Food Crush

Gotta love these chefs who help rock the city's cuisine scene

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Food Crush

Kansas City's foodpreneurs take the cake when it comes to rocking the city's cuisine scene—and these female chefs are among them.

*words: KIMBERLY WINTER STERN | photos: JASON DAILEY*

In case you hadn't heard, Kansas City is poised to have its food moment in 2012. James Oseland, a respected food guru and editor-in-chief of the high-end foodie magazine, *Savoir*, proclaimed his prediction in late December on NBC's "Today" show. KC as a national food destination?

Aw, come on. Those of us who partake regularly in the culinary scene here know that our deep-rooted food culture—which, by the way, goes deeper than our heretofore main claim to fame, barbecue—has a distinct and captivating personality. Perhaps, true to our Midwestern preternaturally humble nature, we've kept our creative, innovative and fire-in-the-belly culinary arsenal too quiet.

WE'RE LOCKED AND LOADED IN KANSAS CITY TO SHARE OUR LOVE OF FOOD WITH ANYONE WHO WANDERS IN FROM ANYWHERE.
FORK IN HAND

Bursting out of the starting blocks years ago in KC were chefs, restaurateurs and food artisans—from both sides of the state line—who took advantage of the bounty of the Heartland and started taking us down delicious new paths. Start naming names and someone is bound to be left out, but marquee chefs like Michael Smith, Colby Garrelts, the late John McClure, Christopher Elbow and others blazed trails and raised the bar. Alex Pope, Patrick Ryan, mixologist Ryan Maybee, Howard Hanna, Carl Thorne-Thomsen, Kevin Timmons, Mano Rafael, Cody Hogan, caterer Lon Lane, table-hopper/underground supper club/pop-up diva Jenny Vergara, Marshall Roth, James Taylor, Jasper Mirabile, Jr., Jimmy Frantze, Green Dirt Farm, The Roasterie, Boulevard Brewing, Jeff Stehney, Aaron Confessori, John Westerhaus, Bill Crooks and Paul Khoury, Alan Gaylin, Josh Ians, Stretch Rumana, Ernesto Peralta, Jr., Charles d’Abhange, Joe Birch, Somerset Ridge...the list goes on and on of plucky pack leaders who dare to try, who put their best culinary foot forward and who keep on marching, trusting the beat of their own food soul.

It’s not just a man’s food domain—there are high-profile female chefs on the front burner turning heads and challenging palates. Debbie Gold, Celina Tio, Megan Garrelts and Jennifer Maloney are among the pros who wow us with their sassy food chops and it’s-not-a-man’s-world attitude.

It’s true—we’re locked and loaded in Kansas City to share our love of food with anyone who wanders in from anywhere. But the fact of the matter is we’re not doing much different on the food scene than we have been over the past 10 years or so—other than innovating, creating, exploring and acknowledging that where we are today is very, very good, but where we’ll be tomorrow will be even tastier.

With fork in hand, we salute our city’s foodpreneurs. We have a crush on you, for sure.

Seconds, please!

These three premier chefs, along with Bluestem Pastry Chef/Owner Megan Garrelts (who was unavailable for the photo shoot), will make magic in the stunning gourmet kitchens of Portfolio Kitchen & Home on Tuesday, Feb. 21, 2012. The Girls Night In event will benefit A Change of Heart, University of Kansas Hospital. For ticket information, visit kumed.com and click on Events.

Debbie Gold
EXECUTIVE CHEF
THE AMERICAN RESTAURANT

James Beard award-winning chef Debbie Gold brings an ethereal beauty to the experience of enjoying a meal, no matter how simple its execution, the lure of its gastronomic provenance or the intriguing chemistry of its humble or lauded ingredients. Gold, who had a star turn on Bravo’s “Top Chef Masters” in 2010, came to cooking through curiosity as a younger growing up in the Chicago suburbs and a well-defined taste. A local interpreter of sorts, Gold has carefully developed her skills as a culinary master, searching for food that is in season, ripe and at the height of its lush glory and spinning it into evocative, inspiring and palate-satisfying dishes. She manages to bring a quiet, almost reverent, ritual to the tables at the renowned American Restaurant where diners are treated to a true superstar reveling in her gleaming kitchen—a balance sometimes difficult to achieve in the world of fine dining.

Celina Tio
CHEF/OWNER
JULIAN

At the heart of her food-driven soul, James Beard award-winning chef Celina Tio is always on the lookout for new adventures, new opportunities, the course uncharted. Her familiar shock of black hair can be seen through the kitchen pass-through at her acclaimed...
FORK IN HAND

Brooksider restaurant, JULIAN, her head dipped down in deep concentration as she tastes and expedites her trademark global feel-good food, à la Tio, before it’s delivered to patrons in the dining room. The distinctive personality of her dishes has won her a diverse urban/suburban following and a respected voice in the KC food community and beyond. A strong competitor on the Food Network’s “The Next Iron Chef” and Bravo’s “Top Chef Masters,” Tio doesn’t wilt under the challenge of creating food on the fly. A dreamer, a doer, a mentor, a creator, a food filly who defies taming, Tio is constantly evolving on her own culinary landscape, taking cues from the seasons and artisans around her.

Jennifer Maloney  
EXECUTIVE CHEF  
KEMPER MUSEUM  
OF CONTEMPORARY ART

It’s no mistake that chef Jennifer Maloney’s bright and creative cuisine is served in one of the most respected contemporary art museums in the country. Artful cuisine that’s clean and fresh and robust, woven through with complex flavors, is this likeable chef’s culinary calling card. Like her colleagues, Maloney relies on the rhythm of the seasons to drive her New American menu whose provenance shimmies with vivid imagination and honest, spot-on execution. Maloney’s formidable cooking chops have been acknowledged not only by patrons of the Kemper and the thousands who experience her signature dishes at special events and galas, but also by Zagat’s and guest chef appearances at the esteemed James Beard House in New York City and the Cannes International Film Festival. Sassy, confident, a globetrotter who has cooked on the high seas and in exotic Caribbean settings, Maloney is as straightforward as her food. And though harvest-inspired dishes and farm-sourced ingredients are an undeniable part of Maloney’s DNA, she has her eagle culinary eye on what’s around the corner. That’s just the way she rolls.

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