



2014

TASTE MAKERS

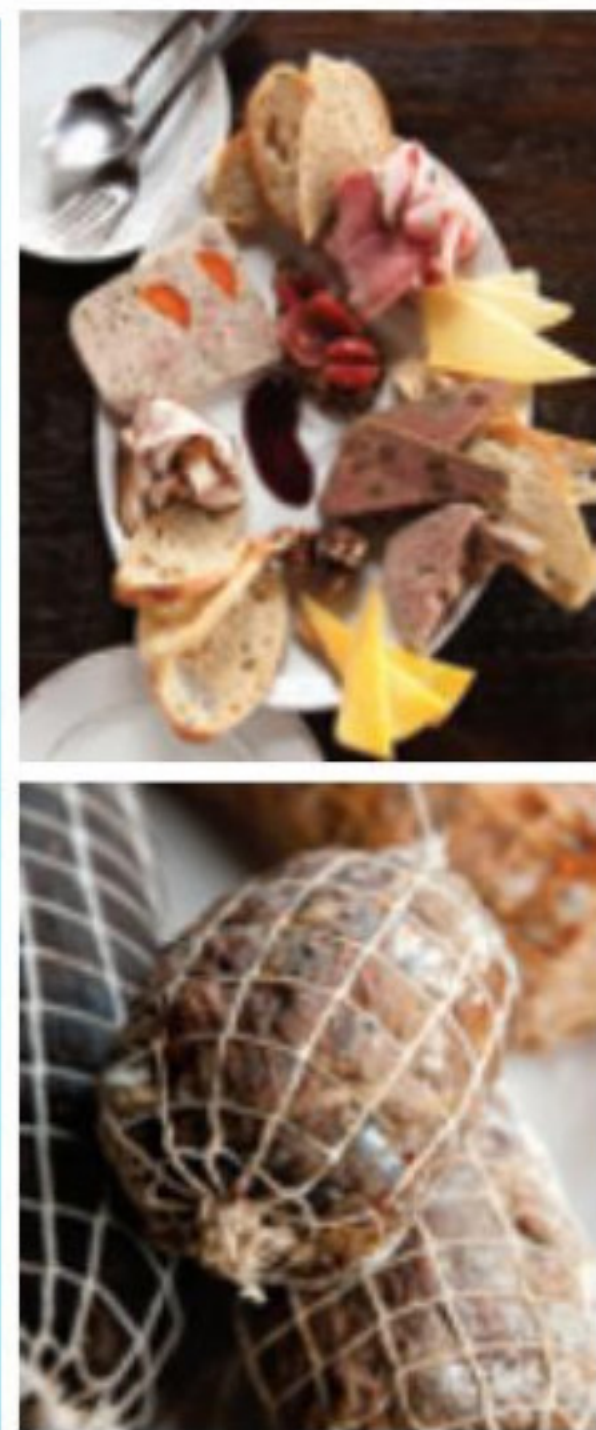


It happened on artfully presented plates at a brewpub. Coming out of the kitchen of a dive bar. In the freezer section of the grocery store. From the tap handles at a cocktail bar. On a vintage plate piled high with house-cured meats. Columbus' dining landscape is rapidly changing, and for the better. Leading the charge: these 11 inspired chefs, bartenders and visionaries who have big plans for the future.

STORIES BY ANTHONY DOMINIC AND BETH STALLINGS
PHOTOS BY WILL SHILLING

Donte Allen

CHARCUTIER, THE TABLE



Why he's a Tastemaker: In the basement of The Table, Donte Allen spends countless hours in a small windowless room he calls his lab. It's where he cures pork, crafts pate from chicken and beef and dreams up savory flavors of sausage. When The Table opened in the Short North last year, charcuterie—a selection of house-cured meats—was a big part of the mission, with offerings rotating every few weeks and taking up a full page on the menu. Allen was the guy they hired to lead the charge, which he did with rich and creamy country pate and jamon blanc (ham herb-brined then slowly oven-poached) among a countless array of other cured meats and sausages. It's Allen's thoughtful commitment to his craft that turned heads this year.

Cheese, please: "It wasn't meat, initially. It was cheese," says Allen, who was inspired "to make things" after taking a job at Curds & Whey eight years ago. He began to make cheese—a wonderful goat milk camembert was his first—at home. "Then I had a lot of failures. A lot of failures," Allen says. So he built a cheese cooler and started to read about molding.

Italian inspiration: On a trip to Italy, Allen wandered into a salumiere. As he spoke with the Italian butcher and tried his cured meats, endorphins started to pulse. "That was the point where I was like, 'Why don't we have this here?' That's when I decided I was going to do this," Allen says. He built a curing room at home and began making peperone, duck prosciutto, lamb pancetta and lomo. Eventually he would enroll in the French Culinary Institute in New York, commuting back and forth each week, for formal training.

The mecca of meat: "I remember the first time I had the black-footed pig, the pata negra, from Spain. It's literally like eating money, 'cause it's \$180 a pound," Allen says. Inspired by the way some of those pigs are raised—fed only acorns their entire lives—Allen followed suit with his own pig in Ohio. Two years ago, his acorn-fed pig grew to 425 pounds. "But that's not what's important," he says. "It's the fat that develops from eating the acorns." The result is lean, nutty meat that melts like butter. "You can taste all the different profiles of what the pig has eaten."

Personal philosophy: "If you eat meat, at some point you should go kill whatever you eat," says Allen, who butchered his acorn-fed pig from start to finish. That, he says, gave him a better understanding of the sacrifice the pig made, a reminder to not be wasteful of any part of the animal. "This is a chance for me to understand and be a part of the process. I think everyone should do that. You should understand how your meat gets to you."

