



CURED

Cured: It's All Good

Steve McHugh's restaurant cures hunger, thirst, food, the spirits, and the soul

During the prestigious progressive era of the early 1900s, it was known as "The Jewel Box" of San Antonio's sprawling Pearl Brewery complex. There are many "precious" aspects of **Cured**, chef **Steve McHugh**'s restaurant celebrating the blessings of life and its food—much of which is lovingly crafted over the course of days, weeks, even months in the laborious, time-honored 'curing' process.

The space itself, which originally functioned as the executive offices of Pearl's president, is handsomely curated, semi-industrial, and even a little gritty. Its 'good bones' have been jolted to life, and there's an edge of excitement to the solidly built, handsomely proportioned, century-old interior. Rather than undertaking a fussy restoration of its former glory, McHugh approached the design of his restaurant with the same contemporary creativity and respectful craftsmanship that he brings to food. And the result is just as – that is to say, *extremely* – good.

As a chef, McHugh espouses foods that are beneficial to human health. That, after all, was how he helped effect his own **cure** in the past few years, as he recovered from non-Hodgkins lymphoma while planning his dream-restaurant. Now, as a fledgling restaurant owner-designer, he seeks out options that are best for the environment, and consequently, the interior at **Cured** is dominated by reclaimed or original materials.

Guests enter up original steps with decorative iron accents, carrying you into a welcoming space with vintage penny tile floors embedded with a pronounced signature brass logo of Cured at the entryway. Rustic floorboards of longleaf pine reclaimed from an old North Carolina tobacco warehouse ground the rest of the interior in warm tones of honeyed molasses. Straight ahead is the mammoth, glass 'Charcuterie Tank,' displaying **Cured**'s signature meats, curing to perfection. The signature Charcuterie Boards are artistically displayed on the clean, minimalist lines of handcrafted platters by renowned Austin-based ceramicist Keith Kreeger. Brimming with purpose, McHugh donates a dollar from each charcuterie board ordered to a rotating series of causes, a system of gustatory charity that soothes the soul as it seeks to **cure** all manner of ills.

Directly beyond the tank, seen through the glass, is the great horse-shoe shaped bar of powder-coated metal. Anchoring the other end, opposite the charcuterie tank, is the massive cast iron vault of Pearl's erstwhile president's office, with the original triple-x logo gilded over the now-open doors.

The interior walls at Cured, which have stood since 1904, were left largely untouched by the renovation. High expanses of exposed brick, some stuccoed, some painted, some bearing large patches of old plaster provide a profound sense of age, time and layers of history. In one corner, a wall of open brickwork serves as a floor-to-ceiling wine rack. McHugh discovered the contoured

bricks on site during the renovation and devised a pattern that perfectly accommodates a portion of his cellar. The high-up bottles are accessed via a vintage wooden ladder. Over the bar, an ornate unpainted tin ceiling has been recreated by the firm that produced the building's original ceilings over a century ago. It is complemented by adjoining ceilings in a contemporary grid pattern consisting of back-lit panels. Tabletops in two of the three distinct dining areas in this space are made from reclaimed Douglas fir with vintage 1970s cast-iron bases, salvaged from a by-gone supper club. Four banquettes are upholstered in textured grey leather, handsomely shielded by freestanding screens of white-painted paneling. Michel Thonet's iconic black bentwood bistro chairs provide the rest of the seating. In the private dining area to the rear, furnishings are crisp white, including the more elaborate Thonet chairs and powder-coated cast-iron table bases supporting zinc tops. Overhead, globes of translucent pearly shell illuminate the space, hanging from bare rough-hewn rafters in the ceiling, which has been left open to reveal its sturdy, raw wooden construction.

The thoughtful re-purposing of materials continues even in the men's room, where an old administrative desk from Pearl Brewery has been repurposed as a sink console, set in to a niche of chocolate brown mini-subway tiles. Off to one side of the principle dining area, a chefs bar seating 16 on bentwood stools overlooks the linear kitchen, its rear wall covered in simple grey subway tiles that mimic the restaurant's extensive brick surfaces. Vibrant regiments of pickled canned goods provide pops of color in a decorative, organic scheme that also feature largely on Cured's menu.

In addition to a congenial atmosphere, the cuisine is comforting and approachable. The menu is built on a foundation of hand-crafted, purposeful dishes reflecting farmhouse fare, awakened by flavors of herbs, legumes, line-caught fish, and field-raised beef. McHugh, who was reared on a farm, worships the neighboring growers for their natural contributions to his plates. Dishes at **Cured** are prepared with the same culinary care that McHugh credits, in part, for his own renewed health. Leaving nothing to chance or the vagaries of mass-production, he controls the creation of every pure element incorporated in his dishes and cocktails, right down to the bitters, and vinegars, and pickles.

The pickles – essentially 'cured' vegetables – are a signature, from the *Masa Fried Oysters with Tarragon and Pickled Tapioca*; to the *Cabrito Sliders with Chayote Pickle and Onion Sprout*. Eleven different cured meats grace the Charcuterie list, from *South Texas Heritage Pork Coppa* to *Hogshead Cheese* – order selections of three, six, or nine choices for a goodly range of McHugh's passion.

From the hams and sausages hanging in the Charcuterie Tank, to the time-worn building materials that surround it, everything about chef Steve McHugh's enterprise is a matter of careful preparation and age, authenticity and discovery. In seeing to the well-being of his guests and himself, his community and the environment, this is a chef whose **cure** has come.

From America's lands to our hands, farmhouse fare at Cured is based on our shared core values - smart, sustainable and seasonal.