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MEET SOME OF THE INNOVATORS, INFLUENCERS, AND INTERESTING INDIVIDUALS WHO MAKE UP THE MANY FACES OF THE MODERN WEST.



➤ *Curing what ails*

STEVEN MCHUGH

Chef and co-owner of Cured
SAN ANTONIO

Steven McHugh is electric with determined, focused energy. He is always on the go, whether at his stellar 5-year-old restaurant, Cured, or on the food and wine festival circuit—and he couldn't be happier. "We're at a place where I feel comfortable traveling," McHugh tells us at the 2018 Chefs for Farmers festival in Dallas. "The team is really dialed in." The chef is smiling, animated, his arms and hands punctuating his speech. "But I can't wait to get back to the restaurant [to] jump in and break down a pig."

There's so much focus on butchering at Cured—a celebrated San Antonio hotspot in the historic Pearl Brewery complex lauded for its charcuterie—that the butcher team has its own work shift, the overnight shift. The fruits of their labor—aged meats on view resting temptingly in a 9-by-11-foot

glass and metal curing case behind the restaurant's hostess station—suggest the dedication and patience that have earned McHugh and his team multiple James Beard Award nominations, the Oscars of the food world. He was in the official running this year for Best Chef: Southwest.

Cured is not only one of the best restaurants in Texas but, frankly, in the country. Dig into three perennial charcuterie options: the gossamer duck ham, an egg-white dollop of preserved Meyer-lemon-punctuated pork butter, and a small jar of spreadable tart and zesty apple-jalapeño pork rillettes to understand the luscious reasons behind all the praise.

Currently, McHugh is excited about the 2-year-old ham. “We used to do ham at 12 months. They’re ready at 12 months. But they’re a wetter ham, almost like prosciutto. Two years ago during a trip to Spain, I realized everything the Spanish do is on average 18 months to 24 months and beyond. You’re able to hand-carve ham aged for two years instead of using a slicer. The result is so much better. I think it’s some of the best stuff we’ve ever done. I’m really proud of it.”

There’s more to McHugh and Cured than cured meats.

The restaurant’s name is also a reference to McHugh’s successful battle against non-Hodgkin lymphoma. This second chance is not lost on the 43-year-old chef. Cured’s proceeds help benefit a monthly charity, and McHugh hosts an annual Cured for a Cure benefit dinner for which all-star chefs like Aaron Franklin of Franklin Barbecue in Austin, Texas, and Justin Yu of Theodore Rex in Houston pitch in a course.

Still, an acute sense of time (and patience) informs everything McHugh does, from the craft and science of aging meat to the building occupied by Cured. The former administrative offices of the Pearl Brewery are more than a century old. The building shows its age in spots—an exposed beam here, a brick wall there—but that’s deliberate. The building’s new lease on life mirrors McHugh’s own: open, energetic, and full of light. curedatpearl.com

—José R. Ralat