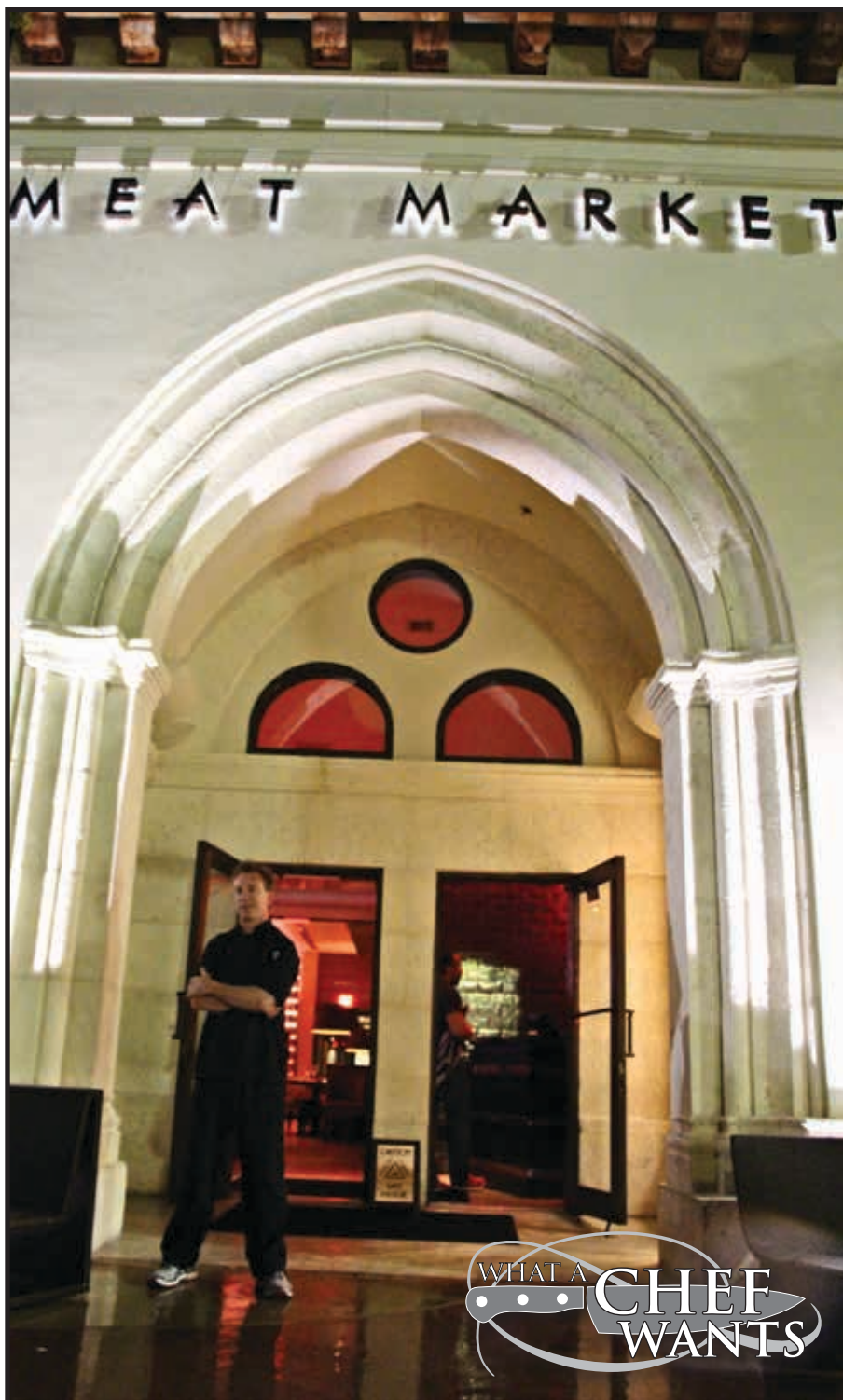


What a Chef Wants:

Dreamworthy

Beef and a creative, culinary life
on Miami's South Beach are this chef's passion.

Story & photos by **Laura Conaway**, Certified Angus Beef LLC



There's a turning point in every chef's life. Sean Brasel snaps his fingers to illustrate the abruptness.

"There's a point where you're replicating what other people have shown you, and a point where you're creating what you've invented in your mind," the Miami chef says. "One day you decide to make something, you assemble it and just know it's going to work."

The same could be said of Brasel's career. The 47-year-old owner and executive chef of Meat Market is at the top of his game and, so far, he's made it look easy.

Whether that's purposeful, he'll never let on. It's all part of the intrigue that brought four television offers and forced him to delete a personal social media account — his own little mystery.

Nestled in the back booth of his dimly lit "restaurant child," Brasel takes the seat that lets him glance at accumulating tickets in the window. He's a man who makes eye contact, but if the orders grow too quickly, he'll need to step in.

Brasel is shy, but direct, soft-spoken and witty. His sly grin undoubtedly made parents wonder and says just enough today to keep you watching to see what he'll do next.

