



The Daily Meal[®]

All Things Food & Drink

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Chef Josh Berry on UNION, His New Portland, Maine, Eatery

The 'enhanced local' recently opened a spot in this food-centric city

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The restaurant's goal is to support local purveyors.

UNION

Portland, Maine, is a city renowned for its food, and one of its newest restaurants is UNION, which is located at 390 Congress Street. We spoke with executive chef Josh Berry about the restaurant, which offers creative takes on some favorite dishes, supports local purveyors, and is both farm-to-fork and dock-to-table.

The Daily Meal: In a nutshell, what is the concept of UNION and what inspired it?

Chef Josh Berry: The cuisine at UNION can be best explained as “enhanced local.” We focus on a particular ingredient and try to showcase it at its zenith state through preparation methods and flavors. Inspiration can come from anything at any time. I have no particular muse that I rely on, with the exception of the season. Seasonal cooking is very important to me, and that shows through in the cuisine.

Is there anything special about your restaurant sign and logo? And who designed them?

Simple yet refined, city yet non-pretentious, easy to read but sophisticated.

Are there purveyors of specialty produce that you're going to be serving who you'd like to highlight your relationship with?

Using purveyors from around New England will be a priority for us here at UNION. At this time, we are using seven different dairy producers to research and develop which ones are the best. We are doing this with all products and food stuffs.

If you were asked to name one dish that people need to come check out at the restaurant, what would that be?

A great example of my cuisine would be our local cod dish. We start with local cod and littleneck clams from Harbor Fish Market on Commercial Street in Portland. We pan-sear the cod in some brown butter then add the Chinese sausage for sweetness and deglaze with lemon and soy. The richness of the brown butter is foiled by the salinity of the soy for a brilliant flavor profile. Enhanced local to the core.

Why are you passionate about the food served at UNION?

Being from the Lakes Region of Maine, growing up, Portland was my “big” city. This has always been a dream for me. I am privileged to have this opportunity.

Is there a bar/ cocktail program and, if so, what is it all about?

We are just as passionate about the beverage program as we are about the cuisine. Our bar “chefs” and beverage specialist create artisanal cocktails that respect the pedigree of drinks from old, and new drinks to take us to the next level.

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What do you want to be known for? What experience are you looking to create for your patrons?

When guests choose to dine with us, they are sharing a portion of time with us — valued time. I would like them to experience a wonderful meal with great cuisine and attentive service in a upscale atmosphere.

What sets you apart from your neighbors or competitors in this location and cuisine?

UNION is a restaurant that is more upper exchange then lower exchange. No brick walls or wood floors. We have lots of windows and natural light. Our cuisine has familiar New England items and flavors, but they're prepared in a unique way with elements that enhance them to their fullest potential.

Do you have an idea in your head of what kind of star-rated restaurant this will be? What star rating are you going for?

Forbes four-star!