Coming to the table: His goal is to make simple foods from simple ingredients. "It's not about making something ornate or expensive. It's about using items you might otherwise throw away," he says. Allen estimates The Table sells more than 100 pounds of cured meats a month, including 14 pounds each of pate and whole hams every week. "I'm glad it's being so well received," he says. "It just shows that our generation is so much more open." Expect the charcuterie offerings to change every few weeks. In the coming months, if all goes well, Allen hopes to start serving his own cheese—starting with bloomy rind cheeses like Camembert and brie.

▲ Raised on the East Side of Cleveland, Allen grew up on brats and kielbasa and trips to the West Side Market. Eastern European cultures influence the way he makes his sausage.

Favorite Off-Night Eat



Fennel sausage pizza with an over-easy egg at Harvest



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PREVIOUS GIG
Curds & Whey

GUILTY PLEASURE
"Anything related to chocolate. Spencer [Budros] at Pistacia Vera makes a chocolate cookie, and I could swim in them like McDuck in a money bank."

GO-TO DRINK
Lemon and honey water

RECOMMENDED READING
The Culinaria series. "You can pick any country for history and a background of cultural things related to food."

FAVORITE INGREDIENT
French Four Spice





Laura Lee

CHEF AND OWNER, AJUMAMA

Why she's a Tastemaker: When the gourmet food truck wave swept into the city two years ago, Laura Lee's Ajumama was at the front of the pack. It's a position that hasn't wavered as the always joyful Lee turns out traditional Korean street fare night after night, feeding our cravings for bulgogi cheesesteaks and savory pajeon pancakes. She's also become an informal ambassador for Columbus food trucks, working with Columbus City Council to enact

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PREVIOUS GIGS
Arterra in San Diego, Latitude 41 and ZenCha

GO-TO DRINK
Unsweetened iced tea or a Moscow mule with Watershed vodka

LOCAL FOOD HERO
"Matt Heaggans. He has such an interesting take on food and dishes and how he puts them together."

RECOMMENDED READING
"In the Devil's Garden." "It talks about why certain foods relate to deadly sins."

Guilty Pleasure



Ice cream. "I'm a dweeby Jeni's fan girl."

fairer regulations and appearing on the Cooking Channel show "Eat St." this year.

No tacos: When Lee first started the truck, people would say, "Oh, you're going to do tacos." "And I'm like, 'No, I'm not,'" Lee laughs. Her goal was to prove Korean food could sell from a truck, without putting the flavors in a tortilla. "There are other ways to make it approachable."

Missing Columbus: After five years at Latitude 41, Lee headed to San Diego, hoping to find a forward-thinking food community. As a sous chef, she made dark chocolate peppermint ice cream with marshmallows and coconut lime sorbet. But guests complained. They wanted "normal" flavors. "It was one of those moments—this is 'normal' to me," says Lee, a "Jeni's fan girl." After eight months, Lee knew she needed to come home.

Family ties: "There's a running joke that my family goes on vacation to eat," Lee laughs. On a trip to New Orleans when she was 7, Lee's mom signed them up for a cooking class. She made jambalaya, gumbo and bread pudding. "From there, I watched way too many cooking shows," says Lee, who would eventually go to culinary school in Phoenix. When her family began to spend more time in Korea a few years ago, Lee took classes there and began to immerse herself in the culture. When it came time to plan the menu for the truck, Lee selected dishes that are "well-loved in Korean street food but you don't see a lot in the States."

Mobile advocate: Lee may be a reluctant spokesperson, but she was willing to step up to the mic during the recent debate surrounding City Council's food truck regulations. The proposal would have put a 25-foot limit on food trucks, essentially banning longer trucks like Ajumama from city streets. "I'm going to advocate for trucks who may be in a similar situation as me," Lee says. She's not always comfortable speaking out, "but I do understand what needs to be said. You know, the squeaky wheel getting the grease. I'm really glad to see the changes that have been made."

Next step: Lee is two years into her four-year business plan that ends with something less mobile—a small eatery serving the same Korean-style food plus cocktails. "It would be an extension of the truck," she says. "The bar atmosphere with the twist on street food. Nothing fancy, just a great place to get some great Korean food. The truck has allowed us to prove the concept of Ajumama will work."



Seth Lassak

EXECUTIVE CHEF,
WOLF'S RIDGE BREWING

Why he's a Tastemaker: Listen closely, and you can almost hear the gears turning inside Seth Lassak's mind as he maps out a dish before ever picking up a knife. How the perfectly pink venison will fan out on a white plate, a pop of green from a frisée salad. His thoughtful, refined and always approachable twists on French classics continue to attract diners to this Downtown brewpub, where they might pair a house-brewed IPA with buffalo frog legs or a pale ale with a herbaceous duck breast. "I want to use classic cooking techniques simply," says the Culinary Institute of America grad, who's proving we can have a beer and foie gras, too.

His start: Looking to pick up extra cash in high school, Lassak started as a dishwasher at Muirfield Village Golf Club but soon was peeling carrots and picking parsley. He was 14 and hooked. By the time he went to culinary school in 2003, Lassak was working the cold station at Muirfield. "I was taught plate presentations and attention to detail," he says. "They were teaching me the science and why you do certain things. It opened

my eyes to [see] there's a lot more to cooking than just the physical."

