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November 28, 2011

PACIFIC San Diego
M A G A Z I N E

Hammer Time

Chef Brian Malarkey breaks ground on more new restaurants



SMASHING SUCCESS: Brian Malarkey (right) and James Brennan prepare to break ground at their new Point Loma restaurant, Gabardine, opening in mid-January

By Frank Sabatini Jr.
Photo by Brevin Blach

About the only fabric missing from Chef Brian Malarkey's expanding portfolio of textile-named restaurants is loincloth. Although, given his Tarzan-like charisma and penchant for chasing down sustainable proteins, we're not ruling it out.

In just over a year, the former Top Chef (third season) contestant —along with business partner James Brennan—has introduced his bustling Searsucker to the heart of the Gaslamp and swung into Del Mar with Burlap. He's now utilizing his celebrity to sew up plans for three new restaurants, coming soon to a neighborhood near you.

Gingham in La Mesa is next up. Named after the yarn-spun checkered textile dating back four centuries, the operation will replace GIO Restaurant and Wine Bar on December 15.

"We've slapped around the building and roughed her up a bit," says Malarkey as he combs over his menu of "composed barbecue" along with fried chicken and other picnic-type savories. But don't expect to eat from gingham-style tablecloths: as with Searsucker and Burlap, the namesake fabric will go missing from the motif.

Think of the durable material used for making fine suits when Gabardine opens in place of Point Loma's La Playa Bistro in January. "This is my return to the sea," says Malarkey, referring to a casual seafood bar meant to reflect the neighborhood's fishing history as well as his former gig as executive chef for The Oceanaire Seafood Room. At Gabardine, however, sails and buoys won't be the backdrop for the Baja clams: Malarkey has envisioned a "clean, fresh" interior with designer Michael Soriano, who has bestowed his contemporary magic on Vin de Syrah, Sessions Public and Analog.

Malarkey further indulges his seafood passions in April with the opening of Herringbone, named after the twilled material favored by the country club set. The La Jolla restaurant, recreating the vibe of an Italian fishing village, will attempt to reel in the social razzle-dazzle seen (and scene) at Searsucker and Burlap.

"We'll spread the wonderful flavors of lobster and crab and also offer turf items like bone marrow pizza with prosciutto crust."

Where will this chest-thumping restaurateur break ground next?

"I can't look any further than this right now," says Malarkey, "except to say that we might expand the Searsucker brand to Arizona in the future."

EELING GOOD

The 6,000-square-foot space that was Quarter Kitchen at Andaz San Diego is about to be reborn as Katsuya by Starck, synthesizing the "green" design trappings of cult architect Philippe Starck with a litany of Japanese dishes imagined by Master Sushi Chef Katsuya Uechi. Slated to open in January, the indoor-outdoor restaurant will offer the same bill of fare seen at seven other Katsuya locations throughout the country.

Uechi directs his robata (Japanese barbecue) flames toward luxury proteins like fresh-water eel and kobe filet crowned with foie gras. Sushi, sashimi and crafty cocktails also take center stage. And if L.A.'s Katsuya is any indication of the restaurant's celebrity draw, you might find yourself poking into almond-crusted scallops alongside the likes of Paris Hilton and the Pussycat Dolls.

—Frank Sabatini Jr.

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