

A Path of His Own

CHARLESTON, SC, CHEF JASON STANHOPE ON OPENING THE QUINTE AND LOWLAND

story by Helen Mitternacht / photo by Paul Cheney

SOMETIMES, LEAVING THE familiar behind is the best way to reinvent yourself.

That's the case for Charleston, South Carolina-based chef Jason Stanhope, who spent 15 years at FIG—where he earned a James Beard Award for his work in 2015—before leaving last August, when the owners of sister Charleston restaurants The Quinte and Lowland offered him the chance to revamp them after their abrupt closure earlier this year.

"This gave me a chance to redefine all the things I've been working on over the years," Stanhope says. "FIG . . . doesn't need to be redefined, because [it] has managed to stay relevant in the most beautiful, classic way. I was excited to create a path that was more my own and create an experience for our guests that is a little more tailored to me and the vision I have."

When we spoke prior to their opening in November, Stanhope explained that he had changes in store for both restaurants housed at boutique hotel The Pinch, which was once a military billiards and cigar parlor. The Quinte, for example, whose most recent incarnation was as a chi-chi oyster bar, would become "a lot less precious," he said. "It will be super approachable and you should feel comfortable walking in, whether you're coming from a meeting in a suit or from a fishing trip. It's still going to be an oyster bar, but we also will cook Southern classics. The food is non-cerebral, so it doesn't interfere with conversation and relaxation."

Meanwhile, Lowland, right across a cobblestone alley from The Quinte, would be "the most tavernest tavern ever taverned," Stanhope joked. "It will be cozy, and with the colors and the fireplaces and the mix of leather and wood, you just know you're walking into a tavern." As for the food, Lowland "will not only celebrate

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Jason Stanhope is executive chef at The Quinte and Lowland.

tavern classics but also have some very personal cuisine upstairs, where every night I feel like I'm hosting a dinner party in my home. I love to showcase the great ingredients we have around here. It's not fine dining, just really great [and] fun, approachable food—but you might be eating that food off this incredibly crafted plate or sipping wines out of the most thin-stemmed wine glass ever," he noted.

Guided by GM Sam Stresing, the cuisine-driven bottle program as Stanhope described it would feature both Old and New World wines, with producers ranging from Germany's Egon Müller and the Loire Valley's Château de Plaisance

to Hundred Suns in Oregon's Willamette Valley and Sandhi in the Sta. Rita Hills. Stanhope was also determined that the list would include plenty of Champagne, which he declares himself to be "recklessly in love with."

The chef was excited about his new ventures but admitted to having some trepidations. "It's all a challenge—[opening] one [restaurant] is a challenge, so two is definitely a challenge," he said. "We don't want to take ourselves too seriously, although we do take hospitality seriously. At the end of the day, we are just trying to make people have a magical, unforgettable experience." ❧