California flavor: After culinary school, Lassak moved to California. He cites his mentor, chef Jay Veregge of Ten22 in Old Sacramento, as his biggest influence. "He built my style and gave me ideas. He taught me to create a full thought before I even put it on the plate," he says. At Wolf's Ridge, Lassak adopts a similar practice with his staff when creating dishes for next season's menu. On a board in his office, the chef lists the best vegetables, proteins and starches available, then the culinary team circles the ones they want to play with. "Ideas flow; it just clicks," Lassak explains. "One day we're in the kitchen peeling onions and we're talking about chard. Then someone says, 'Let's make a vinaigrette out of it.' Then hopped chard vinaigrette is on a special."

Visual inspiration: "I see the plate in my mind before I even write anything down," Lassak says. "I'm a very visual person. I love the food to be very visual." Lassak says he's always been this way. Even now, he gravitates toward pictures of food in books more than the words themselves.

Adventurous eaters: Lassak was hesitant to put frog legs and foie gras—items not typically associated with a brewpub—on the menu. He didn't know how diners would respond. "I do want to push the envelope, but I don't want to make it so obnoxious that people don't want to eat it," he says. But with encouragement from co-owner Bob Szuter, the chef kept those dishes and added more. They didn't sell initially, but as good reviews poured in, Lassak saw a change in orders.

Hopped up: While Wolf's Ridge was in the planning stages, Lassak—a home brewer since college—spent his down time crafting 10 gallons of beer a week. "I had to keep giving it away," he laughs, admitting he did some really off-the-wall stuff, adding flavor combinations like cherries and cinnamon. "The ideas were good, but I wasn't producing a drinkable beer."



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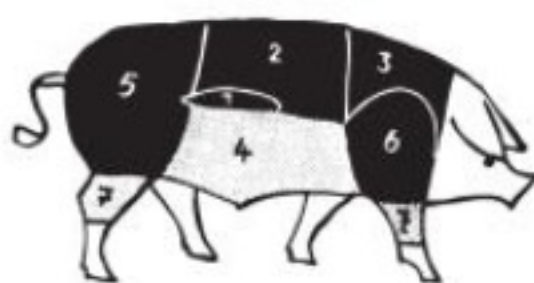
PREVIOUS GIGS
Ten22; Greenhouse Restaurant and Brewery and The Firehouse Restaurant, all in Sacramento, California

GUILTY PLEASURE
"Adobo peanuts. I fell in love with them in Singapore."

GO-TO DRINK
A nice strong beer—barley wine, strong Scottish ales and IPAs. "Hard alcohol—I'll go straight for a Manhattan."

OFF-NIGHT EAT
"We go to 101 Beer Kitchen a lot. They have a great beer selection, they make really good drinks and they're kid-friendly."

Favorite Ingredient



Pig.
"I plan on getting a whole hog in here and doing the butchering. We're killing this animal, so let's use it all."



“I always knew I would be married to the kitchen. It's my second wife, I guess.”

—SETH LASSAK



Logan Demmy

BAR MANAGER, MOUTON



Why he's a Tastemaker: In June 2010, Logan Demmy was hired as a barista at Mouton, when the new Short North cocktail bar was also serving morning coffee. But when a coworker quit, Demmy found himself behind the bar shaking and stirring an ambitious menu of classic drinks. "Looking back, I should have been [nervous]," he says. "I just had no clue. There wasn't a benchmark at all. When we opened, Curio wasn't there. Nobody was jiggering drinks." So he started reading revered cocktail writer David Wondrich and studying "The Flavor Bible," learning how to incorporate bitters, fresh citrus and double-straining techniques into his repertoire. He grew into his role, survived a change in ownership and, in four years' time, established one of the city's most innovative cocktail programs.

Ahead of the curve: Two words: draft cocktails. At Mouton, Demmy has been at the forefront of every major cocktail trend to hit the city (like bottling and barrel-aging cocktails as early as 2011). So we weren't surprised when he put a Moscow mule on tap this spring. But doing so was about more than efficiency; it was an opportunity to create and serve cocktails in an entirely



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PREVIOUS GIGS
Barista at One Line Coffee and Luck Bros' Coffee House

GO-TO DRINK
Negroni

FAVORITE INGREDIENT
Absinthe. "It can be used to make a cocktail, or just a spritz on top completely changes a drink."

Favorite Off-Night Eat



A burger at Press Grill. "It's one of the few places I feel like I can run into other bartenders or cooks."

new way. "It's a totally different art," he says. "Batching and scaling—there's a lot that happens behind the bar. I'm putting hours in to get to the product that takes 10 seconds to pour during service."

Student of the trade: Demmy regularly attends Tales of the Cocktail, an annual industry gathering in New Orleans with seminars, competitions and tastings. Last year, he was accepted into the festival's highly selective Cocktail Apprentice Program, allowing him to work alongside some of the best bartenders in the country. "It's hard to learn about cocktail bars in Columbus," he says. "Sometimes things get a little bit stagnant. So I spend a lot of time conversing with people in Chicago and New York and reading online blogs."

No pretensions: Demmy is proud of Mouton's cocktail program, but he's the first to remind you it's not the bar's primary focus. Mouton is a social bar, a place where friends and strangers gather to share laughs and small plates. "We're a classic cocktail bar [where] you can get a Moscow mule, and we're happy to serve them. I'm happy to serve highballs. I just love that people come in and have a good time."

Flavor fever: Ask Demmy about his bartending dream, and he'll tell you it's immunity to inebriation. If he could craft (and taste) new cocktails all day, he would. For him, it's about creativity. "There's something completely different about how flavor interacts on your palate in a liquid format," he says. "There's a rare point where you come up with a cocktail that's like, wow, it works on a level beyond the natural."

