

A CURRANT AFFAIR

MEET GEOFFREY YAHN, THE EXECUTIVE CHEF AT CURRANT AMERICAN BRASSERIE

BY BRANDON HERNÁNDEZ PHOTOS BY GREG RAMIREZ



WHAT HAPPENS when a chef with a defined passion for all things Americana takes the helm of a hip brasserie? A lot more French than just fries, that's for sure.

"I enjoy cooking comfort-based foods," declares the recently appointed executive chef of the Gaslamp's Currant American Brasserie, Geoffrey Yahn, who sums up his offerings as, "rich, honest food that makes you feel good... with a touch of class."

Yahn puts his personal stamp on Currant's cuisine by masterfully infusing classic European dishes with the finest ingredients and techniques our nation has to offer. Southern Italy meets the Deep South as fried green tomatoes find their way into Yahn's nouveau Caprese salad that's made even more American with a brightening dash of Hawaiian sea salt. Crispy fried soft-shell crab and spicy remoulade fill in for cod and malt vinegar in a New Orleanian take on a British classic, fish 'n' chips. Even playful staples such as popcorn and Walla Walla onion rings find their way onto this patriotic gastronomist's bill of fare.

"I love looking at all that we have in the kitchen, letting my mind wander to an idea and then seeing it on a plate and surprising even myself with how good it tastes," says Yahn. "I also like pushing the envelope and introducing food to our guests that they may have never tried."

There is certainly no lack of innovation at Currant, where even the most familiar, traditional recipes undergo some form of lavish update rendering them unique and adventurous. But, if you're looking for the perfect bite, Yahn recommends the fennel-brined pork chop, which is grilled to perfection and piled atop a bed of creamy polenta with country-fried pork belly and sweet cioppolini onion jus.

As though a solid menu weren't already enough, there's another admirable component that Yahn brings with him to his new post. "I truly enjoy farm-to-table dining. All of our fish, meat and poultry come from sustainable sources, and over half of our produce comes from local farms."

This deeply-engrained philosophy spans beyond the present and into Yahn's future goals. "I hope to always work toward something more. I would like to open a restaurant some day where everything that is brought into the restaurant comes from the local area and leaves no carbon footprint on the community."

When asked about fellow San Diego chefs whom he most respects, Yahn cites two whose ideologies mirror his own. "Jeff Jackson, the Executive Chef at The Lodge at Torrey Pines, has a true sense of care for the product that he uses and cares about where it comes from; and Christian Graves, the executive chef at JSix, cares about the fish that he brings into his restaurant and is interested in making everything from scratch."

When he first arrived in San Diego, Yahn had the pleasure of collaborating with Jackson and working under Graves. With such committed mentors and colleagues to learn from, it's no wonder that this inspired chef has been able to adapt so well and so quickly to his new leadership role.

PacificSD: What key values are at the core of what you do as a chef?

Yahn: "Integrity, passion, love, family, and community."

What are some of your favorite restaurants to in San Diego?

"Phil's BBQ. Their barbecue pork sandwich and ribs are amazing! Sushi Deli 2 for good cheap sushi. The 101 Café in Encinitas is a mom-and-pop diner where the people are friendly and the food is really good."

What would be your perfect San Diego dining experience?

"Lying on the grass in Balboa Park with a big hero sandwich from Mona Lisa Deli in Little Italy and following that with gelato from Gelato Vero Caffé in Mission Hills."

Name some non-culinary pursuits that you are passionate about?

"I have a new son who is five months old and a beautiful loving wife, and they are the biggest passion in my life other than cooking."