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In the Kitchen

Written by admin

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In the Kitchen
With Lincoln Chef/Owner Jenn Louis

By Jeremy Lloyd
Photo by Amaren Colosi



Jenn Louis doesn't like labels, at least when it comes to the menu at her newly-opened restaurant, Lincoln (3808 N Williams Ave, 288-6200, lincolnpdx.com). "I don't really like to pigeonhole myself," she explains. "I think it's more fun to see what people say." It all makes sense when you consider that the chef's influences come from all over the world.

Louis' self-described "wanderlust" has led her to parts of Europe, South Africa, South America, the Middle East and beyond, where she has experienced a vast diversity of cuisines. She also runs a thriving catering business, Culinary Artistry (culinaryartistry.net), which allows clients to fully customize their event without the restrictions of preset menus. So why would her restaurant be any different?

But there are some common threads that can be found in all the offerings at Lincoln: simplicity and freshness. From unique appetizers—like bruschetta with roasted apples, hazelnuts and gruyère—to mouthwatering entrees like grilled lamb, braised pork or roasted chicken, every dish is designed to let the natural flavors of the food come to the forefront, and all the ingredients are fresh—most, in fact, plucked straight from a local farm just a day or two prior. It's a recipe that has made Louis' restaurant a perfect addition to the already visit-worthy North Williams neighborhood. Recently I had a chance to ask the chef a few questions about her newest venture.

How did you get started in the food industry?

I think I had a very unorthodox start to cooking in restaurants. I spent a lot of time traveling right after school. I traveled through part of the Middle East, and a lot of Western and part of Eastern Europe, and then I got a job working for Outward Bound [a non-profit organization] in North Carolina, cooking—and I'd never cooked before... They needed three meals a day, all from scratch, plus snacks. And so it was a lot of daydreaming, what do I want to make? I really started to learn about what people enjoyed, how to cook, and it was really exciting... And it's funny, because looking back, all of my really passionate memories are food memories growing up, but until then, it was never really an option for a career.

Simplicity seems to be a theme on your menu. Would that be fair to say?

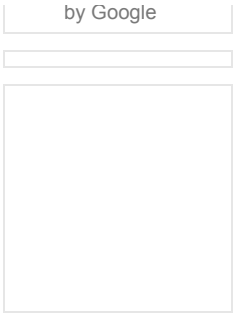
It absolutely is. It has been said many times that you buy the best quality stuff that you can, and you

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do as little to it as you can, and it should be really great—and it's true, it's absolutely true... You don't need a lot of elements to make something delicious.

How often do you change the menu, and what's your process when it comes to getting the ingredients you need from local farmers?

We change the menu everyday, although we usually just tweak it... We have four or five farms that we work with, and we email or call them twice a week, tell them what we need, and they pick it the next day and then deliver it to us. It's incredibly fresh. We can get 10 pounds of something, we can get 30 pounds, we can get 50 pounds, but we buy in smaller quantities so that we can use it up really fast, and then go on to something different. If we get some squash, we use half of it for a dish, then we might turn half of it into pumpkin ice cream. It just keeps that creativity really high.

What type experience would you like for your guests to have when they visit Lincoln?

I'd like for people to be able to relax, to be able to forget everything that happens outside our doors—if they had a bad day, anything going on outside in their real world—to be able to come, sit down, relax and feel very well taken care of. That means the service and that definitely means the food... If you want to be challenged as far as something different and more unique, you can do that. And if you want something that's more familiar, you can have that as well.

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