

SERVING THE HUDSON VALLEY AND THE CATSKILLS

'Sexiest chef'
whips up
brunch

SUNDAY
LIVING

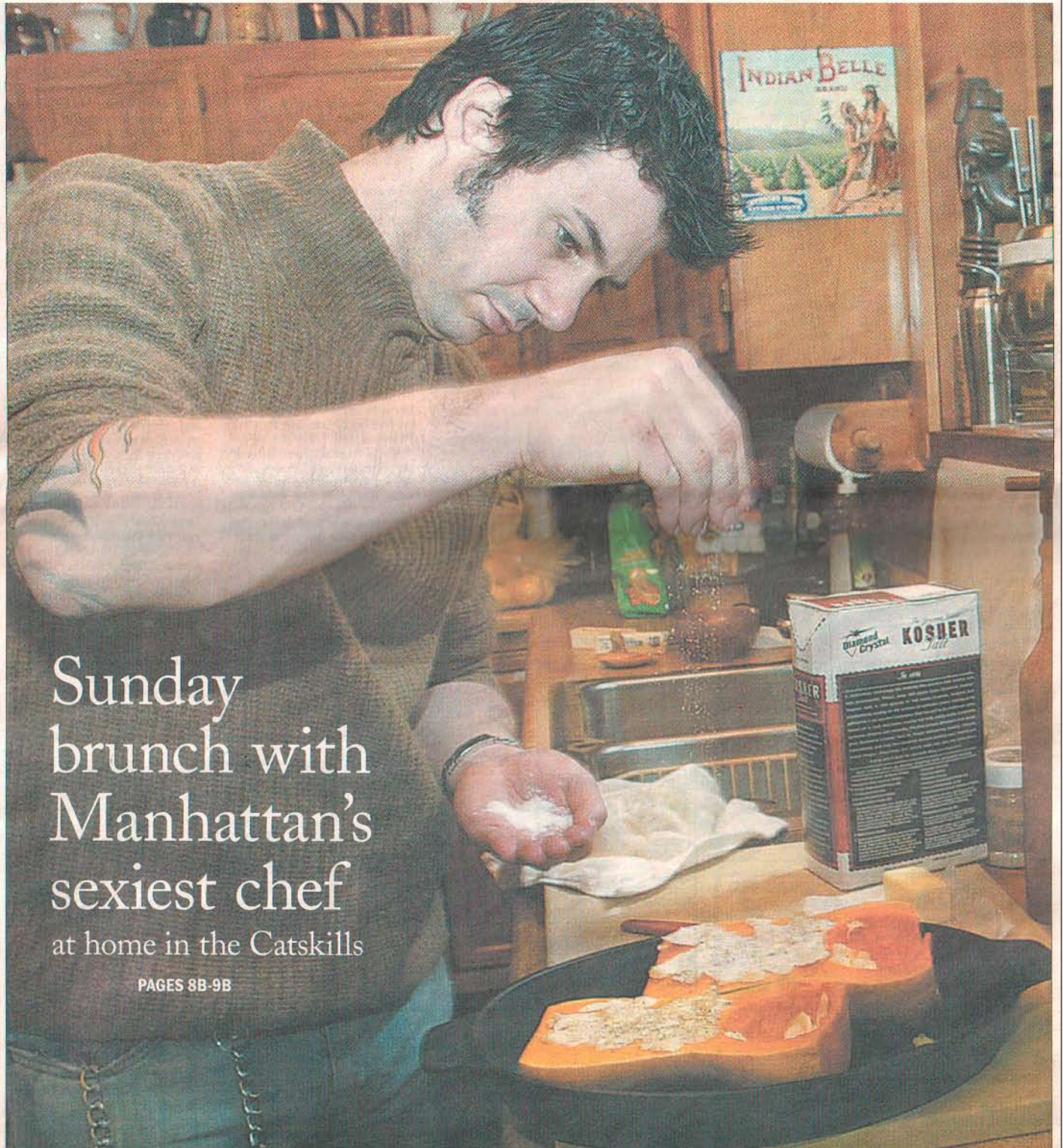


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Merchants
stung
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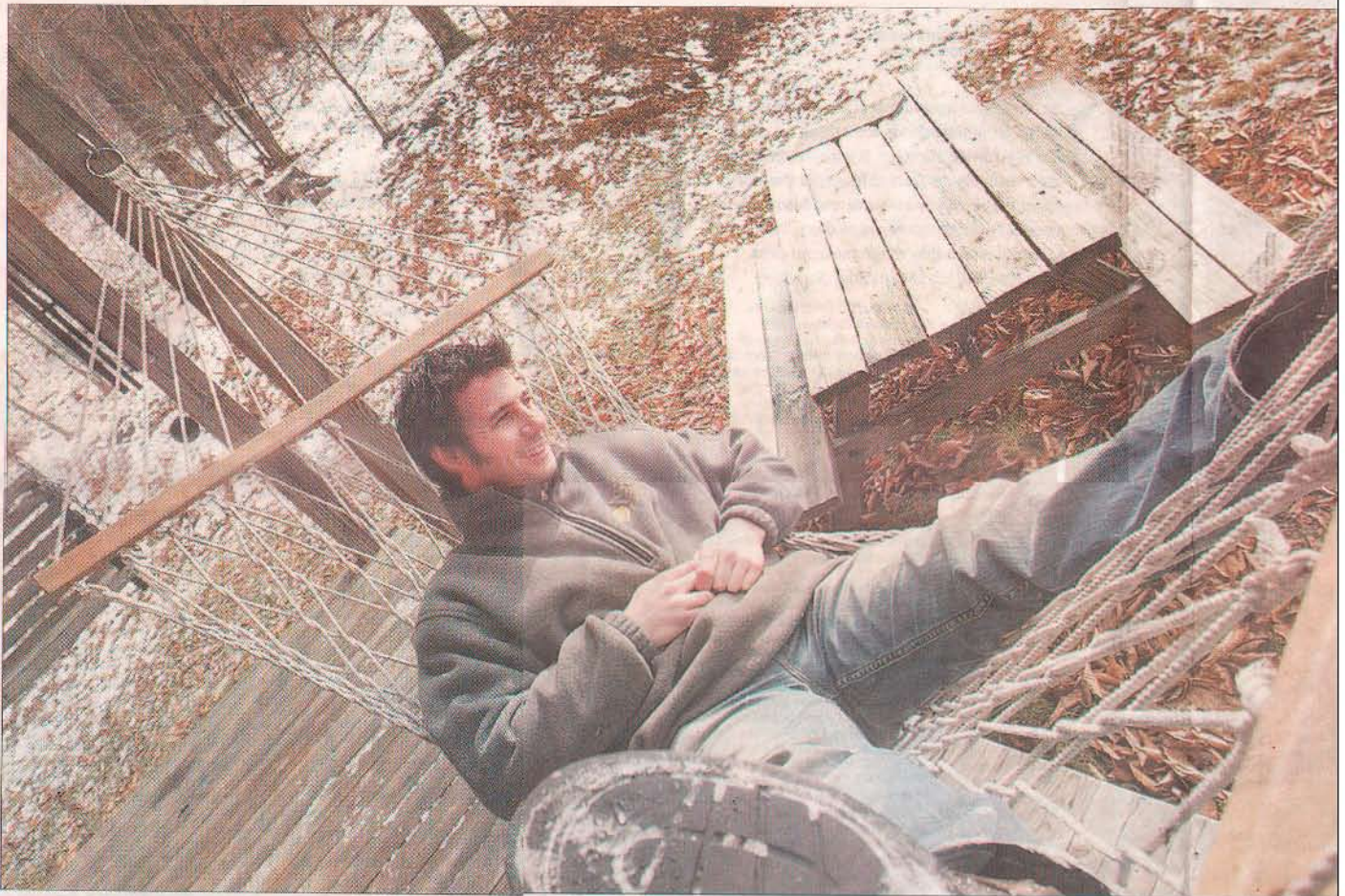
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Sunday
brunch with
Manhattan's
sexiest chef
at home in the Catskills

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He's bringing sexy back



Johnny Iuzzini of Walden, now an executive pastry chef for Jean Georges in Manhattan, relaxes at his cabin in the Town of Denning.



Iuzzini looks over wines to serve with his meals at his cabin.

"For me it's important to get back up here. Being in the city, people are so one-dimensional. It just re-inspires me and keeps my food evolving."

Johnny Iuzzini, 33, Walden native named New York Daily News Sexiest Chef, reflecting on the inspiration he gets from the Hudson Valley



After stocking up at the local store, Johnny arrives home with his girlfriend Lucinda Sterling.

to the kitchen



BY MEGHAN MURPHY
Times Herald-Record
PHOTOS BY MICHELE HASKELL
Times Herald-Record

A bedraggled man in a motorized shopping cart apologizes to Johnny Iuzzini for talking to himself.

"That's OK, I was just about to talk to you," Johnny smiles.

"The produce today doesn't look too good, does it?" the man says.

Johnny shakes his head. Outside, a snow dusting blows in shifting waves across the blacktop of the Liberty ShopRite. In almost every aisle, a man in camouflage pants is hunting for canned soup or cereal.

Then there's Johnny: distressed rust-colored leather coat, strategically-ripped jeans, spiked dark hair - Manhattan's sexiest chef, according to New York Daily News readers.

Every weekend he's allowed, the 33-year-old described by media as a bad boy club-hopper escapes to the Catskills. Here he veers away from the raspberry rosewater soup fare he crafts as executive pastry chef at Jean Georges Restaurant, instead drawing inspiration from the simple life.

Leeks and baby bella mushrooms

Johnny sorts through a handful of sorry-looking leeks with dried outer husks. "This time of year, you're screwed," he says. "You're at the mercy of these giant markets."

