

From an early age I was drawn to the kitchen and inspired by my grandmothers culinary aptitude as a classic creole cook. But I discovered my true love for cooking in 1980 when I began working at Louis 16th - a restaurant known in New Orleans for its classic French Cuisine - it didn't take long before I was totally hooked!

Any early memories of cooking?

My first memories are totally old-school - at my grandmothers knee learning all the fundamentals. We didn't use measurements or recipes, and that freedom and creativity is something that still inspires me today.

Napoleon House has been beloved among locals for more than 100 years. How do you honor the menu they've come to love while at the same time putting your own stamp on it?

I try to honor the legacy of Napoleon House by keeping the classic dishes honest and returning to the tradition of hand-making recipes in-house. The olive tapenade on our signature warm muffuletta sandwich for example - we make over 50 gallons of it, by hand, per week! And only a tablespoon is put on each sandwich. I have a great platform upstairs in the private dining space that gives us the opportunity to incorporate a more eclectic approach to the cuisine and dining experience.

Can you share any tips on finding great food in the city? Any hidden gems? Perhaps a Lebanese butcher, a Cajun spice market, a crawfish purveyor. (Something the average visitor might not otherwise discover.)

Part of making great food is all about finding great boutique suppliers. Over the years I have developed incredible relationships with local purveyors including Creole Country Sausage that provides all of our andouille, boudin and alligator sausage. I also work together with their team to create custom grinds for special events.

I know you're a history buff and are keen to find ways for guests to experience the history of the building. For instance, you are now doing a brisk private event business in the parlor rooms on the second floor. Any future plans to open more of the building to guests?

In the first full year of ownership we have discovered a greater-than-anticipated banquet demand. That being said, Ralph Brennan and I are committed to expanding space at a careful and fully thought-out pace to preserve the integrity of this historic treasure.

When you're not working, what's your favorite go-to meal at home or out?

I have been on what I'm calling a "BBQ Binge" for about two years now. I feel lucky that there is a newly thriving BBQ scene in New Orleans and I love exploring the take-out options. I also really enjoy experimenting at home - smoking just about everything and anything imaginable.

Are there any ingredients that you haven't had a chance to work with yet but would love to incorporate?

I am interested incorporating Cuban ingredients and dishes at home and in the restaurant. The Cuban culture and cuisine is incredibly rich and full of interesting and dynamic flavor profiles.

Flash forward ten years: What are you doing?

In ten years - I'll be nearly 70 and hopefully I will be upright and at the helm of this amazing entity - a place I hope to be for the remainder of my professional career.