

## Meet the only RI chef nominated for a 2022 James Beard award



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The Providence Journal

Published 4:58 a.m. ET March 2, 2022 | Updated 6:29 a.m. ET March 2, 2022

When the [James Beard Foundation](#) announced the 2022 Restaurant and Chef Awards last week, a new Rhode Island name appeared.

Chef William "Will" Rietzel was nominated as a semifinalist for Best Chef Northeast. He is the chef de cuisine at [Coast](#), the fine dining restaurant at [Ocean House](#), the Watch Hill hotel.

The [James Beard awards](#), first given in 1991, are considered to be the "Oscars" of the restaurant world. Nearly all of Rhode Island's nominated chefs have come from Providence. [Al Forno's Johanne Killeen](#) and the late [George Germon](#) are the state's only winners.

Rietzel, 31, is pleased to represent his home state, he said in a phone interview. He grew up in North Kingstown and had his first cooking job there..

He has been the chef at Coast for three of its five years and believes the restaurant represents everything the James Beard awards stand for.

He and Coast are in a great position to do the kind of elevated food and service recognized by the awards, he said. He personally feels fortunate to be working with a high caliber of ingredients and to have creative freedom.



William Rietzel is chef de cuisine at Coast, the fine dining restaurant at Ocean House and R.I.'s only James Beard nominated chef for 2022. Courtesy Photo

"We've pushed ourselves to be the best in Rhode Island," Rietzel said. He believes he and Coast are helping to move the state's culinary reputation forward.

"We have world-wide travelers and we are trying to be on same level as a Michelin-starred restaurant," Rietzel said.

Coast earned a [Five Diamond rating from AAA Northeast](#) and is Five Star-rated by the Forbes Travel Guide.

## On the menu at Coast

[Coast](#) is open for dinner Wednesday through Saturday until April when they will add Sunday service, Rietzel said. The restaurant has 34 seats.

According to the Ocean House website, "Coast offers a seasonal menu that showcases the finest of each season's products.

"Dining guests may select from a prix-fixe four-course savory or vegetarian degustation menu with optional cheese courses available to elevate the meal to an indulgent five-course culinary journey."

The stunning setting that Ocean House occupies offers a wonderful inspiration for Rietzel's cuisine, he said. Olive oil poached Dover sole is his signature dish.



Ocean House in Westerly and its Coast restaurant have both earned the prestigious Five Diamond rating from AAA Northeast. *Steve Szydlowski, The Providence Journal, File*

## **North Kingstown pizzeria to Paris**

Rietzel was just a teen when he started cooking at Junction Pizzeria in North Kingstown.

"I instantly found I loved cooking," he said.

He spent five years there and went to Community College of Rhode Island to study business administration and accounting.

He includes Giusto owner/chef Kevin O'Donnell among his mentors. The Newport restaurant owner also worked at the pizzeria in North Kingstown. When O'Donnell went to Paris to open a bistro, Rietzel went, too.

That trip was important to his growth as a chef.

"It really opened my eyes," said Rietzel of Paris. "It gave me a real appreciation for looking at food as part of the whole day instead of just for nutrition. Everything is about food there."

He also cooked at the James Beard House in New York City with O'Donnell.

Rietzel worked with Aaron Edwards at Bistro 9 in East Greenwich for three years and considers him another mentor.

## **The awards process**

The James Beard Foundation put out the call for 2022 nominations last fall.

When Rietzel heard they were re-working the way they nominated chefs, he felt they would be looking more in depth at restaurants and that would benefit Coast. Rietzel asked the hotel marketing team to put his name out there for a nomination to see what might happen.

"I thought we should give it a shot," he said.

He said he feels the scope of the awards is now more diverse and interesting due to the changes.

The next step in the award process is the announcement of Restaurant and Chef Awards nominees with the list narrowed to five in each category. That will be released on Wednesday, March 16. The winners in each category will be crowned with a medal at a ceremony on Monday, June 13 at the Lyric Opera of Chicago.

Rietzel hopes he'll be there with his wife, Nadya Kovacheva, who is also in the business but works at the front of the house. They met at Ocean House.