



## Spirits Rise in the Kitchen

**David Kneller, Chef de Cuisine at The Stewart in Easton, Maryland** is quickly emerging as a top culinary talent. Kneller, however, is no stranger to fine dining or the Eastern Shore and he brings more to the table than his excellent cuisine. The young chef has been a core member of the parent company, Bluepoint Hospitality, since they first introduced The Stewart's highly praised sister restaurant, Bas Rouge, in 2017. While this may be Kneller's first foray as Chef de Cuisine, he is already creating plates and pairings so exquisite that his passion is as palatable as his ingredients.

With a hand-selected collection of the world's finest single malt Scotch whiskeys and vintage Champagnes, The Stewart is known for its rare pours and decadent small plates. From the moment you step through the doorway you are transported to 18<sup>th</sup> century Scotland. Distinguished, warm, and welcoming, the handsome interior is replete with tartan fabrics, dark woods, gilt-framed oil paintings, and a polished brass trumeau chimneypiece. Kneller's experience embraces cultured classics with a twist—together with The Stewart's high design and distinguished wine and spirit list making for a one-of-a-kind dining experience. There is a playfulness to Kneller's food that is uniquely his. Guests are invited to "snack" on a perfectly prepared, crustless, grilled cheese with short rib and horseradish - or the classic Stewart Egg, cooked to perfection and topped with Kaluga caviar, smoked salmon, and chive.

Born and raised on the Eastern Shore, Kneller has long been immersed in the bounty and the beauty each season has to offer. As a child, he was surrounded by lush spring gardens and hand-picked summer fruits and vegetables. His falls were filled with hunting and his summers with freshly caught fish and blue crabs. By the age of eight, he had his hunter's safety license and developed an enduring respect for animals. By his early teens, he had comfortably settled into a farm-to-table lifestyle of sorts - though he had yet to truly start exploring his culinary curiosity. To this day Kneller's commitment to using and honoring the entirety of each ingredient adds flair and flavor to every dish.

As a teenager, Kneller tried his hand at everything from gluten-free baking to resort line cooking, with remarkable success. Still, it wasn't until a decade ago, when he accepted a position at the historic Bartlett Pear Inn that his culinary career truly began to take shape. There he learned the art of plating, began refining his skills, and was inspired to balance flavor and presentation in a way he never had before. It was during this period, alongside colleague and friend, Chef Phil Lind, that Kneller knew he had found his calling.

Already a rising star in Maryland, Kneller set out to make an international name for himself, beginning with a stage at Thomas Keller's Per Se. In 2014 he had the esteemed honor of taking part in the Young Bocuse d'Or International gastronomic competition. A year of training and experimentation culminated on competition day with an innovative take on the classic Chicken Ballotine. Kneller's award-winning creation came complete with truffle and an ovo ravioli - the yolk of which mingled with the chicken jus on a bed sautéed leeks. His take earned him the Silver Award and a long-term stage at Chicago's 3 Michelin-starred restaurant, Grace. Kneller's time at Grace inspired his love of elite fine dining and allowed him the opportunity to work and manipulate ingredients in ways he had only imagined - ultimately elevating him as a chef and changing the trajectory of his career.

Then came the call of a lifetime, with an opportunity from best friend and former colleague, Phil Lind, who is now the Chef de Cuisine of Bluepoint Hospitality's Bas Rouge. Kneller was asked to assume the role of the opening sous-chef for Bas Rouge and the rest, as they say, is history. Alongside Executive Chef Harley Peet, Kneller and Lind brought camaraderie to the kitchen, while continuing to grow and experiment. Through these years Kneller honed in on his distinct style - one that respects and highlights the flavor profiles of each and every ingredient.

This approach, combined with Kneller's unique blending of local and luxurious, eventually earned him a kitchen of his own as Chef de Cuisine of The Stewart. Crafting a menu to pair with single-malt scotch is no easy feat but Kneller, along with Head Bartender Adam Golinski, has mastered the art. When inspiration strikes, Kneller perfects his new dish and offers a taste to Golinski who within seconds knows which one of his 183 bottles will provide the perfect counterbalance. The duo's synergy is exemplified by a single sip in the Ardbeg Oyster Shooter; a single, briny oyster submerged in a naturally sweet, Red Pepper Consomme with fresh Cucumber and Jalapeno and a spritz of Ardbeg 10-year Islay Scotch - for just a touch of smokiness.

After over a decade of creating refined dishes with the best possible ingredients it would be easy to lose your luster or rest on your laurels. Not with Kneller. When asked what recent menu feature excited him most he did not hesitate, "The Foie Gras Pretzel Salad" he exclaimed, leaning forward with delight, "that dish really hit home for me." The treat in question is a clever play on an Eastern Shore, Maryland classic Strawberry salad that sums up the man behind the meals. Traditionally a dessert, Kneller's rendition is a savory take - with salted brown butter, pretzel crumble, foie gras ganache, organic Harry's Berries strawberry jello, pickled green strawberry, and a salted white chocolate foam.

With every glass of Champagne and perfectly prepared bite - Kneller solidifies both himself and The Stewart as a dining experience for any roving gourmand.

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