



ERIC WOOD

Executive Chef | HHSVA FOOD SERVICES

Why did you decide to become a professional chef?

I took a leap! I wasn't really sure that I wanted to be a chef, but once I started I fell in love. Books about chefs and cooking were a real inspiration to me (and sometimes a cautionary tale).

What is the most rewarding part of your role?

As the Executive Chef I don't get to cook in the kitchens as much as I used to. However, I get live vicariously through our talented Chef Managers. Watching them put my ideas into action or evolve them with their own creativity is a great reward.

What inspires you when you're planning a menu?

Hamilton has a fantastic food scene and there are so many talented chefs in the city. Often I'll see a new idea or combination that sparks my own creative process. I often will try something and think "How would we do this in the

cafeteria? Could I make a vegetarian version?" In our shops we need to be fast, affordable and appeal to a wide audience it's an art to find menu ideas that check all the boxes.

What are your favourite flavour combinations? The whole Vietnamese flavour palette is pretty great. Ginger, Lime, Fish Sauce, Mint, Chili, Cilantro, Star Anise. It's a really balance of spicy, sour, herbaceous and salty flavours. Don't be afraid of the fish sauce! The depth and saltiness are essential.

What staple ingredients should everyone have in their kitchen? Good salt: I like to use fine sea salt (never iodized table salt) for seasoning, and a nice flakey salt like Maldon salt for sprinkling on fished dishes like roast potatoes, or pan fried fish. High Quality Canned Tomatoes: Outside of tomato season fresh tomatoes are often woody and flavourless. Canned tomatoes are picked at peak ripeness. Find your favourite brand (it's not always the most expensive one) and have them on hand always for pastas, braises or soups.

What is your go-to meal at home? When in doubt I make a curry. There are so many variations across South Asia and the Caribbean. Sometimes I'll use meat or fish, but often I'll have chickpeas, lentils or paneer.

What food is your guilty pleasure? Potato Chips!
Literally any style or flavour.