Branded: A good bartender knows cocktails; a great bartender knows hospitality. Demmy's passion for the latter inspired the pineapple tattoo on his leg. It was once customary for sailors, upon returning home, to place a pineapple outside their front door. This was an invitation to friends and family to join them in food and drink—an idea Demmy carries with him at Mouton. "I love sharing my passion for drinking," he says. "I enjoy working a Tuesday or Wednesday shift when it's slow and you can just sit down and talk to someone for a bit."



John Lowe

CEO, JENI'S SPLENDID ICE CREAMS AND EAT WELL DISTRIBUTION

Why he's a Tastemaker: John Lowe saw the potential in Jeni Britton Bauer long before national media outlets took notice. Tapped as CEO in 2009, Lowe is the business savvy ying to Britton Bauer's artisanal ice-cream yang. He can be credited with building the company's wholesale business that ships pints of ice cream all over the world. And now, he and his creative and logistical teams are doing the same for other Columbus food artisans through Eat Well Distribution, Jeni's food-distribution arm. Eat Well is the reason you'll find frozen Harvest pizzas on market shelves in Chicago and Luna burgers at Dean and Deluca.



people, yes, he admits, he's "reasonably creative." When he first came on board, Jeni would joke there are 150 employees—149 of them artists, and then there's Lowe.

Legal aid: A graduate of Ohio State University's Moritz College of Law, Lowe met Jeni and Charly Bauer during his first year as a labor and employment attorney. He left Columbus in 2005 to take a post as corporate counsel for GE Aviation. But in June 2009, he was back in Columbus and, as he likes to put it, betting it all on Jeni's. "Why did I leave GE to come here? Because it felt wholesome," Lowe says. "It was an opportunity to help grow a company that exists for all the right reasons."

Wholesome foods: At its core, Jeni's exists to make the world's greatest ice cream. But, Lowe adds, they also want to make the world a better place. In December, Jeni's was recognized as a B Corporation—a company using the power of business to solve social and environmental problems. It's adding accountability to a philosophy that was always there, Lowe says. And while Eat Well hasn't applied for the designation, it upholds the same standards—to deliver great, minimally-processed foods. "I'm no scientist. I don't know what is making us less healthy as a society. But my heart tells me that it is the highly processed food we take in," Lowe says. "When we can help put less processed foods on the shelf that stay good because they're frozen, not because they have stabilizers in them, we can make the world a little bit better place."

Go-to Drink



Watershed Bourbon Barrel Gin and tonic

Longtime foodie: Lowe makes a point of saying he doesn't have a sophisticated palate. But, he quickly adds, he's always been a foodie. "I grew up south of Chicago, and I've lived in several major cities," he says. "I think we've got a fantastic food scene. My hunch is that over the next decade, our city will become known more and more as the food hub on par with Brooklyn, Charleston and other great American cities." As to whether or not Jeni's plays a role in that, Lowe hopes so. "I think Columbus' food scene can do it without us, but I hope that Eat Well helps in some tiny little part in expanding the brand of Columbus."

Play ball: A father of three boys—ages 8, 5 and 3—one of Lowe's favorite things to do is coach third grade travel basketball. "I had more fun doing that than I have had in 10 years," he says. "I love having time with my boys and wife. If you drive by our house, I am outside playing catch with them most of the time."

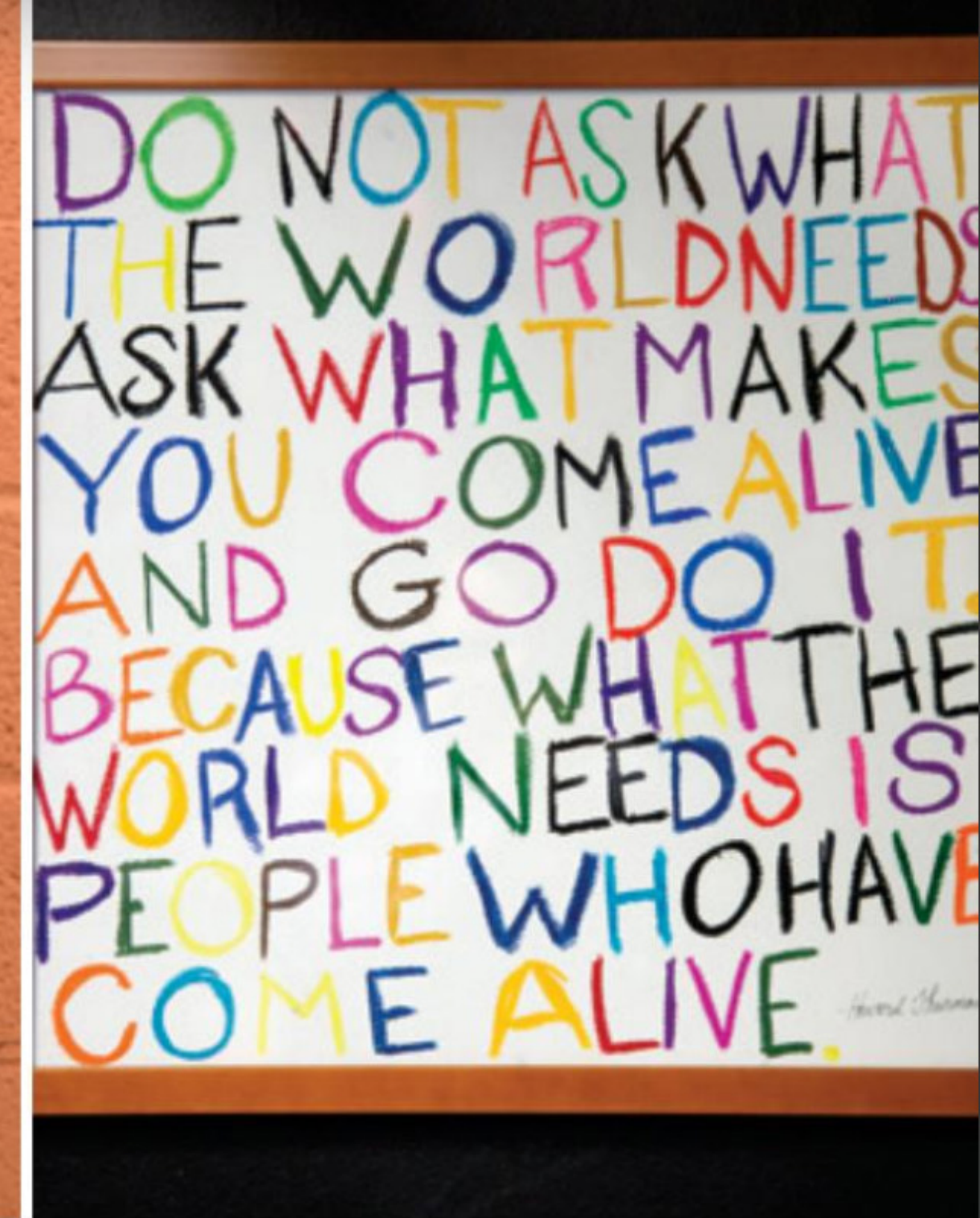
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GUILTY PLEASURE
I eat dim sum every chance I get.

