

SERIOUS SUCCESS

New Orleans Chef Kristen Essig of Coquette opens second restaurant and works for change in the industry

BY **Ashley McLellan**
PHOTOS BY **Romero & Romero**

NEW ORLEANS WASN'T ORIGINALLY on Chef Kristen Essig's career map — until she bumped into a very familiar face while enrolled in culinary school.

"I had the amazing opportunity to work with Chef Emeril Lagasse at an event in 1997," says Essig. "Chef Emeril was very kind to me and offered me a job that night to work with him on a 'small' TV show he was working on."

While the offer to move to the Big Apple did not pan out, it would later transform into a move to the Big Easy.

"When I declined he gave me his cell phone number and told me 'When you're done with school and want a job call me,'" says Essig. "I did just that and in 1999 I moved from Charleston to New Orleans to begin my first job at Emeril's Restaurant."

With plans for a new restaurant, as well as building on the success of her tight-knit team at Coquette, where she is chef and co-owner, Essig has much to look forward to in 2018.

"My partner, Michael Soltzfus, and I have a big year coming up," she says. "We are opening a second restaurant, Thalia, in the Lower Garden District. We're thrilled to create a place for our friends and neighbors in the neighborhood in which we live. I am most excited about continuing to work with some of the finest people and talent in the city. We have an extremely dedicated and talented team of people that work with us at Coquette. There is no limit to what they can do." ■

“Service is the most important aspect of my job. Food can be delicious, but if you’re not offering it to a guest with love, it just doesn’t taste as good.”



LOUISIANA CRABMEAT AND ENGLISH PEA SALAD WITH MINT BUTTERMILK DRESSING

If you can't get your hands on crabmeat, this salad is just as delicious with lightly poached shrimp or poached and chilled mussels.

- 1 pound jumbo lump Louisiana crabmeat, delicately picked
- 1 tablespoon chopped Tarragon
- 1 cup English peas, blanched in salted water
- 4 green onions, chopped
- 1 cup mayonnaise (or aioli)
- ¼ cup buttermilk
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley
- 1 tablespoon stone ground mustard
- 2 tablespoon capers, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoon chopped mint
- salt and freshly ground black pepper

- 1.** Combine the blanched English peas with the crabmeat, tarragon and salt and pepper.
- 2.** In a blender combine the remaining ingredients, puree until smooth. Toss the English peas and crab with this dressing.
- 3.** Chill for at least 2 hours and serve cold. Delicious served inside half of an avocado, or on creole tomato slices. Also delicious, straight out of the bowl.

YIELDS: 8-10 SERVINGS

POWERFUL HOSPITALITY

Manny Augello of Bread & Circus Provisions in Lafayette recognized by the James Beard Foundation

BY **Ashley McLellan**

PHOTOS BY **Romero & Romero**

“I am exceptionally lucky to be surrounded by a talented, passionate, and enthusiastic staff at B&CP whose commitment to redefining dining and elevating the expectations of hospitality are highly infectious. I look forward to continue to grow our B&CP family. Continue to learn with them and implement our knowledge to further refine our brand.”

SINCE THE BRICK AND MORTAR OPENING in 2014, Chef Manny Augello at Bread & Circus Provisions has brought a distinctive cultural mash-up of classic and cutting-edge cuisine importing a dash of Italian, a smidge of the Far East and a helping local down home cooking to Lafayette diners.

For Augello, the self-professed “Ambassador of Neapolitan pizza. High-priest of salumi,” working in the restaurant industry has long been a family tradition.

“Cooking, farming, restaurantering and exposure to everything in between... gave me an appreciation for hospitality’s power,” says Augello. “The biggest influence in my culinary journey was my childhood spent in Sicily, where the simplistic approach to ingredients in both ancient and modern recipes remains paramount to the culture’s food ways.”

Augello’s passion is reflected in his menu, which has an emphasis on the freshest of ingredients.

“I have always noticed the resemblance that Cajun tradition has to my own culture,” he said. “Seasonal availability, simplicity and a deep sense of respect for the ingredient are principles which create the fundamentals for the enjoyment of food and company.”

The James Beard Foundation took note of Augello, recognizing him in March with a 2018 semi-finalist nod for Best Chef: South.

“As a chef, I find satisfaction in providing an experience to our guest that fills their need for nourishment and entertainment,” he said. “I’m grateful to be surrounded by a community supportive of my culture where I can practice my craft. This recognition lets us know that all the difficulty, long hours, and hard work that go into operating our restaurant comes from a desire to want to be better at our profession.” ■



BREAD & CIRCUS PROVISIONS

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OSSO BUCO

Using **kitchen twine**, snugly tie each of the **5 pieces of beef shank (2-3" thick)** around its circumference, as if you were attempting to fasten the meat closed around the bone. With a small piece of twine, fasten **4 sprigs of thyme, 2 sprigs of rosemary** and **2 bay leaves** together into a bundle.

