

The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of two fresh radishes with their green leafy tops. The radishes are resting on a rustic, weathered wooden plank. The lighting is soft and natural, highlighting the texture of the radish skin and the vibrant green of the leaves. The overall aesthetic is clean, fresh, and emphasizes local, seasonal produce.

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# Band of Bohemia

Eclectic Artistry and a Gypsy Spirit

by Amelia Levin

## CHEF MATT DUBOIS HAS FOUND HIS TRUE BAND.

After clocking time most recently at Phillip Foss's El Ideas and John des Rosiers' Inovasi, where he brought his culinary artistry to new levels, and building on the seasonally focused cooking he honed while working in Portland, Oregon, DuBois has partnered up with former Alinea vets Craig Sindelar and Michael Carroll to open Band of Bohemia, a self-described brewhouse in the North Side's quiet Ravenswood neighborhood.

A band of bohemians is precisely the concept in both the look of the space, dripping with gold-inlaid textiles and decorative woodworking, and in the team's collective spirit. "Welcome to our band of artists rooted in the namesake gypsy spirit of collective ingenuity and dedicated to an elevated level of cuisine, libations and service," the website puts forth.

"Nobody has done anything like this," DuBois says. "We've put together an amazingly talented core group so that every facet of our business has the brains behind it to be really successful. All the pieces are in place."

Upon walking in, the former warehouse space looks like a seamless blend of

comfortable lounge, coffee and tea shop, cocktail and beer bar, approachable and casual restaurant and fine-dining restaurant, all wrapped up in a neat package with something seemingly for everyone.

Even the front foyer resembles a boutique, vintage hotel, outfitted with a host "stand" resembling more of a decorative concierge desk. It's here that co-owner Craig Sindelar might greet you, offering to take your coat and make you feel at home, and later offer wine suggestions just as he did as the head sommelier since 2006 at Grant Achatz's legendary institution.

Sitting at the bar you might be lucky enough to chat with Michael Carroll, the former head baker at Alinea and a former brewer at Half Acre Beer Company, who will run you through the various house-brewed session beers like grilled apple tarragon, orange chicory rye and roasted beet thyme, all meant to pair with different dishes on the menu as it progresses.

Or, perhaps you'll chat with Tom Santelle, yet another Alinea vet and the resident head of tea and coffee, who will explain at length about the loose-leaf teas made with fresh herbs and aromatics, not that dried stuff you might find anywhere

else in a tin can. Mornings at Band present this impressive lineup of teas along with Dark Matter coffee brews and house-baked pastries, meant to feed the neighbors and daily commuters on their way to the Ravenswood train station just steps away.

Just past the long, winding bar you'll see the exposed kitchen reflective of a modern fine-dining setup where cooks work their spaced out "stations" in quiet concentration rather than listen to a head chef barking orders at a pass line.

DuBois usually sets up shop at the back, emerging ever so often to collaborate with other cooks on the decorative plating or assist the sous-chef at the black cast-iron, custom-built wood-fired grill which looks like it came straight out of medieval times. The workhorse of a grill is used for everything from smoking whole Cornish hens to heat-blasting clams and charring tomatillos for a dish with crispy sweetbreads and a mushroom dashi poured tableside.

A soft-spoken, humble artist, DuBois likes it that way: focused on the task at hand without ego or vocal eccentricity. But take a seat at the chef's counter, set just in front of the grill, and DuBois will often come to greet you, explaining the intricacies of the



photographs courtesy of Band of Bohemia



coursed-out dishes “meant to be shared.”

Dishes like walleye crudo, shaved ever-so-delicately into a thin taste of the freshwater lake and dotted with an herb-infused olive oil and pink peppercorns. Or, perhaps like the house-made tortellini, which explodes at the bite with a duck confit and creamy risotto filling, its umami-ness even further coaxed out by the corresponding maitake mushrooms, pecorino shavings and leek “ash,” created in the wood-burning grill.

DuBois (on Instagram) labels himself a father, husband and “archaic revivalist,” professing to “say more with less.” This shows in dishes where he’s combined different flavors and acid and textures in well-thought-out combinations so as to achieve balance, not simply throwing a bunch of nice ingredients prettily on a plate. Every tweezer-placed purple-hued nasturtium, every dotted drop of a spice-infused aioli is as detailed, colorful and whimsical as the artwork on the walls, created by resident artist Elizabeth Weber.

DuBois is, indeed, a trained artist. The Michigan native originally studied audio engineering at the Art Institute of Seattle, and later took classes in audio arts and acoustics, preferring to strum on a guitar in his office from time to time. “Sometimes you need to make some noise to relax,” he says.

DuBois moved into the culinary arts after doing some cooking during school at a jazz club in Seattle, and later in Florida, where he says he discovered his true

passion for “creating beautiful dishes” while working in a Spanish tapas bar and classic “French nouveau” bistro. He later moved to Chicago, where he enrolled at Kendall College in Chicago and worked for Suzy Crofton at Crofton on Wells to further his culinary education.

But DuBois’ passion for “seasonally-driven” cooking took shape more in Portland, where his “watershed moment” came while working at Castagna under acclaimed chef Matthew Lightner and building relationships with farmers out there. There, he also developed his style: creative but willing to be flexible and work with the seasons and different ingredients.

Carroll and Sindelar must have recognized that talent in DuBois when they hired him five years ago after coming up with the concept for Band “on a bar napkin.” The timing was perfect; DuBois had already been looking to open up or be a part of a concept where he could work with a mixologist to pair cocktails with dishes. It was a whirlwind six to seven months last year from when DuBois came on board in late March to when they opened the doors in early November.

“They needed someone who got the concept and had a creative approach but who was willing to be flexible and work with the different beers and seasonal beers,” he says.

To do this, DuBois looks at the ingredients and flavors in the particular beer at hand and tries to pair them with seasonal herbs, vegetables and other

foods. He keeps in close contact with local farmers, continuing to cultivate relationships from his time at Inovasi, visiting the area farmers markets often, working with boutique distributors of local products and welcoming farmers who bring him gifts at the restaurant.

One farm from Dubuque, Iowa supplies DuBois with beef from Gelbvieh breed cattle that have grazed on the rolling, grassy hills of this pre-glacier “Driftless Area.” The result is an extra large, extra juicy, bone-in rib eye cooked on that wood-fired grill for smoky tenderness, now a crowd favorite on the menu.

This Spring, DuBois looks forward to asparagus, of course, along with all the different types of peas our region offers, green garbanzo beans, baby favas and even green strawberries for savory dishes. He hopes to start a garden on the expansive rooftop to grow things for eating and brewing. Because who wouldn’t want to do both? It’s an eclectic pairing that fits the very style of this culinary brewhouse. **ec**

*Band of Bohemia is located at 4710 N. Ravenswood Ave., Chicago; 773-271-4710. For more information: [bandofbohemia.com](http://bandofbohemia.com).*

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*Food photography by Nick Robins*