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How Working In A Restaurant At Age 11 Inspired Chris Coombs' Culinary Success

For the first time, Forbes is bringing together 1,000+ members of the Forbes [30 Under 30 list](#) with some of the globe's top leaders and mentors to create partnerships that will change the world over the next 50 years. The [Under 30 Summit](#) will take place in Philadelphia from Oct. 19 – 22.

Christopher Coombs was a breadwinner first, chef second. His three restaurants do over \$10 million in annual sales and employ more than 100 people, but Coombs' success has a humble beginning. He got his start washing dishes and doing menial tasks on Boston's North Shore at age 11.

"We didn't come from much, so as soon as I could work, I had to," Coombs, 30, said. "What was initially [done] out of necessity for the family just became a love."

As a pre-teen and then a teenager working in a neighbor's seafood restaurant, he fell in love with the energy of the kitchen. Through the Massachusetts Restaurant Association's ProStart School-to-Career Program, which lets students supplement traditional education with foodservice industry courses and internships, he was able to explore his passion for cooking in school as well.



“It was strange to be in high school and know exactly what I wanted to do,” Coombs said. “I was lucky that the program aligned me with great mentors.”



He went on to the Culinary Institute of America and upon graduating in 2004, Coombs cut his teeth at Blue Ginger in Wellesley, Massachusetts and Toppers at the Wauwinet in Nantucket where he met Chef Patrick O’Connell. An impressed O’Connell brought Coombs over to the Inn at Little Washington in Washington, Virginia where he got the chance to prepare meals for “Le Club des Chefs de Chefs,” an exclusive club for the personal chefs of heads of state around the world, and First Lady Laura Bush.

“There was a lot more pressure to be perfect,” Coombs said of his experience at the White House. “But it was like prepping every other dinner—except the secret service was there to check that everything was properly suited for the First Lady and her distinguished guests.”

After stints at Boston’s Aujourd’hui at the Four Seasons Hotel and Troquet, he wanted to open his own restaurant. Coombs partnered with restaurateur Brian Piccini, owner of dbar, a restaurant and nightclub. They formed Boston Hospitality, Inc., and Coombs took over the kitchen and became co-owner of dbar. He built a garden on the roof to help support his dedication to fresh ingredients.

In 2010, Coombs and Piccini opened Deuxave, which focuses on high-end contemporary French cuisine at an affordable price. The restaurant has received critical acclaim, including three stars in the *Boston Globe* and the AAA Four Diamond Award. The duo set out to build the best French restaurant in Boston, Coombs said. According to

Boston Magazine, he succeeded: Deuxave won the publication's "Best French Restaurant" award for 2014.

"It's really my comfort zone to cook [French cuisine]," Coombs said. "It comes from the heart and really speaks to my training."

But the chef likes to try his hand at less comfortable concepts too. Three years after launching Deuxave, Coombs set his sights on conquering the contemporary steakhouse. He opened Boston Chops in the city's South End neighborhood in March of 2013. Coombs described it as a modern interpretation of an American steakhouse. It made the cover of *Food and Wine* last February, and Coombs has made two appearances on the Food Network's "Chopped."

He'll square off against some of the industry's other top up-and-comers at the Under 30 food festival, battling for the title of the best young chef in America. The food festival is part of the first-ever Under 30 summit from Oct. 19-22 in Philadelphia.

"I'll come up with a dish that represents what Chris Coombs stands for," he said. "It's not every day that I get to cook for a thousand people."

[2014 30 Under 30: Food & Wine](#)

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