RECOMMENDED READING
"Happiness: The Art of Living with Peace, Confidence and Joy" by Douglas Smith. "I'm sort of, at my core, a happy, confident, peaceful person. It is a great reminder of how we impact [the way] we perceive the world."

PLACE TO EAT
Akai Hana is our go-to.



Matthew Heaggans

CHEF AND OWNER,
SWOOP! FOOD GROUP



✦ Why he's a Tastemaker: Two words: chocolate pasta. Sure, Matthew Heaggans caught our attention long before this dish, thanks to his never-cut-corners attitude toward the sliders and tots he pushes from Swoop! Food Truck. But it's his ability to execute dishes that are both odd-sounding and delicious (like savory and bitter-sweet chocolate pasta) that gave us serious whiplash this year. Our heads snapped toward Merion Village, where Heaggans is now notably stretching his culinary muscles in the food-truck-size kitchen of the Hey Hey, operating pop-up eatery Bebe. His creative bar fare (think confit potato poutine, house-made pasta with broccoli pesto and, hopefully soon, bao made with biscuits) is a promised sneak peek of the small-plates restaurant he hopes to open in Columbus.

Changing the culture: Heaggans views the truck and pop-up as a way to build trust with customers, hoping that by delivering consistent, good food, diners will be inspired to order unconventional dishes like butternut squash pudding. "At one point, someone's going to look at my menu and see chocolate fettuccine and not think, 'That sounds gross,' but, 'That sounds interesting. And I can trust this guy to give me a good plate of food,'" he says. "We're at a tipping point where people know what we're doing, and they like it, hopefully. It's being patient."

Soft spoken: Heaggans has a tough time tooting his own horn. When asked by a TV reporter who has the best bite of food in the city, he proudly exclaimed, "Pistacia Vera!" He laughs but says he'd still give the same answer. Don't get him wrong; he's proud of his food, but he knows he has room to grow. "I'd put our food up against anyone else's. With very little, I feel like we've done a lot," he says. "It's not been easy. But I'm learning that if something's easy, you're probably not doing it right."

Let's drink: Heaggan's group includes Swoop! Food Truck, Crepes a la Carte and Bebe at the Hey Hey. Bebe is a preview of the kind of food he wants to make at Bebida, a small-plates restaurant he hopes to open. This year, he'll be looking to crowd-fund Bebida. And if he doesn't raise the money, he'll come up with another plan. "Standing still isn't really an option for us," he says.

Favorite Off-Night Eat



Destination Donuts



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PREVIOUS GIGS
Chuck E. Cheeses,
Inox in Virginia
and Garrett's in
Washington, D.C.

GO-TO DRINK
Fernet-Branca, neat

LOCAL FOOD HERO
Andrew Smith at The Rossi

RECOMMENDED READING
"Eleven Madison Park: The Cookbook."
"It's also a place to look for inspiration."

FAVORITE INGREDIENT
Vinegar. "There is always an acid component in everything I do. I go through gallons of apple cider vinegar."

