

# HOW FRENCH CUISINE IS SHAPING KNOXVILLE'S FOOD SCENE

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*"Fashion can change your mood, identity and, of course, your appearance."*

Knoxville is a city known for many components ranging from being the home for one of Tennessee's state universities (the University of Tennessee) to being referred to as the Marble City. This city can also boast about it's up and coming downtown which contains a slew of restaurants offering cuisines ranging from countries around the world. From American, Thai, to Mexican, or

French cuisine this small city offers many options for everyone.

When one tends to think of food-forward cities, the names of New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco, or even Houston may come to mind. But Knoxville has a food scene which is in the midst of development.

estaurateurs, chefs, food bloggers, and gourmands alike are moving to the city of Knoxville and its surrounding areas and bringing along their backgrounds and experiences within the world of food.

Many chefs are helping to implement international flavors in the city's food scene. One notable chef is Krista DiSocio, who is also a food blogger. She runs a website called DeSocio In The Kitchen in which she posts recipes that are based on her

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husband. She is a world traveler, visiting food conscious destinations such as France, Italy, and Thailand (amongst others). She utilizes international ingredients and techniques while illustrating how easy they are for the average American cook within her blog.

Along with individual chefs, restaurants are assisting with the incorporation of cultural flairs. One restaurant in particular is called The French Market Crêperie, which is an authentic French crêperie. The French Market offers both sweet and savory French crêpes, delicious baguette and croissant sandwiches, plus a choice of soups and salads. This restaurant was started by Allen and Susan Tate after they lived in France for several years. There, they fell in love with the food and the general lifestyle and were determined to replicate it within Knoxville, in the form of their own restaurant.

The story of Allen and Susan Tate is reminiscent of Julia Child's life story. Both Child and the Tates went to France and lived there several years. There, both parties developed an adoration for French cuisine, as well as the French style of living. That trip abroad to explore France and their

culture inspired them to bring a bit of France back to the United States.

As previously stated, one notable offering within the city limits is French cuisine. While there is not an extensive list of French establishments, those found here capture the essence of French cuisine. The list of restaurants includes The French Market Crêperie, Mimi's Café, and the Northshore Brasserie. Each restaurant brings a bit of French culture - whether through the recipes, techniques, or ingredients themselves - into the realm of American culture.

Looking in particular at The French Market Crêperie, they hold a title signifying their authenticity as a French restaurant. This restaurant "imports flour (both traditional white and buckwheat) by the tons" as well as "other staple ingredients (caramel and chestnut paste) and products (the soda, Orangina) directly from France" explained Susan Tate, co-owner. In addition, this crêperie is ranked as one of the best in the nation as determined by Yelp.

One reason that The French Market Crêperie is well renowned in both Knoxville and the United States is due to their attention to the individual

ingredients themselves. Susan Tate said, "attention to food, but more importantly the ingredients is what distinguishes French cuisine from the rest". For French recipes, the ingredients that make up the dish are oftentimes more important than who cooks the dish or how it is prepared. This ideology is based on one of the principles of haute cuisine (a subset of French cuisine).

Finding French cuisine within the United States is not new. French cuisine first began its influence after Thomas Jefferson served on the commission on Congress for diplomatic duties in Europe on May 7th, 1784. As a diplomat, he often worked within France and would frequent many restaurants throughout France. Upon his return to the United States, he promoted French cuisine within the White House and to the people. From that moment on, the elements of French cuisine spread throughout the nation. Today, one can still see the impact French cuisine has had on the restaurants within Knoxville.

Restaurants, as establishments, have derived from France after chefs became self-employed after the French revolution. Restaurants were appealing for many occasions as they allowed social interaction and private conversations to be held. Restaurants grew in number from 50 during the French revolution

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to over 3,000 by 1810. Due to their popularity, the idea of restaurants spread throughout the world and continue to be prominent for similar reasons within the United States.

Upon hearing of French cuisine, many adjectives may pop up in one's head, most of them being considerably negative. Ranging from stuffy to old-fashioned, difficult or time consuming, frilly and extravagant. Regardless, French cuisine serves as the foundation for other culture's cuisines regarding techniques and processes. In addition, the cuisine is often perceived as a status symbol extruding prestige and honor for the country of France.

Breaking down those stereotypes, French cuisine has modernized with the times. The modernism of dishes and the cuisine itself has occurred within France and other places where French cuisine has been incorporated. French chefs continue to experiment with tried and true recipes and continue to adapt them with new ingredients or combine them with other cuisines entirely (known as fusion). The French Market Creperie, for example, has kept some classical French dishes on the menu, while also adapting some dishes for the American



palate. In particular, the "turkey baguette sandwich is an American take on the classic baguette sandwich" due to turkeys not found indigenously in France, explained Susan Tate. She also points out how the "strawberries and cream crêpe is derived from the American classic, strawberry shortcake".

Looking at the big picture, food serves as an integral component of a culture and society itself. This is especially true within the country of France, where food has been an intrinsic aspect of daily life since the earliest civilization. On a more localized scale, looking at the cuisines that make up Knoxville's restaurants can tell you who resides there. With the quantity of restaurants available within the city radius, one can conclude that food and all its associated practices are intrinsic to the society and the people of Knoxville.

You can learn about various "cultures, through their ingredients and their native techniques" said Krista DiSocio. One can learn about the lifestyle and the environment of a country solely based on their usage of common ingredients. DiSocio reminisces about a cooking course she participated in within the

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French countryside. They made a dish with duck as the star and she was able to go right down to the local butcher shop and buy a whole duck. While working on adapting French recipes to an American audience, she keeps in mind the availability of ingredients found within grocery stores within the United States.

All phases, including the construction, consumption, and clean up of the food are elemental to French culture. After the preparation of the meal, the consumption of the meal typically takes several hours to complete. Altogether, the French may spend hours preparing and savoring every course and bite of food. Here, in Knoxville, one can follow French practices by partaking as a consumer at the French restaurants in town. Due to the relaxed atmosphere at The French Market, one can dine and enjoy the company of others for a couple hours without being prompted to leave (as done within most other American restaurants).

Food surpasses all language and cultural barriers, rather it serves a unifier amongst people. DiSocio believes that "food is a universal language that brings us together". In her worldly travels, Chef DiSocio recalls how she forged a connection with other chefs despite the language barrier. Within the culinary classes, she

notes how "you didn't even need words," rather "you were just watching" and learning. It was within those classes that she learned how to cook. Cooking is a process done "by feeling" rather than rigorously "following a recipe ... by adding a bit more salt or a bit less flour". Each time you step into the kitchen it's an experiment and "maybe it's never exactly right". In order to be a successful chef, "you need to really learn the ins and outs and how the ingredients work together".

It's a cycle, as Knoxville grows more diverse in terms of its population and with its food choices, there will be greater selection for one to try and cook international dishes using authentic ingredients. Moving forward, one can use the selection of restaurants to their advantage, the feeling of world travel without ever having to leave the city.

