

THE HOUSE

NOVEMBER 2025 • VOL. 1, ISSUE 1



**INSIDE THE REBIRTH:
HOW JACKSON HOUSE
REDEFINED CASUAL DINING**

**YES,
CHEF!**

**MEET THE TEAM
BEHIND THE MAGIC**

EAT. DRINK. BELONG.

jh
JACKSON HOUSE
RESTAURANT





FROM CORNBREAD TO COCKTAILS

THE JACKSON HOUSE STORY

By Kylie Perez
Photographs by Casin Brown



A CREATIVE HUB IN THE HEART OF MIDDLETOWN

To many Middletown residents, Jackson House is their Tuesday Social Hour spot, the location of their favorite Spicy Hibiscus Margarita, or perhaps, the constant opportunity to try new things with Chef's ever-changing Specials. But to the staff, Jackson House is the opportunity to take creative liberties in an industry rarely tolerant of such experiences.

CHEF CHAMAIGNE STONE: CRAFTING FLAVOR WITH FREEDOM

It seems that around every corner, this central- Middletown restaurant exercises the human need to be creative in any way possible, from the cocktail competitions for mixologists, to the curation of menus and aesthetic at the very top of the food chain—pun sort of intended. “I don’t think people realize how rare it is for even a Head Chef to have total creative freedom over the menu” says the Head Chef of Jackson House, Chamaigne Stone, who has taken her experience of being a student at the Culinary Institute

of America as well as other roles to curate the seasonal menus that Middletown residents have come to know and love. This includes, but is not limited to, the creation of their renowned Strawberry-Apricot and Sweet Potato Cornbread, which was inspired by a story that Ms. Stone was kind enough to share with me. In a previous role, Chef Chamaigne made the controversial decision to change another Chef’s recipe, an occupational taboo, which resulted in an influx in new customers for that establishment. As a pastry chef, responsible for both making and cutting the cornbread used for bread service at this particular restaurant, Ms. Stone realized the waste it resulted in as she described it as being far too dry, crumbling away as she parceled them out. She had two choices, continue to make it the way in which the recipe outlined, and risk being berated for what was assumed to be her mistake, or to make covert adjustments against the Head Chef’s wishes. In an act of self-preservation, Chamaigne casted her solitary vote for the latter. Little did she know that this would be the





inspiration for one of the most popular and complimented appetizers on the Jackson House menu today.

Ms. Stone is adamant that she holds nothing but the deepest respect and regard for the mentors she has had throughout time, remaining thankful for both the triumphs and mistakes she has made in order to be where she is.

MIXOLOGY IN MOTION: THE ART OF JACKSON HOUSE COCKTAILS

Creative freedom takes a new form in the case of mixology at Jackson House. If one pays close attention to their social medias, run by their very own Casin Brown, one might catch the days in which Jackson House hosts themed cocktail competitions for their mixologists. For Valentine's Day of 2025, four talented mixologists were tasked with the creation of a cocktail – the winner of which would then be featured on the cocktail menu for the following season, and thus, Mr. Big's Margarita, a sweet and savory spin on a summertime margarita was born. Emma Zimmerman, Jackson House mixologist of a year and a half, beat out 3 others with her "Texts from Last Night," a refreshing and sweet variation of the classic Gimlet with inclusions of strawberry and basil jam, garnished appropriately with a strawberry heart. When asked about the creative freedoms she is able to take in this role, Ms. Zimmerman said, "I won the first cocktail competition we did. Because of that, I was able to introduce to a sweet and savory cocktail to Middletown patrons, and hopefully inspire them to be more adventurous with their cocktail orders." Jackson House has since gone on to host two more

of these competitions, one being fall-themed drinks, and the other solely to celebrate Halloween in the way their brilliant barkeeps find exciting—with General Manager and Chief Operations Officer Selena Alvarez ordering specialty ingredients just for them.

CAMERON MOORE: THE RISING STAR BEHIND THE BAR

As far as superlatives go, Cameron Moore would earn himself the Rising Star—going from being referred by extension for a barback position, to becoming an excellent mixologist at just twenty-two years old. Being a college student at the University of Delaware, Mr. Moore explained to me that Jackson House had a great impact on expanding his palette in terms of ordering cocktails, whereas before he would only consider the cheapest options, oftentimes liquor & sodas, he has since experimented with numerous classic cocktails, going so far as to craft a Toasted Almond Old Fashioned for the aforementioned cocktail competition, garnishing second-place in his very first Battle of the Bartenders. He found that finding his own rhythm behind the bar was what he experienced the most difficulty with, but that the helpful team of managers and mixologists ensured that he was prepared to take on such an intimidating role. Mr. Moore also explained that his position at Jackson House has greatly impacted his ability to build rapport with others in his everyday life, making the skills he employs inside and outside of work entirely transferrable, bringing something from one to the other and vice versa.

SELENA ALVAREZ: MANAGING WITH CREATIVITY, MIXING WITH PASSION

Selena Alvarez devotes many hours to making Jackson House the best it can be—from implementation of policy to curation of numerous cocktail menus where her efforts shine as she employs methods of liquor-infusing, and home-made infused syrups. Ms. Alvarez was classically trained in mixology in what many deem to be the heart of the craft, New York City, and has passed along that knowledge to those behind the bar at Jackson House. Prior to this, Ms. Alvarez spent a lot of her life working in the restaurant industry, from her Grandfather's restaurant in Gaffney, South Carolina, to every location of Jackson House's sister company Blue Mezcal—formerly El Azteca—where she worked in almost every position, equipping her with the information necessary to run this unique local business. Her role at Jackson House, being the culmination of everything preceding it, has challenged her in many areas outside of work as well. “It definitely challenged me to the breaking point...but has allowed me to open up as a person. To be more extroverted, and build rapport with customers and share my knowledge of mixology,” she shares.