"Given the opportunity, I'll be quiet," he says, like a taunt to bring probing questions.

The self-proclaimed introvert says of those appearances on *Chopped*, *Miami Ink*, *Emeril's Florida* and, most recently, *Knife Fight*, "I forced myself to be a hybrid."

Bucolic beginnings

Long before TV shows, Porsches and 15,000 Instagram followers, Brasel was just a kid growing up in the Colorado Rockies. With a father who worked in construction, a mother in school and a sister eight years his junior, Brasel spent coveted summers on the cattle ranch his grandfather managed. Fishing, hunting and horseback riding became a haven to explore and grow.

"Those were the best times," he says, a peaceful smile taking him back to loyal companions Duchess (a beagle mix) and Dolly, the horse. "I'd just point at a mountain and say, 'I'm going to go hike that today.'"

Recent decades carry a more hectic schedule, filled with building plans and new ideas for recipes, leaving mountains as something to admire rather than climb. The reflection brings a faint regret.

"I wish I hadn't got promoted so fast when I was young," Brasel says. "I would have really liked to work around the country more."

The 15-year-old who took a job as a country-club dishwasher to buy a car never saw this coming. After promotions to making salads, running the buffet and later the pantry, the quiet boy from Denver had not just the car, but a life's passion.

“Next thing you know, I got the uniform, and they called me the Omelet King,” Brasel laughs. “They gave me a knife, I got to cut stuff, and it was golden.”

He worked two jobs in high school; having one was “just not enough to see. I wanted to make things — teach me, show me how to do this right.”

College brought philosophy classes in the morning and greater learning under the evening’s kitchen lights. Brasel’s love of the human mind and a steady paycheck begged him to consider psychology, but his heart had other plans.

“I don’t want to have a job where I’m not creating,” he says. “For my character, it didn’t feel rewarding.”

A drive for perfection

For those who dine on his edible talent these days, the reward is all theirs. The path that led to Miami was an unexpected dash from line cook to pastry, sous and executive chef, all by the age of 22.

“When you’re a hard worker, you’re given opportunities that you’re probably not ready for, and the only way to excel is to try and fail.”

Talent kept failure at bay. A corporate chef role in Denver led Brasel to the Sunshine State where he and a business partner opened a “concept” restaurant on the famous beach. “It had an eight-year run and it was done. I said, ‘Let’s sell it and reinvent ourselves.’”

So they did.



Meat Market Miami has a sexy vibe.

“The light we use is sunset,” he says of the concept opened in 2008, followed by sister locations in San Juan, Puerto Rico (2013) and Palm Beach, Fla. (2014). Tampa will open in spring 2017. “Everyone looks good in golden light.”

The steak house design is subtle, as if effortlessly attractive. The front bar fills with boisterous laughter while the back seating area hosts those with a more formal dining experience in mind. A glass wine wall frames the front house, and quality beef supports the kitchen.

“Steak houses can have a 30- to 40-year run as long as you keep updating to what people want. If you bring in variety, you’re never going to get old. You won’t have to chase the trend.”

Four years ago Brasel decided to make Meat Market a licensed *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand partner. He’d been serving the quality product for years, and finally committed to making it official.

“It just worked. CAB® has the best quality and consistency of any beef I’ve ever used,” he says.

The partnership worked, and he was named the brand’s 2015 Steakhouse Restaurant Marketer of the Year.

The restaurant’s matte black menu may look static to the unfamiliar eye, but its contents evolve, at once satisfying both the comfortable and adventurous palates that dare to explore it.

“Just because an item stays on the menu doesn’t mean it’s the same as it was five years ago,” Brasel assures. “I take elements and reinvent them so it’s always the first time.”

The chef doesn’t practice. His best flavors come from the pressure of the moment or in his dreams: “I’m in that environment. I close my eyes and I create.” The role requires it.

“We push the envelope here, and we push each other,” Brasel says. “Supply and demand happens. We try to never give up on quality, but you have to get creative with affordable cuts, because at the end of the day it’s a business.

“It doesn’t matter what my passion is, because if my passion loses me money, I’m just a homeless person on the street, painting.”

Every day is an adventure, sure, but the rush that so many others feel behind the wheel of a renowned restaurant, Brasel doesn’t.

He’s snowboarded the blacks of Colorado, wake-boarded the whitecaps of open waters and felt the force of speed atop Ducati’s professional racing bikes. The restaurant life is intense, but he’s experienced more.

A flick of a paper order catches the chef’s eye as he studies the scene from that back booth, determining whether to intervene or let those he’s taught hold it steady for a while. Tomorrow he’ll be in Palm Beach and next week in Puerto Rico, but everywhere he’ll be serving the quality that outlasts trends and helps drive his need for bigger and better.

“My favorite is the CAB short rib,” he says. “I love how we smoke it, then sous vide for 60 hours. It’s dreamworthy.”

As is his story.



Editor’s Note: Laura Conaway is a producer communications specialist for Certified Angus Beef LLC.

