

MY KITCHEN VALENTINE

Romance can be tough when you're a chef. How do you keep love alive when you work long hours and come home smelling like garlic? In honor of Valentine's Day—one of the busiest nights in restaurant kitchens—we talked to married couples who cook together.

Aaron Zimmer, sous chef, and **Jewel Zimmer**, pastry chef, at CityZen in DC's Mandarin Oriental hotel.

How did you meet?

Aaron: We were working at La Folie in San Francisco. I was a cook; Jewel did the pastries.

Jewel: I got deported back to Canada. Aaron sold everything he owned, and we moved to Italy for a year—cooking in a little town in Tuscany. We got engaged there.

What was your wedding like?

Aaron: We had a small wedding in St. Helena, California, at a friend's restaurant, Tra Vigne. A classic Italian wedding feast. Our friend brought white truffles. The



MORTON'S WOOS THE YOUNG CROWD

Morton's, long the haunt of beef-loving expense-account types, is going after Bethesda's young crowd. Bar 12-21, at the new Morton's in the Hyatt Regency, is offering a menu of 50 martinis and noshes that are less pricey than Morton's regular menu.

Bar bites are available throughout the evening, but the real bargains are between 5 and 6:30 and 9:30 and 11 on weeknights, when the little plates go for \$1 to \$3. Among the offerings are oysters on the half shell, petite filet mignon sandwiches, mini cheeseburgers, crab-and-artichoke dip, and colossal shrimp. In the dining room, with its mahogany paneling, leather booths, and LeRoy Neiman prints, things are pretty much the same as at other Morton's steakhouses in the area: Waiters show off oversize specimens of beef and vegetables as they rattle off menu highlights.

Morton's is known for its double-cut filet, 48-ounce Porterhouse, and rib eye, though seafood makes a showing, too. The addition of the Bethesda restaurant makes the Washington area the nation's biggest Morton's hub. Bethesda has two other high-end steakhouses: the New Orleans-based Ruth's Chris and the kosher Red Heifer.

The dining room at the Bethesda Morton's (7400 Wisconsin Ave., NW; 301-657-2650) is open Monday through Saturday from 5:30 to 11 and Sunday 5 to 10. The bar opens at 5 PM daily.

sommelier gave us free range of the wine cellar. My family owns a fish company and sent a kilo of their best caviar—split among 14 people.

Your honeymoon?

Jewel: We went to Thailand. We took cooking classes.

What's it like working together?

Aaron: There's a flow between us. I don't get angry when Jewel's in a bad mood. She might not be very nice, but I know she's stressed. It's the same the other way around. The first time we'd ever worked apart—that was the hardest two years.

Jewel: We come as a pair. Otherwise we wouldn't have a relationship for sure.

Susan Scheffler and **Louis Nickell**, co-owners and chefs at Nickell's & Scheffler in Old Town Alexandria.

When did you meet?

Susan: A friend introduced us at the Culinary Institute of America. We're both career changers, so we're older than the typical people starting out at CIA.

Louis: We were both focused on school. Nothing happened until we ended up working at the Marriott in Bethesda. I was in the kitchen and Susan was wearing a black tuxedo as a management trainee.

Aaron and Jewel Zimmer work together in the kitchen at CityZen in DC's Mandarin Oriental hotel.

Where was your first date?

Susan: The Iwo Jima memorial. I asked him.

Louis: We sat down and four hours later we'd told each other our life stories.

We walked and walked and ended up at an Ethiopian restaurant.

Susan: When the guy walked through with the roses, he got me a rose.

What's your favorite romantic spot?

Susan: We love Euro Bistro in Herndon—the chef is Louie's mentor. When we were courting we loved Bistro 123 in Vienna. And 1789, in front of the fireplace.

The challenges of working with your spouse?

Susan: It's hard to have two chefs in the kitchen. Louie, having grown up in Hawaii, likes to go in an Asian way. I like to go in a French or Southern way.

Louis: It tends to lead to some good ideas.

Susan: I wanted to work with Louie. I waited a long time to get married. I'm making up for all the years I wasn't married to him—compressing it.

—ANN LIMPert