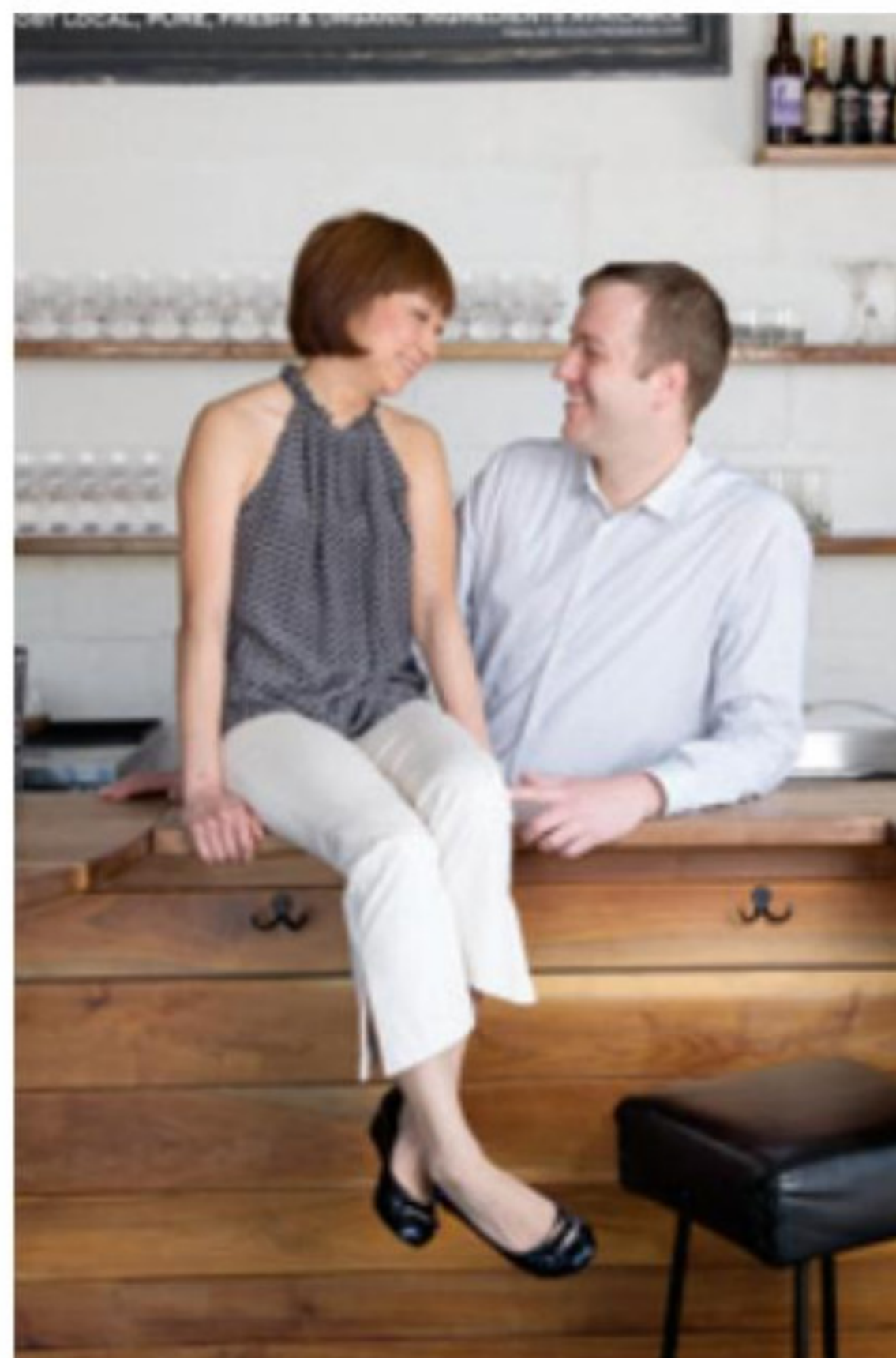
"I have memo pads all around my room. This flavor and that will go well together. How can I put those flavors together?"

—MATTHEW HEAGGANS



Eric Allen & Miki Ashino

GENERAL MANAGER AND CO-OWNER, BROTHERS DRAKE MEADERY; OWNER AND CHEF, TOKYO GOGO



Why they're Tastemakers: When Eric Allen was asked to join Brothers Drake in 2011, it was little more than a struggling mead tasting room on the then-dead corner of Fifth and High. Allen asked himself: "How do we make alcohol from fermented honey relevant?" So he and co-owners Sarah and Oron Benary applied for a liquor license and built a stage for live music. In late 2012, when Allen was ready to add food to the mix, he turned to his wife, whom he met at culinary school at Columbus State Community College. Miki Ashino comes from a long line of Japanese chefs. ("There's literally pictures of her at 6 years old with 7-inch fish knives cutting raw fish," Eric says.) It's this amalgam of authentic food, music and mead that, in less than two years, has turned Brothers Drake into one of the Short North's premier attractions.

Above and beyond: Ashino imports many of her ingredients from Japan. "It's hard to get ingredients [in Ohio] I really want to play with," she says. "I don't want to just have OK ingredients." For example, the soba noodles found in her Japanese Noodle Soup (\$8) come straight from her parents' home of Yamagata, a region known for soba noodles. "Not to underestimate the palates of the people around us, but do you really think 90 percent of customers would be like, 'Well, these soba noodles aren't from the region I like my soba noodles from?'" Allen says. "This is about bringing the best quality ingredients that make sense for this truck."

In high demand: Brothers Drake serves more than alcoholic honey in a glass. Their meads can take up to two years to make, and each offers a surprising flavor profile. Beer lovers can't get enough of the Hopped Traditional, a dry mead with citrusy Cascade and piney Chinook hops,

while those with a sweet tooth go for the Apple Pie, a mix of local cider, cinnamon and nutmeg. The next time you belly up to the bars at World of Beer, Seventh Son Brewing Co., Bodega, Double Happiness or The Local inside Whole Foods, you'll find their signature Wild Ohio and Honey Oak meads on tap. "When I was still selling cases [of mead] myself, I'd sell one to Whole Foods and think, 'Wow, we sold a case,'" Allen says. "Now we're pushing 10 cases at a time."