In a large skillet, bring **1 cup of olive oil** up to smoking point. While oil is heating, season the shanks liberally with **salt and pepper**. Carefully place the shanks into the hot oil and proceed to brown well on both top and bottom.

Remove from the skillet, lower heat to medium and add **½ cup salt pork or bacon (diced small)**. Stir until bacon begins to brown, add **2 cups yellow onion (medium dice)**. Once onions are translucent, then add **2 cups celery (medium dice)** and **2 cups carrot (peeled and medium dice)** to skillet.

Deglaze with **24 ounces of dry white wine**. Bring to a simmer, scraping up brown bits off the bottom of the skillet. Turn off heat and stir in **24 ounces plain tomato sauce** and **24 ounces beef or chicken broth**.

Place shanks into a deep baking vessel and pour vegetable/liquid mixture over them evenly. Place the herb bundle in the pan last.

Place a piece of parchment paper over the pan and cover tightly with aluminum foil. Bake at 300 F for 6-8 hours till meat is fork tender.

LOCALLY INSPIRED

Chef Jeff Hansell looks close to home for his creative menu at Oxlot 9 in Covington

BY ASHLEY MCLELLAN
PORTRAIT BY ROMERO & ROMERO

CHEF JEFF HANSELL IS A GULF COAST native who has made Louisiana his home as chef of Oxlot 9 in the historic Southern Hotel in Covington. His bag full of culinary tricks of the trade, stem from journeying across the United States honing his chef's knife and learning skills from top restaurants in Colorado, Alabama and New Orleans.

"Each stop has brought something to learn," he said. "Birmingham has a wealth of great chefs and restaurants along with a large farming community. My time in Aspen, Colorado was the first time I felt out of my element. New ingredients, cooking methods, culture. It taught me to think outside my box of just cooking in the South."

Opened in 2014, Oxlot 9 quickly gained attention both in Louisiana and on a national level, as Hansell was soon named Best New Chef, Gulf Coast by *Food & Wine* magazine that same year. Hansell gains inspiration from the people and fresh ingredients in and around Covington and south Louisiana, and attributes that, in part, to the innovation found in his restaurant.

"I would have never guessed we would have landed here, but am so grateful we have.," he said. "We have the access to all the local seafood and game of south Louisiana and a huge farming community. I think the ever-changing availability of fresh seafood and produce is what definitely influences our menu the most."

Cooking and creating in the kitchen with the freshest of ingredients has been a lifelong love affair Hansell continues with his wife and business partner Amy at the Southern Hotel.

"It's a culmination of many influences," he said. "At a young age I remember a lot of our gatherings and celebrations being centered around food. Also, Amy, who is always challenging and creating by my side; the past, present, and future staff at each restaurant, who are always pushing as hard as we are; the patrons, that sing our praises. It was complete fate that we drove past the Southern Hotel in its first stages of renovations. We were hunting for a spot to finally open a restaurant of our own and fell in love in love with the property." ■



CRAB CAKES WITH ROASTED CORN CREAM, HARISSA, AND BLACK RICE SALAD

CRAB CAKES Pick 1 pound jumbo lump crab meat to ensure there are no shells and reserve in cooler. Lightly saute ½ cup diced red onion, ¼ cup diced celery, ¼ cup diced poblano pepper, and 3 cloves minced garlic until soft. Reserve and set aside to cool. Combine crabmeat, sauteed vegetables and ¼ loaf of diced, toasted French bread, 1 egg plus 1 egg yolk, 1 tablespoon heavy cream, 2 tablespoons mayo, 1 teaspoon creole mustard, 1 teaspoon horseradish, ½ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce, 1 teaspoon Crystal Hot Sauce and juice of half a lemon. Salt to taste.

Lightly fold mixture to incorporate. Try not to overmix so that crab meat stays intact. Let mixture sit for about 30 minutes in refrigerator to marinate and for bread to soak up liquid.

Split into 6 ounce portions and sear on both sides. Finish in 350 degree oven for 5 minutes to finish cooking through.

CORN CREAM Sweat 2 shallots (diced) and 6 cloves garlic in ½ stick of unsalted butter in a medium sauce pot until soft. Add 5 ears of shucked corn, and on medium heat cook until mixture starts to caramelize, about 7-8 minutes. Add 1 quart cream and simmer for about 10 minutes. Salt to taste. Pour mixture into blender and blend on high until mixture is smooth. Add 3 tablespoons verjus (found in gourmet grocery stores or online) and blend to incorporate. Taste and season with 1 teaspoon salt and ½ teaspoon white pepper. Serve hot.

To get the recipe for Chef Hansell's Harissa and Black Rice Salad, visit louisianalife.com

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IF I'M NOT COOKING I'M USUALLY A FAN OF HAVING SOMEONE COOK FOR ME. MY WIFE AND I LOVE DINING OUT AND DISCOVERING NEW GEMS. I'M ALWAYS A SUCKER FOR RAW OYSTERS AND A GOOD POORBOY.