

ALL ABOUT THE FOOD

BRENDAN COLLINS ELEVATES THE HALL'S CUISINE

writing and photography by JOSHUA LURIE

Brendan Collins typically arrives at the The Hall kitchen by 8:30 a.m. and doesn't leave until past midnight. "That's the life of a chef," he says. "The only way you'll get better is immersing yourself in the kitchen: living, breathing, dreaming, eating — everything is about food. If you're not prepared to do that, you shouldn't be in this industry."

Originally from Nottingham, England, Collins committed himself to cooking and the food industry at age 11 when he was staying home from school one day, ironically, with food poisoning. "I was watching a chef called Antoine Westermann, who is a very famous Swiss chef," he says. "I watched that program every day for a week and I was like, that's it."

In 1992, at age 16, Collins enrolled at Derby Technical College in Mansfield. Eighteen months later, he began working at Le Gavroche, a famed French restaurant in London. In 1998, he became an executive chef at The Calls Grill in Leeds. He revamped the menu and was awarded a Michelin red "M" for his efforts.

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After a decade in British kitchens, Collins was ready for a change. He joined his American girlfriend in Los Angeles, where he worked with Josiah Citrin at *Mélisse*. "Me and Josiah had a pretty good rapport from the get-go," he says. Citrin offered Collins the chef de cuisine position. He thrived in the role for four years. "It was all about food," says Collins. "We'd get into work in the morning and all we'd think about was the quality of the produce and how we were going to cook it."

Collins solidified his style by the time he started working with Alain Giraud at *Anisette* in early 2008. Palihouse representatives approached him about becoming executive chef at their own brasserie, *The Hall*. He was apprehensive about the opportunity, given Palihouse's glam-centric West Hollywood location, but



hotelier Avi Brosh, Food and Beverage Director Marcus Nicolaidis and Vice President Laurent Fraticelli won over Collins with their support and vision.

Collins is convinced that *The Hall's* food has improved since he arrived in September. "We're getting good product and we're cooking now. It was a lot simpler before," he says. Collins doesn't plan to stray from the French brasserie concept, although he does run nightly specials based on farmers' market finds.

He may command *The Hall* kitchen, but Collins can't stand the term "executive chef." "I'm not an executive," he says. "I don't wear a suit and tie. I don't carry a briefcase to work. Most of the time I'm covered in flour and fish scraps."

The culinary expert prefers to let customers dictate signature dishes, but he admits to three staples: Arctic char with spiced eggplant compote, lamb loin marinated in *ras el hanout*, and beef *Bourguignon* cooked two ways: beef cheeks served with traditional mushrooms and bacon, and roasted applewood-smoked hanger steak.

When he was in comprehensive school in England, Collins was a footballer, but he also took part in home economics classes. "It didn't go down so well," says Collins. "Lots of ribbing, but I'm the one who lives in LA now, married to a model and drives a Porsche. I get the last laugh."

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