Photo taken by Marijose Molina

AVA SHRADER: BUILDING CONNECTION THROUGH SERVICE

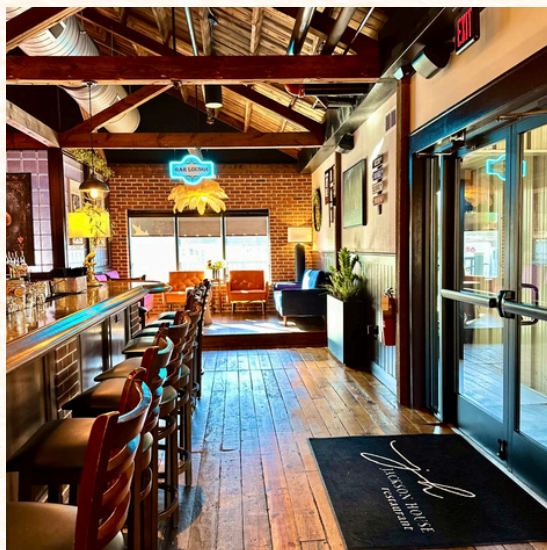
It seems that in the lifespan of Jackson House staff, one employee has remained constant since their first day in the Delaware capitol of Dover, and that is Ava Shrader. Ava, being a big advocate for local businesses, was excited about the prospect of working at a new up-and-coming business in the heart of Dover, seeing it as opportunity to bring her own ideas to it which she has done through the methods like training new staff, providing input on efficiency and organization, and even going so far as to provide an idea that Head Chef Chamaigne put on the specials for the day. The complimentary scoop of Chef's own homemade ice cream was also another idea brought forth by Ava, a custom that guests have come to love and appreciate given the many choices they are afforded by Chef. Ms. Shrader can also attest how far Jackson House has come not only since moving to Middletown, but from the very beginning—growing from such a small location, to something of much greater scale and thus, being able to expand their clientele and community. When asked what her favorite part about Jackson House is, Ms. Shrader responded, “I love being able to have fun at work and build connections. I like serving our customers and being able to crack jokes. I feel like they don't see me as just a server, they get to know me.” Clearly, Ava's methods of service and general contribution to the way Jackson House operates works as she often has guests wait specifically for her section to become available before enjoying their experience.



Photo taken by Nick Wallace

HOPE LOPEZ: A VISIONARY REDEFINING LOCAL DINING

However, the culmination of Jackson House and all that it is can be traced back to the owner's very own childhood. Hope Lopez, part-owner of Blue Mezcal Group—formerly El Azteca—and now Jackson House is primarily responsible for the factors that set Jackson House apart from the other restaurants of Middletown, most specifically its charming decor and relaxation-inducing ambiance. In her youth, Ms. Lopez worked in a small Mexican Restaurant in Roanoke, Virginia owned and run by her parents, however, when it comes to her own footprint in Delaware's restaurant scene, she has recently taken the steps to steer away from the image many think of when it comes to Mexican Restaurants in the U.S. With the development and creation of Jackson House, Ms. Lopez felt it best to rebrand its sister company as well, moving away from the El Azteca people know and curating the taste to move towards one of the first upscale Mexican Restaurants Delaware has ever seen. "I wanted to do something different. I was tired of doing the same thing over and over again, like copy & paste," Lopez attests as she speaks on what made her want to open a place like Jackson House. She further states, "The rebrand has brought a wider customer base. Restaurants are evolving to be more unique and upscale, and we wanted to be the first to upgrade and match the needs of the new generation." It is Ms. Lopez's creative liberties that have not only built the Jackson House reputation and aesthetic, but its success has encouraged her to rebrand the company that started it all in the first place. Jackson House opened in May of 2022, shortly after things began getting "back to normal" during the COVID-19 Pandemic, and in turn, Ms. Lopez found it incredibly difficult to find an interior designer for their initial Dover Location at 144 Kings Hwy, sighting that everyone was booked for months in advanced. So, she decided to conquer the feat herself, envisioning the aesthetic she wanted for it and bringing it to fruition entirely on her own, with no prior experience in interior design to this magnitude. "I wasn't comfortable because I had never done that kind of restaurant before, just Mexican restaurants, and I just had to go for it." When asked what Ms. Lopez has planned for the future of Jackson House, she says, "I would like to keep the small-town charm of Jackson House. If we were to expand any further, I would like it to be something a little different." Not only was Jackson House a path less taken in terms of Hope's career, a step in a different direction, but it is what inspired her to rebrand what was once the image anyone might envision when picturing a Mexican restaurant into one of the first of its kinds—an upscale dining experience more akin to traditional Mexican culture.



Photos taken by Selena Alvarez

A LIVING CANVAS OF CREATIVITY

Jackson House is just a local restaurant to many, but what Middletown residents don't see is the many ways in which the employees are able to express creative freedom at every turn from the top down. Because of this, Jackson House is ever-changing, with limitless specials inspired by other cultures, cocktails derived from the true classics, and the welcoming of ideas and criticism from every position of staff. The embodiment of local business, Jackson House refuses to be cookie-cutter, employing staff that invites creativity and thrives on individuality in seemingly every way.



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**SPECIAL THANKS
JACKSON HOUSE STAFF, WE
CAN'T DO WHAT WE DO
WITHOUT YOU. IT'S A PLEASURE
TO GET TO WORK ALONGSIDE
YOU ALL**



Hope Lopez, Selena Alvarez, Chamaigne Stone



Ava Shrader



Kylie Perez



Cameron Moore



Casin Brown



Emma Zimmerman