



## Pop-Up Cuisine

BY BRIDGET SHIRVELL / PHOTOGRAPHY BY CLAY WILLIAMS | SEPTEMBER 22, 2017

257 SHARES



It was either going to be brilliant or nothing short of a disaster.

On a late-August evening made for an outdoor dinner party, eight people gathered on the back patio of a home in Throgs Neck. Smells of barbecue flitted through the air as guests excitedly made their way to a communal table under an umbrella strung with flickering lights, claiming seats, with views of Chef Jose DeJesus's cooking station. They introduced themselves to the other party-goers, strangers who shared at least a few things in common: a love for and desire to support the Bronx's growing food scene, a willingness to try new things and maybe an acquaintance with DeJesus.



*Chef Jose DeJesus*

As the evening began, DeJesus, who has more than 10 years of experience cooking at places including Eataly's Il Pesce and La Marina in Washington Heights, moved with practiced ease between his makeshift line of folding tables and a grill and the dining table, hinting at the nine courses to come. Working with DeJesus this night, as he often does, is Chef Elio Lapais.

Known as Breaking Bread Kitchen, the pop-up dinners have taken place about once a month since March. All on the hush-hush. A secret "chef's table" experience of five or more dishes created by a chef likely to soon be a household name, in a lush setting which—along with the menu, beverage pairings and other guests—is often a mystery.

"It's very intimate: You sit together, you're forced to talk to each other. But it's really all about the food," DeJesus said. "I want it to be about the senses and the emotions of having this food."

It takes a good deal of trust to let someone cook a nine-course meal for you without having any idea what's on the menu. It takes even more trust to not know the other guests at the dinner or even know



*Photo 1: Chef Jose DeJesus and Chef Elio Lapais prep a salad course*

*Photo 2: cucumber and tomato salad*

*Photo 3: Chef Elio Lapais*

"I'm a little nervous," DeJesus told me conspiratorially before the other guests arrived. "Of the nine things we've got on the menu tonight, we've only cooked one of the dishes before."

In lieu of having a restaurant in the Bronx, the tasting menus are DeJesus's way of sharing his food and his passion with the community. It's an idea that started when he worked at La Marina and would do a Tuesday Tasting menu, changing up the dishes each week. The response was so positive that he started thinking about doing pop-up dinners in the Bronx. He was so serious about the idea that after DeJesus and his wife bought a house they remodeled the living room and kitchen to design a chef's table in one wall. He hosted the first official Breaking Bread dinner there in March.

"I want to get my name out there, and bring my style of food to the Bronx," DeJesus said. "I want to be one of the first chefs born and raised in the Bronx to hopefully get a James Beard [Award] nomination, but as much as this is about getting my name out there, it's about having fun and pleasure."

If the scraped-clean plates at dinner were any indication, my fellow guests definitely had pleasure. The food was seasonal, with an endless summer barbecue vibe that took influences from around the



so perfectly crispy, with just the right balance of sweet, salty and sour that I could've eaten 20 of them.



*Photo 1: a Mexican inspired corn on the cob served with compound butter, chives, cilantro and shredded parmesan cheese*

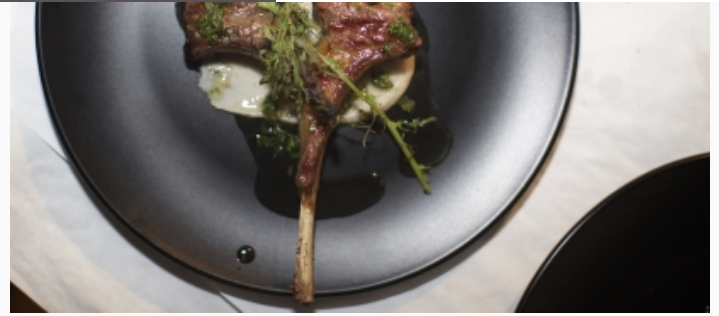
*Photo 2: Thai chicken dumplings, made from hand with a lemongrass emulsion*

"I want to see you licking your fingers," DeJesus said as he set down empanadas made from scratch and stuffed with ground beef, hard-boiled eggs and olives.

He didn't have to tell us twice.

DeJesus, who went to culinary school at the Art Institute of NYC and has some French cooking training, considers his style of cooking more New York progressive than anything else.

"Unfortunately or fortunately, I don't have a specific style I cook. I'll take ingredients from a farmers market or fresh fish and reinterpret it with what I know," DeJesus said.



*Photo 1: Kung Pao Spare Ribs*

*Photo 2: Grilled Lamb Chops*

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At previous dinners those reinterpretations have included things such as a take on a peanut butter and jelly—but as a dessert of chocolate ganache, grape jam ice cream, peanut butter and doughnuts.

“Biting into it gives you that nostalgic feeling of coming home from school and your mom making you a snack,” he said.

Comfort food, or comfort dessert, seems to play into Breaking Bread Kitchen. Towards the end of the evening, DeJesus’s daughter Kaleigh (11) delivered a plate of still-warm, homemade chocolate chip cookies she made herself. It was impossible to eat just one.

As the evening wound down, a nearby neighbor set off fireworks, and we dipped into a dessert of coconut sorbet topped with pineapple, presented in coconut shells with a side of rum to drizzle on top: a deconstructed piña colada. Sharing stories of recent vacations and swapping tips on restaurants to try, we were over any awkwardness of not knowing each other.

It was one of those nights you know you’ll be talking about years from now.



*Photo 1: DeJesus's daughter Kaleigh (11) delivered a plate of still-warm, homemade chocolate chip cookies she made herself*

*Photo 2: A deconstructed piña colada for dessert*

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To reserve a spot in a future dinner, visit [trillcooker.com](http://trillcooker.com)

To see what Chef Jose is cooking up follow [@Trill.cooker](https://www.instagram.com/Trill.cooker) on Instagram

To see what Chef Elio is cooking follow [@elapaixx](https://www.instagram.com/elapaixx) on Instagram

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## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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### **Bridget Shirvell**

Bridget Shirvell is a freelance writer and digital strategist. Based in New York, she has covered a wide range of food...