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Local 127 chef gets back to the land

Geddes leaves Las Vegas to join farm-to-table cooking movement

By Polly Campbell • pcampbell@enquirer.com • September 1, 2009

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Aureole restaurant at Mandalay Bay Resort in Las Vegas is famous for its 40-foot tower of 10,000 wine bottles.

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Assembling that collection of wine at Aureole was one of many restaurant jobs Steven Geddes has had in an extremely varied career, and it earned Aureole a James Beard nomination for Outstanding Wine Service in 2008.

At the age of 29, Geddes became a master sommelier, the highest wine professional designation. He also works as a chef – at Michelin-starred Alize in Las Vegas, and beside well-known chefs such as Charlie Trotter and George Morrone. He was a restaurant consultant, taught at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, owned a Japanese raw bar and trained in pastry with Chef Bradley Ogden.

Geddes' latest career move is to come to Cincinnati and oversee the new restaurant in the space most recently occupied by Jean-Robert at Pigall's, at 127 W. Fourth St., Downtown. It will open, he promises, on Sept. 15 and will be called Local 127. He'll be executive chef, but more than that, he'll be the overall manager of the gastronomic experience. Kyle Johnson, also from Las Vegas, will be his assistant.

Geddes, 44, says he had been looking to move from Las Vegas to somewhere in a more agricultural part of the country in order to work within the farm-to-table movement, using local ingredients and forging relationships with local producers.

"Las Vegas has been a great training ground, and a lot has been happening here," he said. "But it's the middle of the desert. I've been

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wanting to go somewhere different, not a big city, someplace that's not so frenetic.

Someplace with the attributes of a big city, but close to agriculture. When I came here to talk about this job, and drove in from the airport, that first view of the city when you come over the hill (I-75) was fantastic. I love it – the bridge, the river, the rolling hills. I'm seduced by this city."

The Relish restaurant group's first restaurant plan for the building it owns was to be called Twist, the name of the lounge next door, with Mark Bodenstein as chef.

Bodenstein is now the chef at Chalk Food + Wine in Covington, also a Relish restaurant. Twist Lounge is now Tonic Union and will focus on drinks, with possibly a small bar menu.

Geddes says he has been busy finding local farmers and purveyors he needs to provide "new American," farm-to-table dining that's respectful of culinary traditions. "We'll take inspiration from heritage food and recipes. That's what we'll string our hearts on. We want to use the best food, focus on simple ingredients. It will be 80 percent ingredients, 20 percent handling them with respect."

"We know Steve had offers to go elsewhere," said Justin Dean, the chief operating officer of Relish Restaurants. "But our commitment to farm-to-table meshed with what he wanted to do. It's a perfect fit."

"We're trying to keep respect for this wonderful building and its history," said Geddes. It has been transformed from its previous look into something completely new that reflects the elemental but sophisticated menu.

"For instance, there are these great rustic butcher block tables, paired with sleek white leather chairs."

The menu will change frequently, but Geddes said some items that might be found include house-made cured meats, served with house-made pickles and sauces. A typical dish could be braised bacon with pole beans, greens and crispy shallots; pork chop with apples, cabbage and grits; roasted beets with goat cheese, mountain ham and red wine syrup.

A small bar in the front of the restaurant will serve smaller items, such as a cured meat sampler or a hamburger. Entrées at Local 127 will be under \$30. It will be open for dinner only, Tuesday-Saturday. Reservations are being taken, and Mayor Mark Mallory has booked the first table.

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