

OWNER BIO: ELIAS HENGST

Eli Hengst has literally grown up in the hospitality business. His father, Wolf Hengst, a German immigrant to the United States, recently retired from the position of President and COO of Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, after 30 years with the Company.

Many of Eli's earliest memories are of Washington, DC, where he attended elementary school during his father's early days opening and managing the Four Seasons Georgetown. Through him, Eli was exposed to every imaginable facet of a luxury service operation, and the corresponding values and standards necessary for success.

Eli began working in the food and beverage industry at age 15 and has performed virtually every restaurant job imaginable - from dishwasher and busboy to line cook and bartender. These diverse experiences have given him the perspective to be an effective personnel manager with a high level of empathy - but also a direct approach to discipline - a fact confirmed by the unusually low staff turnover in the operations he has managed.

After graduating with honors and Phi Beta Kappa at the top of his Middlebury College class, and completing his Master's Degree at Georgetown's prestigious Graduate School of Foreign Service, his ambition to open his own restaurant was realized in 1998, when he met eventual business partner, Constantine Stavropoulos, and opened Tryst Coffeehouse and Bar in Adams Morgan.

After the practically overnight success of Tryst [2500sf] which grossed over \$1.8M in its first year of operation, and \$2M+ in subsequent years, Eli saw the opportunity to execute his own personal vision: a 24-Hour restaurant and bar in the nation's capital. Like Tryst, The Diner [2500sf] became an instant-institution grossing over \$3 million in its first year. The restaurants are set to enter their respective eleventh and eighth years of operation.

After selling his share of Tryst and the Diner to his business partner, Eli dedicated himself to developing ingredient-focused and hospitality-driven neighborhood restaurants in the nation's capital. His first acquisition was Mendocino Grille in Georgetown. Under his six year guidance, Mendocino [2000 sf] emerged from a below-the-radar Georgetown gem to one of the city's premier seasonally-oriented restaurants, and averaged 1.8M annually on dinner-only service. Over four consecutive years - from 2005 to 2008 - the restaurant was selected to the Washingtonian 100 Very Best Restaurant List, and was a consistent Wine Spectator award winner. (Eli Hengst and co-owner Jared Rager sold Mendocino Grille in late 2007).

Eli's subsequent venture with Jared Rager, Sonoma Restaurant and Wine Bar, opened in 2005 to rave reviews from the community and critics alike and quickly became a city-wide destination. Tom Sietsema, food critic of The Washington Post, wrote that Sonoma is "good-looking in a fresh sort of way... the design runs simple and handsome...I'd love to keep Sonoma a secret, but I knew it was too late the day it opened."

Sonoma's mission is to present the region's best ingredients in a simple, straightforward manner, pair the creations with the best American and Italian wines in a contemporary, inviting neighborhood atmosphere. In 2007, under Eli's direction as Managing Partner, Sonoma won the prestigious Best Neighborhood Restaurant Award "RAMMY" and was a finalist for the People's Favorite Award.

Sonoma's first floor [2000 sf] is a bustling "upscale-casual" bistro and wine bar, featuring exposed brick outlining a long dining room and bar, as well as an outdoor patio. The second floor [2000 sf] Avenue Lounge is an airy, elegant space that hosts a lively after-work and weekend bar scene. Sonoma is also one of the city's premier private-event locations and frequently plays host to corporate events, political fundraisers events for Senators, US Representatives and Cabinet Members, as well as wine and culinary functions.

In April 2009, Eli will open Blue Ridge Restaurant in Glover Park [6000 sf], where he is the majority owner and Managing Partner. This simple yet ambitious farm-to-table restaurant will set a new standard for ingredient-driven neighborhood dining. Through longtime friendship and common community involvement, Eli has secured one of the city's top culinary and philanthropic talents, Barton Seaver, to head the Blue Ridge kitchen. He has also brought on board Justin Guthrie - a nationally-recognized bartender and mixologist at the vanguard of the cocktail revival - to run the Spirits program at Blue Ridge. Eli and Barton are also in the planning stages of a project in Logan Circle.

