

Foodstuff: Gather 'round the Tabl

THURSDAY, MARCH 17, 2022
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The Arts Campus at Willits engages all five senses with the launch of in-house cafe

The future of performing arts is in the sensory experience: sight and sound, sure, but also taste and smell and touch, according to Ryan Honey, the executive director of the The Arts Campus at Willits.

The stage has the visual and the auditory covered. But the kitchen brings with it the rest of the senses — the tactile and gustatory and olfactory immersion that, in Honey's mind, "completes the experience" of artistic immersion.

It's why the team at TACAW has envisioned a dining operation to complement the facility's programming, an idea that manifests now in Tabl (pronounced "table"), helmed by the dynamic catering duo Julia and Allen Domingos of Aspen Epicure. The in-house cafe soft-launched this winter and had its grand opening March 8.

The offerings are about as varied as the lineup at TACAW, which hosts comics and bands and film festivals and artist talks



Tabl at TACAW is now open on Tuesday, March 8, 2022. (Kelsey Brunner/The Aspen Times)

(and, and, and, and) at its home in Basalt, which opened last year. Ask what kind of restaurant Tabl is and you won't get a clear answer; that's part of the point.

"We don't want to pigeonhole ourselves by saying we're going to be this kind of restaurant or that — we want it to be a little bit of everything," Allen Domingos said.

Take the March 11 dinner menu, for instance: Diners could choose from options as varied as enchiladas (Mexican origins), salmon rillettes (French provenance) or meatloaf (the American roots of the dish are two centuries deep). The salmon and another dish, "Interesting Meats and Cheeses," both come with a side of "herbed

lavosh," a flatbread with ties to Armenia and to its neighbors, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkey; the local apple cobbler comes with vanilla gelato, which traces back to Italy.

Menus might also be catered to TACAW's lineup, according to Honey and Domingos; they see the culinary arts as part and parcel of the vision at TACAW, which Honey said is focused on "flexibility" and "creativity" alike.

A "Dinner and a Movie" event a couple of weeks ago paired Middle Eastern cuisine with a screening of the documentary "Breaking Bread," about a food festival in Israel where Jewish and Arab

chefs collaborate in the kitchen. A Mardi Gras celebration on Fat Tuesday featured king cake and other Louisiana bites. And in the future, Domingos said he sees potential for an educational series that uses food as a medium for learning about other cultures, or for menus that match the cuisine to performers' home countries.

Ingredients don't have to travel far for such a worldly menu, though. Local, seasonal sourcing also determines what's for lunch or dinner, which Domingos sees as a connection to the overall ethos at TACAW.

"We spend an immense amount of time in procuring a lot our products from local farms, and also a lot of Colorado products, and I think that a lot of those kind of people have the same mindset the team here at TACAW has — you know, real local-centric," Domingos said.

"I guess, you know, that sums it up, meaning it's a local-centric place, it's a gathering place for everybody to not only enjoy all the culture and the arts here, but also the food," he added.

It makes TACAW a fitting landing spot for Epicure's Domingos couple, who previously operated the SO Cafe at the Aspen Art Museum and who have long put the "art" into culinary arts.

(Allen credits Julia with the artistic and creative inclinations; he's more of the "business guy," he said. Julia wasn't available at the time of the joint interview



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last week.)

"What goes on to the plate is an artistic creation in a thoroughly aesthetic sense, meaning it needs to not only look beautiful, taste beautiful, but it needs to fit the time and the place that it's in," Allen said. "And so we can take that sort of inspiration into the events, into the space that's going on here to call and just be a part of the

whole artistic creation that's going on here."

Community, too, adds flavor to the experience, Honey said.

"You want to really create an experience for them that is a shared community and a shared cultural experience, and adding food to that just makes it so much richer," Honey said.