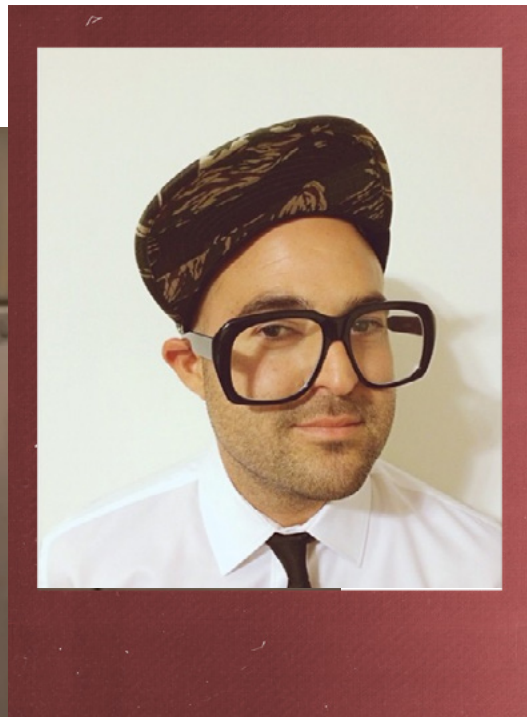
During the interview, Schoen gives us a deeper insight into the behind-the-scenes of running a restaurant. He explains, “you’re there 16 hours a day. You have to be overseeing everything.” And he notes that although this experience had been exhausting for him, when he returned home for the night, he “couldn’t sleep because [he] was still so amped up.” The most crucial thing Schoen learned from his experience running Pangea was that “you have to be there, you have to be present, and you have to be on it.” He adamantly expressed the value of overseeing all aspects until things began to run smoothly.

In 2015, Schoen began creating his new ideas for the culinary world, starting with the Selfie Cork. He tells us he came up with the idea one night while bored alone at his house. It began with Schoen gluing an end of a phone charger to a cork, finding that the

cord could hold up the phone on any bottle. His girlfriend at the time saw value in the invention and encouraged him to pursue the idea. The Selfie Cork is now described as “a universal bottle stopper that turns almost every standard bottle into a monopod for hands-free pictures and video.” You can purchase Selfie Cork online at selfiecork.com. Selfie Cork is also sold on Amazon and in the entertaining section of specialty stores in L.A. At this point in Schoen’s life, he can confidently describe himself as a creative through and through. Now, after having a few patents and grants, Schoen says he now knows he’s capable of bringing cool, innovative things to market that people will

them for all his clients after noticing people would “always go bananas over it, because it was that good.” After some friends expressed they wanted to invest in Schoen’s idea, he began the process of testing his recipe for a few years. After a few more years of getting it ready to go into production, Rice Browns were finally launched in the Fall of 2021 on shelf. When asked to share recipes using Rice Browns, Schoen says to keep it simple:

“I would air fry the Rice Browns or



cherish.

One of Schoen’s most notable ventures today is Rice Browns Crispy Rice, which launched around this time last year, 2021, to 100+ Whole Foods

in the Southern Pacific region (Southern California, New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona, Hawaii), Gelson’s Markets (California), Bristol Farms (California), and on Instacart through those retailers. Rice Browns are patties made of the highest quality sushi rice, lightly fried, and they are used as delicious vehicles for any meal or snacking occasion. Because it is refrigerated, Rice Browns - both vegan and gluten free - stays fresher longer. His idea for this dish came from the crispy rice and spicy tuna at sushi restaurants Schoen visited while in L.A. So, he started making what is now Rice Browns for some of the clients he catered for, eventually using and making

whichever method of cooking you would like to do. And then, on the side, mash up some avocado. Put up a touch of salt. You know, maybe some chili flake if you like a kick, and that’s it.”

If readers would like to access more recipes for Rice Browns or share their own concoctions, head over to @Ricebrownscrispyrice on Instagram; there, you can see various combinations put together. Drawings of these dishes also accompany the recipes, created by a local LA artist named Lexy Cotterell (@lexy.c). Overall, Schoen says, “It’s simple. It’s easy. And I think when someone sees something new, they get intimidated by it, and they get scared. I don’t know what to do with it. It’s like you don’t need to think about it so much. If it’s too difficult, just add a touch of salt and eat it plain.”

Schoen has plans for this product to be available in stores na-



tionwide, but as of right now, they are still learning about the details of mass producing this product from coast to coast. Schoen concluded by saying, “we are so sure that the world will absolutely love it and just make it a staple of their house or kitchen.”

When asked about other projects on the horizon, Schoen had a couple of things to share exclusively with us. First is a project he is very close to launching called CALÍRICA, which uses fresh hearts of palm to create realistic lasagna noodles. He explains that fresh hearts of palm spoils quickly, and freezing the whole palm is not an option. After farmers cut it, you have nine days to use it before it spoils. Be-



cause of this, it is super expensive, around \$17 a pound

right now. Schoen explains that he has found a way to get fresh palm at a very economical price, allowing him to create this new product. CALÍRICA will be launching three different types of lasagna: meat, just cheese, and a vegan version. The remarkable thing about this project is that the hearts of palm mimic the texture of pasta, unlike zucchini, and it's still a vegetable. Schoen says soon we will be able to find CALÍRICA nationwide, and he “cannot imagine there being a buyer that tastes this and does not put in an order. It is that delicious”. Although all of Schoen products are made in LA, California, one of his other new projects will be produced in Sheridan, Wyoming at the

RnRiv.com factory. It's a project that Schoen has been working on for years, called Chef Shirts by Knife and Grill. The goal of this new project is to modernize the traditional chef uniform so chefs can perform their best in the kitchen and for guests while being both comfortable and showing up well.

To Schoen, food “means beauty. It means love. It means connection and expression. And it's the ability to nourish people, you know, is very powerful and satisfying.” To be able to provide quality ingredients to a universal audience across America doesn't have to be difficult. Schoen's creative solutions to provide healthy and tasty options to every palate and table is inspiring. When asked about his hopes for the future and his legacy, he says: “I'm really enjoying what I'm doing right now with these products, and there's even other stuff that is planned in the pipeline. But what I really would like to do to make a bigger difference is to be remembered as someone who cared and tried to do good. Being a Chef isn't about being egocentric. It's more for me about fueling my craving to discover things for others to enjoy. Hopefully, not too far in the distant future, I would like to put an emphasis on mental health.”

Schoen does his best to live by this ethos of service and support to others to find hope and help by providing wholesome and delicious meals to those who are in need of nourishment with an amazing program called Destination Hope, which is partnered with Shower of Hope. He makes the meals from scratch in his home and brings it to the areas for families or individuals in need.

Like many chefs and creative people, Chef Schoen has had his own struggles with mental health diagnoses in recent years and if it weren't for his incredible support network professionally and personally, he would not be in the position he is today, for the benefit of so many appetites and food entertaining experiences. “I've been lucky to have the parents that I have and the friends that I have. Everyone deserves a good quality of life. I think empathy goes a long way. Even for your brothers and sisters that you might not know, it goes a long way to bring someone back from a bad place into a joyful life.”

To follow, inquire or learn more about the latest with Schoen's creations and his journey, go to [knifeandgrill.com](http://knifeandgrill.com), Instagram @knifeandgrill @ricebrownscrispyrice @selfiecork. Coming soon on IG @caliricaheartsofpalm.