

The Countdown

Chef Scott Boswell thinks big. Has he got time to reach his goals?

Scott Boswell is an ambitious man. Scott Boswell wants to be New Orleans' top chef. And Boswell, the chef and owner of Stella and the soon-to-open Hoshi, knows how long he has to pull it off. "I have about 7,682 days left if I live to be 70 years old," he says. "That's not that long. I've lived over two-thirds of my life."

The Lake Charles native started late, enrolling in the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, NY. After turning 30 and spending several years working in a bank, he vowed to own a restaurant by age 40. With a copy of the bright yellow *Business Plans for Dummies* as his guide, he opened Stella inside the Hotel Provincial in 2001. Stella's audacious menu, a fusion of French and Asian cuisines, reads like the inventory of a culinary treasure chest collected on a trip around the globe: foie gras with 100-year-old balsamic vinegar; crab and shark fin soup garnished with gold leaf; and roasted Hawaiian walu with champagne sea urchin butter. Boswell crafts his food with the precision of stonecutter, and the delicately balanced flavors linger long after the names of the flashy ingredients fade.

Recently, the Asian elements have colonized more territory on Stella's menu. That will change when Hoshi opens in the space that once held Lemon Grass inside the International House Hotel. "Hoshi," Japanese for "star" and a symbol of hope, will serve the "healthy, fresh, ingredient-driven Eastern side of the world food," says Boswell. He promises curries, stir-fries, sashimi, Korean barbecue, an array of fried and steamed dumplings and desserts dyed the brightest colors of the rainbow. Boswell treats each restaurant as a series of ideas to explore. "In order to build Stella," he says, "we need Hoshi."

It's late January, and Boswell hobbles around the gutted space inside the International House, one foot in a cast after an exuberant celebration of the Saints' playoff victory. Boyish and dapper with a striped, knitted scarf tossed around his neck and a Bluetooth headphone permanently affixed to his right ear, he leans over the blueprints spread across a dusty table and conjures up Hoshi. Over there, a sunken set of tables set off to catch the attention of

everyone else in the room. Over here, diners cook meat on grills inset into the tables. Steam and smoke from the kitchen fills the air. Outside, a line of cars waits at the valet stand.

It's a glitzy scene common on the coasts but utterly unknown in New Orleans. Is the city ready? "We're not here to rebuild what we had before," Boswell says. "We're here to improve what we had, and part of that is evolving with the rest of the world."

Erik Venéy, who gave up the executive chef position at Muriel's to be second-in-command at Stella after the storm, walks into the room. Boswell rattles off Venéy's resume complete with accolades. "Erik really came on at a crucial time," Boswell says. "Changed my life. He also brought on Nolan Ventura, the most creative pastry chef in town."

Boswell hints about new plans like a gourmet soda stand for the currently shuttered Stanley, the breakfast and lunch joint where he served relief workers in the days after Katrina. He talks about expanding beyond New Orleans. "That all sounds big," he says, "but hey, people do it everyday. Someone's got to do it. Someone's got to be number one. Someone has got to stand on that spot. Why can't it be us?"

"When I was in Lake Charles and I had never left Lake Charles, I was happy with being in Lake Charles and I had very simple desires," Boswell says. "Now, I'm living way beyond any dream I ever had 10 years ago. It makes me realize how small my dreams were."

"Sleep is the one thing that gets in my way. Gee, if I didn't have to stop, if I didn't have to sleep, if I didn't get tired, I could go so much faster."

Al Abandons New Orleans?

At the corner of St. Charles and Napoleon avenues, Copeland's restaurant still sits vacant with plywood covering the windows. A few weeks before Mardi Gras, though, some Carnival colors graced the building. A purple sign said, "NOLA helped Al, now it's Al's turn." A green one read, "What a disgrace," while a gold sign said, "Nothing done in 18 months." They disappeared quickly, but not before George "Loki" Williams posted photos on his blog HumidCity.com.

"Orleans Parish was what generated the revenue that took him out of Chalmette and made him a millionaire," says Williams, who used to be the headwaiter at the Cheesecake Bistro on St. Charles Avenue. "I watched him abandon all of his Orleans Parish assets." The Cheesecake Bistro also remains vacant.

City council member Stacy Head, whose district includes Copeland's, has urged Al Copeland Investments and the building's owner to better maintain the property. In an email, Head said that executives at Al Copeland Investments blamed an insurance dispute for the delay in reopening. "I replied," Head says, "that I still expect Copeland's to repair and reopen or sell."

Al Copeland did not return *OffBeat's* calls seeking comment.

Other News

Good news for Mid-City. Mandina's, Crescent City Steak House and Venezia have reopened.... Beloved chef Chris Kerageorgiou of La Provence died in early February. Chef John Besh of Restaurant August bought La Provence in January and will maintain the Northshore gem.... Michael Collins was fired from the Windsor Court's New Orleans Grill for "personnel reasons." The high-profile restaurant is searching for a replacement.

Final Thoughts

1) It's warm enough to start grilling again. 2) Cork and Bottle's \$40 cases of wine might be the best deal in town. 3) Hansen's should be open by the time you read this.

Cork and Bottle: 3700 Orleans Ave., 281-4384
Crescent City Steak House: 1001 N. Broad St., 821-3271

Hansen's Sno-Bliz: 4801 Tchoupitoulas St., 891-9788
La Provence: 25020 Hwy. 190, Lacombe, (985) 626-7662

New Orleans Grill: Windsor Court Hotel, 300 Gravier St., 522-1992

Mandina's: 3800 Canal St., 482-9179

Restaurant August: 301 Tchoupitoulas St., 299-9777

Stella: Hotel Provincial, 1032 Chartres St., 587-0091

Venezia: 134 N. Carrollton Ave., 488-7991 ★