Guest chefs: Ashino knew she was onto something last summer and fall when the lines outside her truck kept growing. People are attracted to what Allen calls her "simple, real food," like the Karaage (\$6), flash-fried chicken thigh with mead-infused sauces, and Korokke (\$4), potato cheese balls topped with a tonkatsu mayo. But Ashino's proudest moment came in October when her parents visited from Japan to dish out one-night-only items, like \$12 scallops, which sold out in hours.

Team player: From mead-maker Candy Griffin to booking agent April Kulcsar, Allen largely attributes the meadery's success to old-fashioned teamwork. "You can't do it all on your own; you can't work all the hours in a day," he says. "Service is what makes things happen, and we continue to get more accolades the more and more I put things in the hands of our team."

Always improving: Despite the meadery's success, there's always room for improvement. "I don't know if we've got it 100 percent right yet," Allen says. "I'm always thinking about what we can do to better serve Columbus." And whenever Ashino returns to Japan (which she did this spring), she's always thinking about the truck. "It's fun to study, and I have new ideas for the menu when I get back," she says.

ERIC ALLEN
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PREVIOUS GIGS
Lease agent at Commercial One Realtors; bartender at Morton's Steakhouse

GO-TO DRINK
Jackie O's sour beer

LOCAL FOOD HERO
Josh Dalton, Veritas

RECOMMENDED READING
Imbibe magazine



MIKI ASHINO
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PREVIOUS GIGS
Server at Restaurant Hama and Sushi Bistro

GUILTY PLEASURE
Chicken wings

GO-TO DRINK
Watershed vodka

LOCAL FOOD HERO
Josh Dalton, Veritas

Favorite Ingredient



MIKI ASHINO
Pork



ERIC ALLEN
Fresh fruit





“My palate is obnoxious. I like things that taste like roots that still have dirt on them.”

—NICOLE HOLLERMAN



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GUILTY PLEASURE
“Korean ramen with eggs. It has to have eggs.”

RECOMMENDED READING
“The Drunken Botanist” by Amy Stewart and anything by David Wondrich.

FAVORITE INGREDIENT
Angostura bitters. “Sometimes I get overwhelmed with how many bitters there are, and Angostura bitters could stand up to pretty much any recipe.”

Nicole Hollerman

BAR MANAGER, VERITAS TAVERN



Why she's a Tastemaker: When Veritas opened two years ago, its modern dishes got a lot of attention. But there was just as much magic and finesse happening behind the bar thanks to Nicole Hollerman, who applied a scratch-made attitude from the start, creating 30 to 40 clever cocktails every season that are on par with some of the best in the city. It's her ability to not only amaze us in presentation—a one-shot cocktail locked in a gel cap, or a mojito with mint that's been frozen with liquid nitrogen—but in flavor, too. Hollerman's drinks don't just sound cool; they're well-balanced, beautifully presented and delicious.

A change in plans: Midway through her second master's degree (this one in fine arts; her first is in philosophy), Hollerman began tending bar at 1808 American Bistro. It started as a way to make extra money. But when the restaurant chef and owner Josh Dalton asked her to run the bar at the modern cuisine spot he was opening a few doors down, a creative spark lit inside Hollerman. “The opportunity to do something exciting and apply a creative

perspective to something I've been doing in the box for so long seemed really exciting,” she says. For guidance, she turned to classic cocktail historians Dale DeGroff, Gary Reagan and David Wondrich.

Mixer philosophy: From the start, Hollerman knew she'd be making as much as she could from scratch. “I'm a purist,” she says. “There's something to be said about handcrafting and creating and overseeing things start to finish.” She started with tonic, ginger beer and lime cordial and then quickly added syrups, shrubs and infusions, like lavender grappa, black cardamom vodka and strawberry tequila.

Tools of the trade: If you ask Hollerman, having access to Veritas' kitchen gives her an advantage. “That's one thing that has been amazing—having the tools that I don't think a bar would as easily have access to,” she says. Hollerman likes to brag that limoncello, which normally takes two months to infuse, takes her two hours. Vacuum-sealing ingredients inside a bag, Hollerman sous vides the infusion at a low temperature for two hours. “So it's not losing any alcohol, and it's not losing any flavor,” she says. “And I feel like I can stand behind it.” This is how she makes most of her infusions.

Dream job: Before heading back to grad school the second time, Hollerman ran a nonprofit art center in South Dakota. “It was kind of my dream job,” she says, adding the only thing that wasn't perfect was the pay. “Even when I had my dream job, I was still bartending four nights a week. And I always enjoyed it.” After stints in San Francisco and New Jersey, Hollerman moved to Delaware four years ago to be close to her family.

Art mind: When she finds time for her art, Hollerman works with words in the printed form, specifically a long-time project for which she collects “ifs”: “I'm collecting 'ifs' from different newspapers and recording the words I borrowed them from—magnify, trifecta.” She cuts the word out, circles it or gessoes it. “It's art nobody would buy,” she laughs.



Manhattan



Will Johnston

CHEF, STRONGWATER FOOD AND SPIRITS



Why he's a Tastemaker: When Strongwater opened as a bar in the fall, it was a place where the artsy crowd gathered for a drink. When they added food at the start of the year, we expected much of the same: solid bar food, similar crowd. But Will Johnston had other plans. The energetic chef ("I'm totally a line cook," he says. "If we could just get slammed every night, I'd love it.") crafted a seasonal menu that rides the line between familiar bar fare and dressed-up

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PREVIOUS GIGS
Yellow Brick Pizza, Stauf's, Black Creek Bistro

GO-TO DRINK
A nice sour Belgian beer

LOCAL FOOD HERO
Kent Rigby. "He shows how to keep your integrity and produce amazing food for decades."