JOHNNY'S INGREDIENTS

Education: Valley Central High School Class of 1992, Culinary Institute of America, L'Ecole DGF du Chocolat et Patisserie

Experience: Brooklyn - River Café; Manhattan - Restaurant Daniel, François Payard Pastry Shop, Café Boulud, Restaurant Jean Georges, Perry Street, Nougatine

Accolades: 2000: Comité Colbert, Emerging Young Artist of 2000; 2001: Where Magazine, Best Desserts in NY; 2003: James Beard Foundation, nominated Outstanding Pastry Chef of the Year; 2005: Pastry Art and Design Magazine, 10 Best Pastry Chefs in America; 2006: James Beard Foundation, won Outstanding Pastry Chef of the Year; 2007: Forbes.com, 10 most influential chefs in America; 2007: New York Daily News, Manhattan's Sexiest Chef

As a teenager in Walden, Johnny woke up next to a farm that raised corn and sheep. His mother's garden gave him a first taste of the importance of fresh food.

Like any good chef, Johnny draws inspiration from the season and buys local. When he comes to the mountains, he prefers to touch base with farmers at their stands, unless, like today, they are shuttered against a bitter wind. "For me it's important to get back up here. Being in the city, people are so one-dimensional. It just reinspires me and keeps my food evolving," he says.

A dozen limes and lemons

Johnny piles lime upon lime into the thin produce bag until

it may burst. He loads up on lemons, too. He's clearly got a few experiments planned.

The hyperactive chef is constantly rechallenging himself. He's won countless accolades for his pastry, and still has a cookbook and Food Network show on tap. But he also wants to test his talents in a new area: mixology. At the liquor store later, he'll pick up three bottles of wine, rum and gin, destined for a weekend of inventive cocktails.

Rib-eye steak and tiny red potatoes

Johnny carries an overflowing grocery basket of seasonal vegetables and all-natural meats for only two days at his Grahamsville cabin. His weekend fare is a return to the basics. "What I cook and what I eat are two different things. When I come here it's everything against that," he says.

Years ago, Johnny's dad teased his mother about her cooking. She'd put a pot on the burner and then inevitably have to chase two trouble-making sons around. The water would boil away, the pot would burn. Voila, smoked potatoes.

Johnny attributes his refined palate more to the Culinary Institute of America and getting his teeth kicked in by the city's finest chefs than his upbringing. But when just relaxing in his cabin, nostalgically furnished with Dad's bear rug and Mom's thimble collection, he takes the simple meat-and-potato style of his childhood to a new level. Soy-horseradish marinated rib-eye steaks are finished on a grill out in the snow, with leeks and, of course, baby red potatoes.

"I don't want to lose touch with where I come from," he says.

Sunday brunch with Johnny

CITRUS BRIOCHE

- 1 1/4 cups all purpose flour
- 3 eggs
- 1 tablespoon fresh yeast
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1/8 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup butter
- 1 orange zest, fine grated
- 1 lemon zest, fine grated
- 2 teaspoons orange blossom water

With hook on mixer, combine flour, eggs and yeast on slow speed for 5 minutes, then medium speed for 5 minutes. Add salt and sugar, stir on medium speed for 4 minutes. Add butter, zest, orange blossom, stir for 5 minutes. Dough should be very elastic and stretch between fingers without it tearing. Continue to mix if it rips. Put in a plastic wrap-lined bowl, lightly sprayed with oil. Rest in refrigerator overnight. Punch down and form into a loaf. Bake in lightly greased loaf pan at 350 F. for 30 minutes. Rotate pan, cook at 325 F. for 30 minutes until evenly golden brown. Let cool. Can be frozen for up to 1 month.

FRENCH TOAST

Use frozen brioche. Cut 1/2 inch-thick slices. Soak in a flat baking pan in a mixture of milk, eggs, sugar, salt, maple syrup, and fresh vanilla bean. Turn slices over. Allow slices to thaw until liquid is absorbed and toast is spongy. Cook in clarified butter on stovetop griddle over medium heat until caramelized on both sides. Place in hot oven to assure slices cook through.

SMOKED BACON

Cook until crispy in a cast-iron griddle in 375 F. degree oven.

SCALLION, GRUYERE OMELETTE

Lightly beat four eggs. Cook over medium heat in clarified butter. Stir eggs with rubber spatula until thickened. Sprinkle on finely chopped scallions and tomatoes. Place in 375 F. oven until set. Sprinkle on freshly grated Gruyere cheese. Roll off pan onto the plate. Season with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper.

FRIED CHICKEN

Purchase a bucket from Popeyes or Church's. Reheat in oven until crispy.

LUCINDA'S TWISTED MIMOSA

Orange juice, grenadine, champagne, light rum, orange bitters



The simple life is an inspiration.



Fresh local ingredients and a relaxed style bring Johnny back to his roots.