

APR 9, 2018 @ 04:56 PM 1,152

## For The Best New Orleans Cuisine In New York, Go To Brooklyn



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"This is the food I always wanted to cook but couldn't in the restaurants I was in," explains Jacob Clark, the new chef at Williamsburg's Maison Premiere. He means gutsy, earthy Cajun which he grew up cooking with his Louisiana-transplanted-to-Houston family. But during the 11 years he's been in New York, he was a sous chef at Carbone, the Major Food Group's homage to red sauce Italian, and at the New Nordic Acme—neither a place where gumbo and etouffee would fit in.



Jacob Clark's seafood gumbo.

Still, his desire to cook it continued. "One of my first memories was cooking gumbo with my grandmother," he says, learning how to balance the ingredients and the intensity of flavor. So when he accepted this job, a seafood gumbo was the first thing he placed on the menu. He starts with a homemade roux (the base composed of painstakingly stirred flour and butter) that takes three and a half hours to prepare—many restaurants can't take the time and buy a commercially made base. He then piles in blue crab from Maryland and Virginia, Jonah crab from Maine, Gulf shrimp, east coast oysters and Andouille sausage. I've eaten a lot of gumbo in my numerous visits to New Orleans and this is as good as anything there and better than anything you can find in New York.



Fluke carpaccio with kumquats, mandarin, serrano and nasturtium leaves.

Ultimately, the menu, still in development and changing often due to market and whim, will resemble a deep dive into Cajun cuisine, matching the room for the first time. The décor of the restaurant, which opened in 2011, was designed in artistically weathered New Orleans speakeasy style with a touch of Paris bistro thrown in including a horseshoe bar and absinthe fountain in the center, reflecting a sideline of absinthe based cocktails. But apart from a scattering of small plates, shellfish towers and a prodigious supply of oysters, the menu never fully meshed. Now the spread of oysters, from Wellfleet to California's Humboldt Bay Kumamoto, continues but in addition to the gumbo are dishes such as fluke carpaccio with kumquats, mandarin, nasturtium leaves and sumac, as beautiful as it is delicious, a spin on oysters Rockefeller with spinach, watercress, absinthe and serrano chilies, and redfish Pontchartrain with crab, mushrooms and dirty rice. Take one bite and instead of busy, hipster Bedford Avenue, you feel that you're deep in the bayou instead.



The interior of Maison Premiere.