



Jon Wool *Finesse Cuisine*

BRINGING YOU LUXURIOUS, MEMORABLE EVENTS AND EXPERIENCES.

By Trish Hundhausen

Founded in 2004, Chicago's Finesse Cuisine has quickly become a brilliant star in the arena of off-premise entertaining and fine dining, catering grand scale events for groups such as Prada, Chanel, Ralph Lauren, Motorola and Sotheby's to name a few. It has been dubbed by the media and industry experts as ***"Chicagoland's most coveted and exciting culinary concept."*** The man behind the curtain is the humble and affable Jon Wool, who has been producing exciting and magical events for 20 years.



It's no wonder that Jon is so good at what he does. In a way, he has always worked on a stage or set, as his earlier work was in theater and film. After graduating from Carnegie Mellon University with a BFA, he went to New York to pursue acting and "lived the gypsy life," as he puts it, for roughly 10 years, performing in off-Broadway productions, feature films and soap operas. Not unusually, Jon worked simultaneously in the service industry to subsidize his acting career. It made perfect sense, since great food was central to his family life growing up. It wasn't until years later that he realized that this is where his true passion lies.

His career led him to Chicago, where he acted for a number of years and also worked in the catering industry. More and more, he began to shift his focus. To sharpen his business skills, he went to night school and attained an MBA from Loyola University. Eventually, he gave up acting and went on to work for the legendary Wolfgang Puck. As

head of operations for the Chicago division of the catering initiative, he developed significant national accounts.

In 2004, Jon decided it was time to branch out on his own. As he developed his concepts for Finesse, he also worked quickly to build his team. He sought out esteemed chefs and professional servers that were equally passionate about the work, and who would get behind the mission. "The goal is to have each Finesse event be a piece of theater in its own right, and to promote that vision," says Jon. He works primarily in a sales and marketing role with clients and provides necessary support to his team. Regarding his crew, he says, "I place a great deal of importance on service and uniquely inventive menu design. I wanted a chef with a strong understanding and appreciation of ingredients, and the finest and freshest foods – someone who develops relationships with local growers." Finesse's executive chef, Guy Meikle, for example (studied at Chic Culinary and earned stripes at Carlos, Tru, and then led the kitchen at Bin 36), fits this bill. "I wanted an operations director who is driven to please clients and who would create systems to ensure excellence. We work to make each element of every event beautifully memorable."



Jon claims he let go of theater life for his catering business, but in truth, his love for drama comes out in every Finesse event. "There are always challenges," he says. "Akin to the theater, there is always the exciting scramble of putting everything in place, but in a very rigid time-frame." The Finesse approach uses creativity and ingenuity to make each event special, taking great care with all details including music, decor, food and service. Jon takes inspiration from multiple sources. The first is his family, to whom he is profoundly dedicated, but also certainly artists ranging from musicians to actors, and visual artists. He understands that art reflects life, and the details make all the difference.

