

**BOCANOVA
JACK LONDON SQUARE**



**RICK HACKETT
EXECUTIVE CHEF**

Rick Hackett, executive chef of Bocanova, the exciting new Pan-American restaurant opening August 27th on Oakland's revitalized Jack London Square, may have a degree from the Culinary Institute of America and a résumé that includes stints with French master Yannick Cam and the legendary Alice Waters, but his biggest inspiration, he says, was two winters of cooking and eating in the gastronomic capital of Spain.

From 1984 to 1986, Hackett and his wife, Meredith Melville—now Bocanova's general manager—bicycled through Spain, Portugal, and France. "We weren't the typical cyclists," Hackett recalls. "We'd stop and buy things at farmers' markets and little wineries along the way, and cook up feasts on our camp stove every night." When the weather turned cool and rainy, though, the couple would take shelter in San Sebastian—the Basque coastal city that has been called Spain's best restaurant town. There, Hackett worked at an establishment called Urepel, whose then-owner and chef, Tero Almandoz, was one of the underrated heroes of Basque cuisine. On his days off, he and his wife would sample the local bounty in other eating-places, both simple and refined. "Those experiences, in the Urepel kitchen and in the dining rooms of San Sebastian," says Hackett, "contributed more than anything to my style of cooking, which I'd call 'sophisticated rustic'."

A native of Michigan, Rick Hackett was introduced to the diverse culinary possibilities of the West Coast for the first time in 1973, when he visited an aunt in San Francisco and sampled a number of the best local restaurants of the era. This ignited a passion for cooking in the young man, and he enrolled at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, graduating with a degree in Culinary Arts. After learning the principles of nouvelle cuisine at Yannick Cam's acclaimed Washington D.C. restaurant Le Pavillon, Hackett moved to the Bay Area himself in 1979. There he witnessed, and took part in, the incredible culinary revolution that revolved around Chez Panisse in Berkeley. He worked as a pastry assistant at that seminal restaurant, and at an Oakland pastry shop called La Viennoise, meanwhile cooking Monday nights at Oakland's Bay Wolf Restaurant. After giving up La Viennoise for a full-time stint at Bay Wolf, Hackett and his wife set off on their European adventure.

Back in the U.S. as a fully formed chef, Hackett became opening Executive Chef at the popular Oliveto in Oakland, where he was able to incorporate Spanish accents into the restaurant's northern Italian dishes. Leaving Oliveto in 1990 with the idea of opening his own place, Hackett worked briefly at Wolfgang Puck's Postrio in San Francisco, and then spent two years as a baker at Acme Bread.



55 Webster Street, Jack London Square, Oakland, CA 94607
Tel. 510-444-1233 - Email info@bocanova.com
www.bocanova.com

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In 1992, Hackett and his wife opened—or reopened—the fabled Enrico's in North Beach, as a supper club featuring live music and California–Mediterranean cuisine. The two went on to launch Bandol, a Provençal bistro, and Tavolino—which may have been San Francisco's first "small plates" restaurant, featuring *cicchetti*, the "tapas" of Italy's Veneto region.

In 2000, Hackett left his other enterprises to cook French bistro food as Executive Chef at San Francisco's at Florio restaurant. Three years later, when that restaurant's owners opened MarketBar in the city's Ferry Building, he moved there as Executive Chef. "The menu," he says, "was broadly Mediterranean with California sensibilities, but I also incorporated different cuisines from Central and South America." That gave Hackett the impetus to focus on Latin American food traditions—and on the long, complex, mutually beneficial culinary relationship between that region and the Mediterranean—in creating his Pan-American masterwork, Bocanova.



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