

**BOCANOVA
JACK LONDON SQUARE**



**ROSS KAPLAN
CHEF-DE-CUISINE**

Ross Kaplan's path to the position of chef-de-cuisine at Bocanova, the exciting new Pan-American restaurant on Oakland's revitalized Jack London Square, began on the other side of the country. After growing up in rural Columbia, Maryland, the young Kaplan began his cooking career at Manhattan's Union Square Café, under two legendary food-world figures: acclaimed restaurateur Danny Meyer and chef Michael Romano, named by the James Beard Foundation as "Best Chef in New York City". Under their tutelage, he learned his way around a professional kitchen—but even more, he says, he learned "to appreciate and respect quality ingredients, and to understand that it's vitally important to produce the best food possible, because what the guest ingests becomes part of his or her body and soul."

Feeding his own body and soul, Kaplan left Union Square Café to experience the vivid food traditions of France, traveling around the country, exploring open-air markets, hiking the Pyrénées, delighting in simple meals like mussels and frites with a local hard cider. Returning to America, he journeyed through his own nation, working in numerous restaurants and searching for the right place to settle and refine his cooking talents. Not surprisingly, he found the perfect combination of culinary energy and great raw materials in the San Francisco Bay Area.

By accident, he discovered Café Cacao, a small café attached to the Scharffenberger Chocolate factory in Berkeley. The man in charge of the kitchen was Arnon Oren, a talented alumnus of Chez Panisse, and Oren signed him on. At Café Cacao, Kaplan says, he first really began to understand the subtleties of extremely fresh ingredients, and how to allow the natural qualities of the food to take center stage. The most valuable lesson he took away from the place, he says, was "Don't get in the way of the product."

From Café Cacao, Kaplan went to work for Rick Hackett at MarketBar in San Francisco. Ironically, he was so impressed with what he learned there about the interconnections between the local restaurant community and the small farmers and food producers of the region that he was inspired to leave the Bay Area—to return home to Maryland with the idea of stimulating an appreciation of locally, sustainably grown food in the Free State's restaurants. He was just getting started when Rick Hackett called and asked him to come back to the Bay Area as Bocanova's chef-de-cuisine. He jumped at the chance. "This is a wonderful opportunity," he says, "to collaborate with somebody I admire in the creation of a unique concept based on our shared values of quality, freshness, and sustainability."



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