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FEATURED CHEFS

PHOTO BY SCOT GORDON

*Going Places***Jason Viscount**

Bricco, Harrisburg

Best New Restaurant

Some of us need to experience the flavor of places such as Italy by actually going there, toting luggage through an airplane terminal, flying in cramped coach class for hours, then trudging through ancient alleyways and breaking bread with the locals.

Not Jason Viscount. He has never set foot in Italy, yet can describe eloquently and prepare masterfully the foods indigenous to particular regions of the country. He has brought those flavors and his intuitive sense of delicious cuisine to [Bricco](#) in Harrisburg, an uncommon concept in the world of dining. Bricco is a collaboration between the Olewine School of Culinary Arts at Harrisburg Area Community College and Harrisburg Hotel Corporation. It's a food laboratory of sorts, where students learn all aspects of the restaurant business in the company of pros such as Viscount who have been in the industry for years.

In this comfy Tuscan-style restaurant awash in browns, mustards and lustrous dark woods, Viscount stands out wearing his whiter-than-white garb coupled with a very tall white hat, the uniform signifying his executive-chef status. A York native, he lived in Philadelphia with his grandmother for two years while he attended elementary school. She made elaborate meals and gave wonderful dinner parties, lining up cuisine such as Welsh rabbit, made with cheese, beer and mustard sauce, on a buffet table in the dining room. By middle school, Viscount was back in York working inside two restaurants owned by his father, immersing himself in the business of fine food.

"We lived in the basement, which was the wine cellar, of one of my father's restaurants, The Hill," Viscount recalls. "Food deliverers used to have to go through my bedroom to bring food into the restaurant."

While some teens knew only drive-through menus and pizza, Viscount's family was taking him to such top city eateries as Le Bec-Fin, the Four Seasons and the Omni Restaurant. It was a standard he experienced and appreciated, and so he made the unconscious decision to attend the [Restaurant School of Philadelphia](#) and discover his inner chef.

"The first meal I ever made was in culinary school," he says. "It was pan-seared chicken with Dijon mustard, tarragon and a cream sauce."

After graduation, Viscount came home to stay, becoming a chef at the Yorktowne Hotel, a cook at the Hotel Hershey's Circular Dining Room, and then taking over as chef de cuisine for eight years at the Harrisburg Hilton's Golden Sheaf. The Hilton gave Viscount the freedom to develop his own menu filled with American cuisine. That has changed with his transition to Bricco, his first executive chef job, where he delights in creating uncomplicated Mediterranean meals in smaller plate sizes. "It's Italian comfort food with a twist," he says. "We try and use things people in Italy use. It's casual fine dining with a family atmosphere. I enjoy working with veal sweetbreads, kidneys and ham hocks. I love making short ribs. I like to work with things nobody likes to work with, like pork trotters [pigs' feet]."

Viscount recently experienced another important transition. He is a newlywed whose wedding ceremony and reception for 104 guests was held inside Bricco. The couple have settled into a new home, where Viscount eliminated the dining room in order to incorporate a kitchen twice the normal size, filled with cherry cabinets and lots of storage.

Despite the changes in his personal and professional life, Viscount hasn't forgotten his grandmother's cooking, filled with fresh ingredients and flavor.

"I used to eat lamb kidney stew on an English muffin and a slice of tomato for breakfast when I lived with her," recalls Viscount. "I still make that for myself. For breakfast."

— LORI MYERS