

NASHVILLE

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THE ENTERTAINING ISSUE

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Chef's

The city's newest culinary talents

Table



BY STACIE STANDIFER • PHOTOS BY SHERRY CLAGG

The tradition of independent restaurateurs owning multiple locations isn't uncommon, as even those with varying styles and menus are often closely held by food-loving and business-savvy owners. There are several such success stories in and around Music City. But, according to Jerry Brown, founder of Hospitality Development Group, which operates Watermark, Miro District and the newly opened The Blind Pig No. 55, his own latest additions are going to raise the bar for our entire area.

For starters, he set out to give the 12South neighborhood another friendly, casual dining spot and watering hole in taking over the former location of Mirror. Brown spared no expense on cleaning up and improving the interiors, the overall structure and even the patio. That was just part of his plan for his burgeoning dining empire.

Another goal was to find a clever, talented chef to take over the helm at Watermark in the Gulch and in his search, we found an even more insightful way to keep diners coming back for more: Instead of just hiring a single chef, he recruited two. One for the restaurant, and yet another to direct and oversee the operation of all three of his ventures.

For the role of mentoring all of his chefs and restaurant employees, Brown brought in renowned chef Louis Osteen (winner of the James Beard Award in 2004). Charleston fans likely remember his stint at the famous Charleston Place Hotel where his Louis's Charleston Grill received major awards and attention as well as praise from national magazines. He went on to open another restaurant in Charleston, two in Las Vegas and also one in Pawleys Island, S.C. Along the way, his recipes and techniques have been featured in *Bon Appetit*, *GQ*, *Southern Living*, *The New York Times*, *Town and Country* and *Food and Wine* publications. He's also appeared on numerous television programs including The Discovery Channel's *Great Chefs of America*. Osteen is known for his take on Southern dishes, and most famously for championing and redefining Low Country cuisine. Now, he brings his skill and expertise to Nashville, where it's likely he will develop an entirely new group of fans and followers.

"My plan in bringing someone with his experience to our team is so that he can collaborate with the chef at each individual restaurant, and serve in a mentoring role for our talented line up," Brown explains. "With him on board, we are positioned to gain national attention, which ultimately benefits the entire city."

There's no doubt, given his acquisition of such a tremendous chef, that this won't take long, especially since the others on board bring their own set of specialties to the table. One of them is Joe Shaw, who is known locally for his time at the opening of Watermark, then moving on to become executive chef at The Standard. Now, he has rejoined Brown's team as an executive chef and he has been bringing new life and interest to Miro District in Midtown. This understated eatery in The Adelia complex has been getting better daily, as Shaw hones the menu. His focus on Southern regional cuisine is gaining a renewed interest from the

LEFT: From the Watermark menu honey mandarin jumbo lump crab salad, dressed with tarragon, smoked paprika, baby herbs and chive oil

ABOVE: Seared George's Bank halibut on top of an English pea and Marcona almond risotto, garnished with romesco and lemon oil



neighborhood residents and visitors alike, with an evolving menu that only continues to improve.

Perhaps the most exciting happening thus far in Hospitality Development Group's recent history is the addition of James Lohse at Watermark. Under the leadership of Osteen, diners are going to see some new things at what's already one of the best restaurants in the city. The young Lohse brings incredible energy and inventive techniques to the collective table, but he'll also be incorporating many of his own tactics and practices while heading up the kitchen. Everything from new plates and flatware to even more precise ordering from local and sustainable growers and suppliers are on his initial to-do list.

"Nashville is very much like Greenville, S.C., was a few years ago. The dining scene here is just starting to really happen," he says. "My goal is to refine the techniques used both in this restaurant and



TOP LEFT: Roasted Hudson Valley duck breast with spring pea and flageolet bean ragout, garnished with yellow pea shoots and a black raspberry reduction
BELOW: Warm chocolate truffle cake with bourbon dark chocolate sauce and toasted walnuts
BOTTOM LEFT and RIGHT: Chef Louis Osteen and Chef James Lohse.



Watermark
507 12th Ave. S. • (615) 254-2000
watermark-restaurant.com
Mon-Thurs—5 -9:30 p.m.
Fri-Sat —5-10 p.m.
Order: Daily specials and seafood dishes
Parking: Valet available

in the area more, and to put more distance between Watermark and others in the process.”

Lohse goes on to tell me that while others committed to Southern cooking may be more rustic, his approach is more precise. He plans to implement his solid skills and to direct his team to do the same. Each day, there will be new menu items that change based on what is most fresh, available and of the best quality. He'll introduce new dishes frequently, but regulars can always count on finding favorites.

Right now, Lohse is just testing the waters—getting to know the kitchen and tackling his primary goals. Fortunately, the summer brings abundance from the rooftop herb garden adjacent to the popular patio, which he will put to good use. And he's already making friends with the best vendors at local farmers' markets and bringing their bounty to those patio tables each evening. Even the menus offered for the increasingly popular private dining rooms (including the sought-after lower level wine room) are going to offer more excitement and variety—which will likely make those spaces even more desirable for special occasion and business entertaining.

In keeping with Watermark's tradition, the environment will continue to be elegant—an optimum choice for more sophisticated diners seeking a special experience. However, he also plans to liven up the menu at the bar, and to put his own personal twist (utilizing fresh fare, of course) on what he explains will be a “really interesting” cocktail and bar food menu. So, even those seeking only after-work refreshment or light fare will have something to look forward to.

Yes, we're excited about the just-opened The Blind Pig No. 55 too, after seeing the menu in the making, as well as the influence that the addition of Osteen will have on all of the Hospitality Development Group's eateries. But right now, our focus is going to be on following Lohse, as his enthusiasm for all things food and even more on all things fresh, has us ready to discover Watermark again (and again) on the patio this summer.

