

## Sweet Street research and development chef and manager



Jim Churchman's taste buds have been shaped by his travels around the world. He seeks inspiration as a research and development chef and manager at Sweet Street Desserts, 722 Hiesters Lane, where he has worked for the last 22 years. He has an affinity for certain places, like Peru. His trip in November will mark his sixth visit there since 1999.

"Once you set foot in Peru, and I do the rain forest, so you are hiking through the rain forest, and with every step you are smelling blooming flowers juxtaposed against decomposing vegetation, scents of vanilla, almond and spinach," Churchman said. "It's lush. It is just amazing. You are truly in primal land. There is cocoa there. It is just beautiful."

When dining in the city of Lima, Churchman gets the opportunity to experience fusion at its finest. "The cuisine in Peru is this amazing combination of the indigenous Indians, Chinese, Japanese, Spanish and African," he said. "It is truly the original mass fusion." When Churchman, 44, of Cumru Township returns to the United States from his travels and creates new desserts or menus for private clients, he has a clarity that enables him to more easily make his own culinary statements.

"It is totally energizing and transformative," he said. "It's more about being bold in terms of pushing your flavors."

"When I cook, I like to push the envelope with my flavors. There are ways of pushing the envelope in say, chocolate. You can go really deep. If you are going to use something, use it so you are getting the bang for the buck out of it. When I come back from Peru, it's like, 'OK, let's just do this.'" Churchman's time in Europe also has had an influence on his cooking.

"I love Paris and Italy," he said. "Flavor combinations really come back to the ingredients themselves, the purity of the ingredients, staying true to the ingredients." When traveling, Churchman prefers to fully immerse himself in the culture as opposed to taking the touristy approach. He doesn't seek to copy and duplicate, but to be inspired.

"I can get more inspiration from a perfect salad than a mediocre cake," he said. "Whether it's the honey that is in use, the interplay between spices and herbs, all of the sensory harmony going on that you can then put into dishes."

The quality of many of his favorite ingredients has a big impact on the flavor of his creations. "Heirloom produce, single origin chocolate, cultured butter, really rich butter," he said. "I like working with exotic spices more and more. Everyone should have a good supply of fresh spices." While Churchman loves to travel, other things influence his approach to cooking as well. "Art, different types like architecture, sculpture, dance and local art," he said. Churchman also cooks for private clients and acts as a restaurant consultant, helping owners and chefs with menu development.

"I like to work in synergy with an owner and chef to achieve our goal," he said. "Sometimes it takes a fresh perspective to liven things up." Churchman's first memories of cooking are from when he was 8 years old. "I got kicked out of Sunday school because I was asking too many pointed questions," he said. "My mother did not know what to do with me, so I was strapped at her side cooking." Soon, he began helping his aunt, who was a trained chef and had a catering business.

During a summer break from Lock Haven University, where Churchman was a dual major in computer science and English, he began solidifying his love of cooking, focusing on savory foods. "I went to Joe's and kind of fell in love with working there," he said of being a

chef at the famed fine dining restaurant centered on foraged mushrooms and wild game that was located in Reading prior to closing.

"It's all about providing a little joy and delight to someone's life," he said. "We always love to see the elated faces of diners whose expectations have been blown away. "I often wear a shirt that states, 'Do what you love,' and it's pretty obvious that I do," he said.

By Courtney H. Diener-Stokes

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