OFF-NIGHT EAT
"DK Diner is such a perfect little restaurant."

▼ The vegan jackfruit tacos have quickly become Johnston's signature. "If you were going to put on my headstone, 'Here's what Will made,' and you put that one, I would be totally good with it," he says.

Favorite Ingredient



"I love baby spoons. We do a lot of stuff on the side, but the dishes didn't look right. Put a little spoon in it, and it looks awesome."

American dishes with an emphasis on shared plates and local sourcing. He's helped us find flavorful respect for vegan fare, too, in must-try dishes like smoked quinoa sliders and jackfruit tacos. And he's seemingly struck a chord with the neighborhood, drawing diners of all ages and backgrounds to Franklinton on a nightly basis.

The mission: The thought was simple: Be inclusive. A four-page menu on which the only vegetarian option is a salad with the chicken left off "has a psychological effect on a diner," Johnston says. "It says we didn't think about you before you came here." In the beginning, he thought tables would order a vegan dish here or there—but entire tickets are eating up his vegan options. "So thank you, Columbus non-meat-eaters or adventurous carnivores. You're awesome."

Vegetarian lessons: Johnston thinks like an omnivore when he makes dishes, which is what gives him an edge, he says. From the start, Johnston set out to be vegan- and vegetarian-friendly at Strongwater. He became comfortable with this style of cooking years ago when he met his fiancé, then a vegan. She introduced him to "weird ingredients" like wheat gluten and nutritional yeast—things that today, he says, are as common as a cup of sugar.

Taste of Franklinton: Johnston sees Franklinton as a blank slate. "It can be anything we want it to be," he says. "I wanted it to be an extension of what had already been started through the community at 400 West Rich. It's such an inspiring group of people to be around all the time." Working in the building of artists' studios pushes him to do better, he says, surrounding him with creative types who have no problem with criticism.

At a crossroads: After moving to Columbus and looking for a teaching job for more than a year (he has a teaching degree in English), Johnston got two offers—a corporate training gig and an interview at Black Creek Bistro. "I remembered the name as one of the best restaurants in the city. And they want to take a shot on me," Johnston says with a tinge of humble disbelief. "And then I got thrown in way over my head with an amazing crew." Though he'd been in kitchens for more than a decade, it was his first time cooking with professionally trained chefs.

Best advice he's ever been given: "You're only as good as your last meal served," he says. "It keeps you sharp. It's one of those little tidbits that seems like it could be disposable because it's cliché. But we really think about it and take it to heart. We're only as good as the last thing you ate here."



Mikey Sorboro

CEO, MIKEY'S LATE NIGHT SLICE

Why he's a Tastemaker: When Mikey Sorboro was still in the pedicab business, he kept hearing the same question: "Where's the pizza by the slice in this city?" It wasn't long before he started asking the same. So he bought an empty used-car lot office near his apartment and, with cash he earned pedaling, turned the 140-square-foot space into a pizza shop. Five years, eight locations and two trucks later, Mikey's Late Night Slice is Columbus' signature pizza-by-the-slice joint. From an employees-only cafe at Nationwide Arena to windows at Woodland's Tavern and Newport Music Hall, Late Night Slice has not-so-subtly moved into almost every neighborhood in the city, with plans to franchise into new markets by 2016.

No frills: You're not going to find square-cut Midwest pie at Late Night Slice. In Sorboro's mind, you're not going to find New York-style pizza, either. "We just made pizza the way we wanted to eat pizza—the way it tasted good to us," he says. "We don't source 'the freshest ingredients from a garden out back.' We're not trying to create a niche." The Late Night Slice tomato sauce is as expensive as any you'll find, but the mushrooms are dirt cheap. His aim isn't to be artisanal; it's to serve the late-night crowd. That means dishing out big, cheesy slices smothered in Slut Sauce (a tangy homespun concoction that hits the spot after your third beer).

Two-step: You don't want a pizza shop's freshest slice (that is, unless you want a "soupy mess," Sorboro says). Instead, you want a slice that's been reheated for 40 seconds in a 500-degree stone oven—Late Night Slice's tried-and-true method. "I really think that creates the perfect slice," he says. "After having 10 to 20 minutes to cool down and kind of form back together, the stone oven crisps the bottom of the slice and gets everything up top hot but not as melty as it was straight out of the conventional oven."

Guilty Pleasure



Snow crab legs



Making his mark: The Late Night Slice brand may seem cheeky—because it is. It's Sorboro's sense of humor that helps sell pies. (You don't forget menu items like Spicy Ass Pepperoni and Baby Cheezus.)

"Into that first year, we just kept seeing lines and lines of people showing up," he says. "I think people really crave that desire to show somebody something cool in their town, and without even realizing it we had kind of set something like that up."

The big picture: This year, Sorboro enlisted a law firm to prep franchise disclosure documents for Late Night Slice. He expects the process will take the rest of the year and, by late 2015 or early 2016, he could be marketing his Columbus-grown model. "We want to create something [franchisees] can grow and multiply and spread pretty fast," he says. "It's something that could work out really well for us and something a lot of people in broad scope would appreciate."



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PREVIOUS GIGS
Owner of E.C.T.
Pedicab, disc jockey

GO-TO DRINK
Greyhound

LOCAL FOOD HEROES
Jeni Britton Bauer
and Elizabeth Lessner

RECOMMENDED READING
"The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals" by Michael Pollan

FAVORITE INGREDIENT
Cilantro

