

Ray's & Stark Bar



Kris Morningstar
Executive Chef

A native of Southern California, Kris Morningstar's love affair with food began as a child watching his father cook meals for the family every day. By the time he was in high school in New Jersey, where his family relocated, Morningstar was already wowing his family and friends with meals he created for holidays and large dinner parties. While he entertained the idea of attending culinary school, he instead studied marketing at the University of Maryland. Ultimately, Morningstar's first love lured him back into the kitchen and back to his hometown to attend the Cordon Bleu-affiliated California School of Culinary Arts in Pasadena, from which he graduated with honors in 2002.

Morningstar first impressed diners in the Los Angeles area at the acclaimed One Pico restaurant at Shutters on the Beach in Santa Monica. He next worked under Chef Suzanne Goin at A.O.C., which was followed by a stint with Jason Travi at the Mediterranean-inspired Opaline as the lead line cook, and then with Chef Neal Fraser at Grace. Yet, it was the time that he worked at Joachim Splichal's Michelin-starred Patina restaurant and at Meson G alongside Chef Eric Greenspan that made the biggest impact on Morningstar's evolving culinary style. "I focus on big flavors and looking at things

from a different perspective,” Morningstar notes. “I like to challenge myself to do my best and to make food that nobody else is doing.”

Subsequently, Morningstar flexed his creativity at renowned establishments such as Blue Velvet, where he conceived dishes that paired classic French techniques with modern, global influences, at CASA in downtown Los Angeles, and at George Abou-Daoud’s District and its adjacent wine bar and gourmet market, Mercantile.

Morningstar is once again striking the right balance of flavors and techniques as executive chef at Ray’s & Stark Bar, the newest venture from the Patina Restaurant Group. The experience reunited him with Splichal, who collaborated with Morningstar in creating the Mediterranean-inspired, farm-to-table menu for Ray’s. The acclaimed chef will rely on the restaurant’s on-site garden for many of his ingredients, which is in keeping with his philosophy of using what’s fresh and in season. “I can literally walk outside and, 10 seconds later, I can have a handful of herbs and baby lettuces,” he notes.

In keeping with Ray’s emphasis on good food and impeccable service, Morningstar is making dishes that are presented well without being overly stylized—delivering refined yet playful dishes with bold flavor profiles that also make good use of the restaurant’s wood-burning oven and wood-fired grill. “In conceptualizing the menu for Ray’s, we just tried to walk our own path; sometimes it’s a little more classic and fancy, and sometimes it’s a little more rustic. It’s about finding new ways to use ingredients in a ways that are also comforting,” says Morningstar.

When he is not in the kitchen or garden at work, Morningstar spends his free time tending his own garden, traveling, and, naturally, going out to eat with his wife.

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