

Discover

# BACK BAY



# Ken Oringer knows his winter veggies

The Clio mastermind talks about his years in the city's food world.

Chef Ken Oringer has been part of the Boston food scene for a long time. He first opened Back Bay's Clio in the Eliot Hotel 17 years ago, and since then has expanded to other restaurants, including the dual branches of Toro in Boston and New York, which he opened with Jamie Bissonnette. He's also appeared on this year's Boston-based season of "Top Chef." He kindly took a break from managing his multiple restaurants to talk about Boston's changing food scene, dining a la tasting menu and how hard it is to remember the '90s.

## Do you remember the first dish you created for Clio?

That was 17 years ago! I don't remember s— from 17 years ago. [Laughs] No, I think I do. The first dish I created there was

probably — I think it was a bone marrow custard cooked inside the bone with a ragout of corn, mushrooms and black truffles.

## What was the signature dish that helped Clio succeed?

I think what helped the restaurant get going was the tasting menus. We offered different tasting menus back then. Like a 14-course tasting menu and a 10-course tasting menu. Seventeen years ago, I don't think many people offered big tasting menus like that back then. That was before 9/11 when there was a lot of money. People were throwing out money hand over fist. It was so easy to get people to spend a fortune because the economy was booming back then.

## Why do people like tasting menus?

I think they like being able to sit down and be surprised. They leave the spontaneous creativity to the chef and enjoy the roller coaster ride.



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## The Clio menu mentions that it's very seasonally inspired. What do you like adding for the winter months?

I like to focus on certain flavor points before proteins. During winter, I love using things like salsify and sunchokes and beets.

I always like using things like maple and pomegranate. I just like to play off earthy and sweet and sour and spicy and umami to try and work up some of those flavor profiles.

## How have you seen the restaurant scene change over the years?

When Clio opened, there was probably a fraction of the amount of restaurants that there are now. Now we're as good a dining city as I would say anywhere in the world. We're a small city, but the chefs are super talented and driven and we have so many different neighborhoods and so many funky restaurants.

## Where's your favorite place to eat out in the city?

I tend to drag myself to Blue Dragon quite often. I really love it. It's a lot of notes I love. It's a fun place to drink, it's a fun place to hang out, the food is great, it's cheap. Sarma, I really love a lot also.

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