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things to do

WHERE TO EAT, DRINK & PLAY



Brad Farmerie

Chef Brad Farmerie has changed, and his successful downtown restaurant has changed right along with him.



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When it opened 13 years ago, Public raised eyebrows with its Down Under menu of exotic eats like kangaroo. Now that bravado seems to be giving way to something else — but what's really happening is the expansion of ideas that were always present, says head chef Brad Farmerie, who opened the restaurant with his brother in 2003.

"In the beginning, it was sort of a hidden secret, but we always had two or three vegan dishes and tons of gluten-free options, just because that's the way I was 'raised' in

London," Farmerie says. "There was a chef named Peter Gordon who always believed in having cool options for everybody."

Public is still about the "adventure, unique, different." But Farmerie is joining a growing list of chefs cooking from a personal place, whether it's a response to health struggles, as with Marco Canora at Hearth, or issues like animal welfare and sustainability, which prompted Ravi DeRossi to begin converting all 15 of his restaurants and bars across the city into vegan concepts.

For Farmerie, changing what he eats was a matter of trying to keep up with his life. Two years ago, at the height of hospitality group AvroKo's expansion (the company owns Public) and having two young children at home, he realized he couldn't keep going the way he was.

He found the answer to better health and fitness in the kitchen.

"We had decided to look into some of the health cleanses and dietary changes that other people were doing," says Farmerie. "I've always had nasal trouble, aches and pains, and we looked at different cleanses ... and monitoring the dairy and gluten we eat."

On the menu, this translates into breads made with potato and quinoa, rainbow trout with spirulina salsa verde (Farmerie says fish is the restaurant's strong suit), charred carrots with lemon yogurt and dukkah, and ricotta cavatelli with carrot bolognese and kale pesto.

Though he was never big on cooking with cream and butter, which tends to come by the "pounds and pounds and pounds" at

many upscale restaurants, he's cut back even further.

"My cooking has always derived inspiration from the Middle East, Asia and North Africa — those cuisines naturally have sauces and flavors that are complementary without being heavy," he says.

The wine list has been trimmed significantly, with intuitive categories based on flavor rather than vintage.

All of these changes are also intended to ease the "certain level of formality" that settled in after Public earned its Michelin star in 2009. The dishes are meant to be so accessible, in fact, that Farmerie hopes people take the ideas home with them. "If someone said to me that, 'I came in to eat at Public and I was inspired to feed my family in a different way,' I would probably hug them on the spot."