



# Tyler Skrivanek

*Sous chef, Duo Restaurant*

**WITH HIS LONG FINGERS,** shoulder-length brown hair, and shaggy beard, Tyler Skrivanek could easily pass for a keyboardist in a garage band. But watch him in his chef's whites in Duo's open kitchen and it's clear he's chosen performance art of a different sort. Burners blasting, he swirls butter in one sauté pan, tosses prosciutto into another, and spins around, third pan in hand, to plate the special of the day. "You get an adrenaline rush when the wheel is full of tickets," he tells me later. "When it's flowing, it's just like a symphony or a ballet."

If we were at Ellie Caulkins instead of a Highland seasonal bistro, we'd have a program insert announcing that the lead tonight will be played by the understudy. But with sous chef Skrivanek in charge, there are no grumbles, no sighs. Even on executive chef John Broening's day off, soup comes out properly seasoned, courses are well-timed, steak is

not overcooked. Indeed, it's safe to assume that no one in this cozy dining room has any idea that Broening has left the building.

That the kitchen doesn't skip a beat is especially impressive considering that, just a few birthdays ago, Skrivanek, now 23, couldn't have ordered a glass of the house white. "Everyone at Vesta knows him as Buck," as in young buck, laughs Matt Selby, chef of Vesta Dipping Grill, where Skrivanek used to work. "He was such a young kid at the time." Fresh from Johnson & Wales University, Skrivanek impressed Selby with his strong work ethic and eagerness to learn. "You can train technique, but you can't train someone to wonder and be inquisitive," says Selby. "That's why he did so well in my kitchen. You could tell him once and he got it."

Skrivanek's ease in the kitchen can be traced to his youth, when this Nebraska native would spend part of every summer visiting his Czech grandparents and watching his grandmother turn out countless batches of rolls and baked goods. But it wasn't until high school, when he took a job in a local restaurant, that he decided to be a chef. "The food seemed so behind in Nebraska, I wanted to get out," he says. "It was the same vegetable and side for every dish."

At Duo, where the emphasis is on ultrafresh, seasonal ingredients, Skrivanek has explored food pairings he never could have imagined back home—venison with a butternut squash–pear purée, and escarol with leeks, wilted greens, and tomato caper aioli. One of the items he developed for Duo's menu, the grilled flatiron steak with sweet potato hash and chimichurri, earned a write-up in *Bon Appétit*.

Such acclaim doesn't surprise chef Broening, who recognized the young line cook's potential and promoted him to sous chef after just a few months on the job. "Tyler's focused, efficient, and organized," he says. While those adjectives could apply to half of the kids at Johnson & Wales, Skrivanek's respect for food reveals a maturity beyond his years. "A lot of inexperienced chefs will pile on the cream and butter and do all this classical French stuff that nobody eats anymore," he says, but Tyler has "an understanding and appreciation of food."

So much does Skrivanek enjoy seasonal cooking, he dreams of opening a fast-casual restaurant serving not burritos or burgers but light, seasonal fare focusing on fish, salads, sandwiches, and whole grains. But for now he's more than content to soak up everything he can at Duo.

—GRETCHEN KURTZ