

CULINARY POP-UPS

By CLAUDIA ALARCON



If you follow food trends, it is likely that you are familiar with the concept of pop-up, a dinner or restaurant concept that takes over other eateries or spaces for a short period of time. Although this concept is not new, it has certainly gained momentum in recent years. Pop-ups are an effective way for chefs to experiment, gain exposure, or test out a new culinary concept. Most of all, they are meant to be informal, adventurous, communal and inspiring. Leave any preconceptions at the door.



“A pop-up dinner or restaurant is a temporary dining experience set up in ANY space with a finite timeline,” says Chef Fiore Tedesco, a former New Yorker now living and working in Austin. “We’ve done them in restaurants, bars, design studios, half torn-down skyscrapers, river canals and subterranean bank vaults. My wife and I started doing them together in Brooklyn in 2007. We had a series open to the public that we did roughly once a week. It was popular because we were providing great hospitality and inventive food in an always “edgy” atmosphere. Between ‘07 and ‘09 we did more than 200 events. Then we started doing private events, which got crazy. For almost a year we were doing two to three events per week, every one of them totally nuts, like a sit-down, 40-guest corporate dinner for Google in a barely under construction building in midtown Manhattan on the 57th floor. I thought I was going to have a nervous breakdown prepping for that one.”

Tedesco and long-time friend Adam Orman started L’oca d’Oro (the golden goose) in Austin in 2013 with “Dinners to Rock To,” a successful year-long series based on albums by some

of their favorite artists — from Prince to Fleetwood Mac, Metallica and The Clash — cooked and served in a communal setting at Franklin BBQ on Sundays, when the restaurant closes. These days, they are popping up at local favorites like Lenoir and Weather Up for special dinners while they continue their search for a permanent location. “Adam and I have done about 50 pop-ups in Austin in the past two years. Not as wild as they used to be. We are older and wiser and care more about creating the best possible experience we can for every person we serve. Not to say



“Quealy had come back to San Antonio after taking some time off and had a great idea to do an affordable Asian-inspired restaurant that would be vastly different from the technique-centric, composed dishes he had been doing at The Monterey. I have always enjoyed working with Quealy and respect his work and ideas, and love Chinese food, so I was on board to make this happen.”

The duo attempted to lease a former taqueria, but about three weeks before it came to fruition, the deal fell through. “That’s when I offered The Monterey to Quealy on Sunday and Monday nights because we were already closed. We got the name from a



Rocket From The Crypt album and the name of a seedy bar in the novel “Confederacy of Dunces.” We posted about it on social media, told our industry friends, and inevitably people loved it.” When Watson and Carey saw the multiplying crowds at the weekly pop-up, they knew Hot Joy needed a permanent home. After months of searching, the brick and mortar location opened in Southtown in April 2014. “And the bonus love story,” says Carey, “is that we hired a cook, Jenn Dobbs. Not only did she turn out to be great in the kitchen and an awesome team member, but she and Quealy recently got married.”

Another amazing San Antonio project is the Chef Cooperative, a group of extraordinary chefs whose mission is to support the local farm-to-table movement not just by using the products, but also by giving back to the farmers through quarterly pop-up events. “We are a NPO that supports local farms and vineyards,” says Jeff White, one of the cooperative’s founding members and current Executive Chef at Boiler House Texas Grill and Wine Garden. “The cooperative consists of a group of local chefs that are a part of, and practice the movement of sustainability and education about our local resources. As a collective, we will pick a farm or vineyard that meets our guidelines and can use a helping hand. We will organize a pop-up, usually at one of the chefs’ kitchens or at the farm itself. 100% of the proceeds go to the farm. The chefs donate 100% of their time and product.” The group is now almost two years old and their following is growing, as is their knowledge and outreach within the community.

we aren’t as fun anymore. I’d say we are more fun and the food and service has just gotten better.”

Not everyone may know that Hot Joy, arguably San Antonio’s hottest restaurant today, started as a pop-up at its sister restaurant, The Monterey. “The conception of Hot Joy is really a love story,” says Chad Carey, a partner in the Empty Stomach restaurant group alongside Chef Quealy Watson.

So, are pop-ups a passing trend or are they the future of dining? “We are starting to see a shift in the way restaurants are thought of and the possibilities of the kinds of places we can go out to eat at on a given night,” says Chef Tedesco. “There are so many cool projects happening around the world. I see the line between pop-up and brick and mortar getting fuzzier, and it’s trickling down to the mainstream, like at the Pearl Brewery in San Antonio. It’s inspiring and awesome.” Tedesco and Orman are opening a brick and mortar L’oca d’Oro later this year as a neighborhood restaurant largely influenced by Tedesco’s Italian heritage. “But we’ll be doing lots of special dinners celebrating all the different parts of life that we love, from film to music to sport to pagan holidays. So you could say we may end up running a pop-up in our own restaurant. A few years ago I was working on a project that had a different chef every night. I didn’t think we were there yet, culturally, to embrace the concept enough to be sustainable. I think we are now.” ❖



L’OCA D’ORO

917.805.0049 | Locadoroatx.com

HOT JOY

210.368.9324 | Hotjoysa.com
Photography by David Rangel

CHEF COOPERATIVE

210.854.4479 | Chefcooperatives.com

OTHER POP-UPS AROUND TOWN:

LITTLE FOX AT THE MONTEREY — another venture from Empty Stomach restaurant group — most Sunday and Monday nights. Themontereysa.com

ALAMO CITY PROVISIONS — collaborative dinners featuring some of San Antonio’s best chefs. Alamacityprovisions.com

YOUNG GUNS AT CURED — midnight dinners featuring Chef Steve McHugh’s team of up-and-coming chefs. Curedatpearl.com

THE COCINEROS — a group of San Antonio chefs doing bi-monthly pop-ups around town. Squareup.com/market/the-cocineros-sa

THE SPECIAL PROJECTS SOCIAL — a collaboration between Tim of Tim the Girl Catering creating the menu and Peter of Zubiata Projects designing the furnishings. Thespecialprojectssocial.com

FOREIGN & DOMESTIC — featuring periodic Indie Chefs Weeks and events. Fndaustin.com

DELISH BAKERY — hosts bi-weekly pop-ups with guest chefs at 10am on Saturdays. Delishaustin.com