

Chef Steve Samson

Chef Steve Samson might not have realized he was fated for a life spent in kitchens, but his family and upbringing all led to that inevitable result. Samson grew up learning the craft of cooking from his Bolognese mother, with summer trips to visit family in Italy that fomented a veneration for authentic Italian food that never left him. Food was a means of connecting to family, of being together, of cementing a community. While food was always in the back of Samson's mind, his path to professional cooking wasn't a direct one. After three years in a premed program at Columbia, Samson admitted to himself that his true passion lay with food, and that he needed to see where a career in food might take him. Samson enrolled at the Institute of Culinary Education, and completed his time there as a Blue Star Ribbon Graduate. He then began cooking professionally in kitchens throughout New York City and Maine. Upon his return to his home city of Los Angeles, Samson found a mentor in lauded Italian restaurateur, Piero Selvaggio. Soon, Samson found himself back in Italy, this time sent by Selvaggio to stage in some of Italy's finest, Michelin-starred restaurants, including Dal Pescatore, Il Duomo, and Il Cascinale Nuovo. Tasked by Selvaggio to study southern Italian food so that it was afforded better representation at home, Samson fell in love with the flavors of the south, in contrast to the Bolognese and Emilia-Romagna dishes of his childhood. Upon return to the States, Samson helped to open Selvaggio's Valentino Las Vegas as sous chef, moving on to Del Posto in Los Angeles, and finally Valentino in Santa Monica, where, during Samson's time as executive chef there, the restaurant was nominated for a James Beard award for outstanding restaurant. Samson moved on to work at David Myers' Michelin-starred Sona while a new Italian restaurant concept with Myers was in the works. Samson partnered with Myers in 2009 to open Pizzeria Ortica in Orange County, which offered southern Italian dishes alongside Neapolitan-style pizza. The restaurant's success and critical acclaim (OC Weekly's Best Pizza and Best Italian Restaurant) garnered the attention of Starchefs, which named Samson one of Orange County's only Rising Star in 2010.

Feeling a pull back to Los Angeles, Steve found a partner in restaurateur Bill Chait and opened Sotto in 2011. Samson's adherence to offering authentic southern Italian dishes, woodfired Neapolitan pizza, and handcrafted pastas has earned Sotto a spot on many best-of lists, as Esquire Magazine's Best New U.S. Restaurants, Los Angeles Magazine's Best New Restaurant. Even four years after opening, Sotto is still topping LA Weekly's ranking of Los Angeles' best pizza and was featured on Food Network's Best.Pizza.Ever. Samson was also chosen as one of Los Angeles Magazine's Chefs of the Year.

While Samson has proven himself as a master of southern Italian cuisine, he remains nostalgic for the flavors of his childhood, and has plans to open a restaurant focusing on the Bolognese dishes he learned to cook alongside his mother.