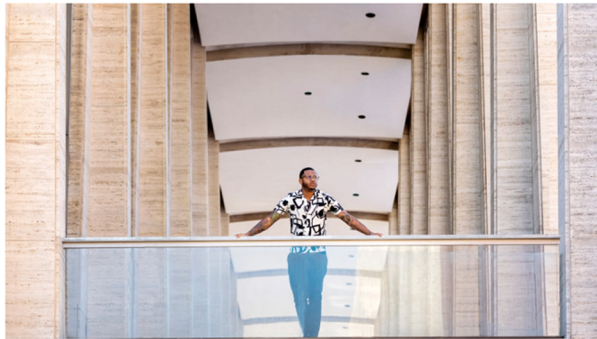


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## Chef Kwame Onwuachi Opens Tatiana, His First New York Restaurant, at David Geffen Hall

The buzzy young chef is heading up a flagship restaurant at Lincoln Center.

By KRISTEN TAUER OCTOBER 22, 2022, 8:00AM



Kwame Onwuachi EVAN SUNG

It's a few weeks ahead of Tatiana's debut at Lincoln Center, and chef Kwame Onwuachi is busy rolling out some Gumbo Panade.

"I probably have salmon scales under my fingertips," says the chef, who has emerged from the kitchen of Tatiana, his forthcoming solo restaurant at the newly renovated David Geffen Hall. The reopening of the Lincoln Center building marks a homecoming for Onwuachi, who grew up in the Bronx, New York. An alum of the Culinary Institute, he went on to star as a contestant on "Top Chef" before opening two restaurants in Washington, D.C., including Kith and Kin, where he received a James Beard Rising Star Chef of the Year award in 2019. The same year, he was named Food & Wine's best new chef.

Both of his D.C. restaurants closed the following year during the pandemic. Onwuachi relocated to Los Angeles, California, and was living on the West Coast when his book "My America: Recipes From a Young Black Chef" was released earlier this spring; the opportunity to open a flagship restaurant at Lincoln Center this fall drew him back home.

"I always wanted to get back into the restaurant game," says the chef. "I had offers in many different cities, but I don't think there was anything more iconic than opening in Lincoln Center. I thought it would be a symbol, especially for an underrepresented community of chefs that don't get many shots to do things like this, to show that, yeah, this is supposed to be here. This is a lexicon of American cuisine and it deserves a stage too."

Onwuachi used to sell candy on the subway as a teen and recalls getting out at Columbus Circle, walking up to Lincoln Center and sitting on the pavilion's steps to take a break. The concept for Tatiana was inspired by the Afro-Caribbean neighborhood that preceded and was displaced by the development of Lincoln Center, San Juan Hill. That neighborhood was always front of mind when crafting the menu and dining room design.

"I was brought on to bring something new and fresh to Lincoln Center and this area," Onwuachi says. "And something that represented more than a restaurant, that gave a voice to the inaudible. When a dish tells a story, it has a soul."



The menu at Tatiana EVAN SUNG

The cuisine is Afro-Caribbean, filtered through the lens of "New York City cuisine" and Onwuachi's experience growing up in the Bronx. Tatiana is named after Onwuachi's sister, who lives in New Orleans and is also a chef; Onwuachi recalls asking her to cook him classic New York dishes like a bacon, egg, and cheese or pastrami sandwich.

"Things that were very indicative of New York," he says. "And New York cuisine is not something you could put a finger on. People think of pizza, hot dogs and pretzels and things like that, but there's so much vibrancy — especially when you reach the boroughs."

The menu at Tatiana is nostalgic but also about having fun. "Getting playful again," he says. "I'm drawing from Jamaican bakeries and I'm drawing from Chinese takeout spots. I'm drawing from Italian places on Astor Place; some of the Afro-Caribbean and Nigerian places in the North Bronx. So there will be a lot of influences from different places that sing together cohesively."

Dishes on the opening menu include Pastrami Suya, made with Wagyu short rib that's been braised and smoked with pastrami and Suya spices; curry goat patties with mango chutney, and a truffled chopped cheese bun that was inspired by childhood bodegas.



Lady and Butler designed the staff uniforms at Tatiana in collaboration with Onwuachi.

The restaurant's design was led by architecture firm Modellus Novus, who aimed to channel Onwuachi's concept through dining room details that speak to nostalgia and the city's ephemera. "It's about bringing people from different backgrounds together, and to celebrate multiculturalism through Kwame's cuisine," says Modellus Novus partner and managing director Preeti Srirata of his approach to the design.

Most importantly, he wanted to create a space where guests of all backgrounds would feel welcome and included in the conversation. Columns in the room were given an iridescent metallic effect to reference images of wet asphalt on a hot day; the flooring ties into Lincoln Plaza and floor-to-ceiling windows blur the boundary between indoors and the landscape of the city. The dining room is accented by Frank Gehry cloud lights hanging over a communal table and art that includes a 1981 Martha Cooper photograph of a Rock Steady battle at Lincoln Center. Although located on the ground floor of the building that's home to the New York Philharmonic, the restaurant's soundtrack will be rooted in R&B, hip-hop and rock.

Onwuachi tapped Kamat Newman as his chef de cuisine, who relocated from Austin, Texas, in September to head up the kitchen. General manager Bradley Knebel, who first met Onwuachi at his going-away party before his L.A. move, brings experience from working with Union Square Hospitality Group. Both front- and back-of-house managers express outsized enthusiasm for the opening and Onwuachi's culinary philosophy.

No matter what brings guests inside the doors — a pre- or post-show meal; an affinity for buzzy restaurant openings and trailblazing cuisine — one thing is undoubtedly clear: Guests are in for a good time when the restaurant opens in early November. Tatiana is just as likely to be the main event.



From the menu at Tatiana EVAN SUNG