Regardless of the final form of the restaurant, Eli and his various development partners have become known for creating restaurants that combine excellent design, sincere hospitality, creative, seasonal cuisine and unique wine and beverage programs. This combination that has led to a decade-long streak of financially successful operations, all of which continue to thrive in distinct District neighborhoods.

The company, under Eli's hands-on management, is characterized by its commitment to developing restaurants that reflect the unique tastes of Washington's diverse neighborhoods, and this mission-driven approach to growth has resulted in a string of accolades from both critics and neighbors alike.

Beyond the bottom line, the Eli has worked to expand the traditional restaurant model to include sustainable business practices: from sourcing organic and naturally-raised ingredients and support of local growers, to use of renewable energy sources and deep rooted community involvement, the company, under his leadership and creative partnerships, aspires to be more than simply a culinary trend-setter.

Jared Rager - CEO - Home Grown Eats, LLC

Jared Rager, a Maryland native and graduate of Middlebury College, left the corporate world of General Electric behind over six years ago to establish a series of neighborhood-based, independently owned restaurants: Georgetown's Mendocino Grille, Capitol Hill's Sonoma Restaurant and Wine Bar, Bethesda's Redwood Restaurant, and Blue Ridge in Glover Park. These gathering places showcase locally sourced, farm-fresh ingredients, and launched the wine bar culture in Washington for friends and family to celebrate everyday events and special occasions.

Jared has over a decade of experience in project development, management, sales, and marketing, a great foundation for his business operations, including site development, construction and financing of restaurant endeavors. In addition to overseeing the behind-the-scenes aspects, Jared fully enjoys the "front end" of the business as well, actively managing his properties on a daily basis and interacting with customers and the local community to ensure the experience at his restaurants is constantly improving.

Jared's first foray into the restaurant world was the purchase of Mendocino Grille (2003). He worked with co-owner Eli Hengst to establish the Georgetown restaurant as one of Washington's premier eateries (*Washingtonian's* 100 Very Best Restaurants List from 2005 - 2008) before selling the restaurant in 2008.

In 2005, Jared financed and opened Sonoma Restaurant and Wine Bar on Capitol Hill. Under Jared and co-manager Eli Hengst's direction, the restaurant opened to rave reviews from the community and food critics, alike. Tom Sietsema, food critic for the *Washington Post*, wrote, "I'd love to keep Sonoma a secret, but I knew it was too late the day it opened." In 2007, Sonoma won the Restaurant Association's RAMMY for 'Best Neighborhood Restaurant.'

In 2008, Jared financed and opened his first solo operation: Redwood Restaurant and Bar located on Restaurant Row in Bethesda, MD. Redwood provides the DC suburbs with a great city experience: a warm, yet elegant gathering place providing the best organic food sourced locally at a great price. Recently voted by Bethesda readers "Best New Restaurant" in *Bethesda Magazine* 2009" and selected by *Washingtonian* magazine as one of the DC area's "Top 75 Bars in 2009," Redwood is rapidly becoming the destination of choice for the greater DC community.

In June 2009, Jared opened his third venture in partnership with Eli Hengst: Blue Ridge Restaurant in Glover Park. This simple farm-to-table restaurant strives to set a new standard for ingredient-driven neighborhood dining. Executive Chef Barton Seaver (*Esquire Magazine's* 2009 'Chef of the Year') heads the kitchen. "We're enjoying serving the bustling Glover Park community and look forward to meeting more of the neighborhood soon," says Rager.

Jared's goal is to create a series of restaurants that serve an important niche in Washington's restaurant scene: places with unparalleled food (organic and locally sourced) paired with great wines in a relaxed atmosphere, at a reasonable price point. This philosophy has inspired Jared's independent company name: Home Grown Eats - look for a new destination restaurant and bar in your neighborhood soon. Jared Rager resides in Washington, DC with his wife Lily and his two young sons.