

# The Making of a Foodie

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## Forget-Me-Nots



By Jenny Vergara

I received a few other invitations to dine this month that came from places not always top of mind for me. They are places that I seem to forget about, not on purpose, but perhaps because they have existed a while on the scene, or they are hidden away in a place not always remembered first for their food. They can be places I keep meaning to get into but never seem to make it happen or they can even be old friends that I have much love for, but somehow end up neglecting with all the new places to go and see.

Each of these places, The Drop, Cafe Sebastienne and Chaz at The Raphael, falls into one of these categories above. It is not a testament of their skills, but more a testament to my schedule and ability to remember them. They are all places that should be considered Forget-Me-Nots in your Spring dining bouquets.



**The Drop** - Eddie Crane and Chef Kelli Daniels at The Drop had been asking me to come in and taste some of Chef Kelli's food for at least a couple of months. I knew I would get myself in to meet my old friends for dinner eventually, but something always came up, and I never seemed to get it on my calendar.

Besides, I felt like I already knew the food at The Drop. The near cult-like

love, and most copied dish in all of KC - The Drop's bruschetta, or how about the Arugula salad or delicious soups. It was the food I remember eating when Chef Josh Eans was with Eddie and Ernesto cooking at The Drop. I loved it then, and I love it now. So, when Eddie and Chef Kelli kept calling me to come eat, I couldn't imagine why or what

had changed. Now, I know what has changed, and who has changed it. Chef Kelli Daniels. Period.



The funny part is, I actually introduced Eddie to Kelli after I had met her briefly at the Christmas party. My impression of her was that she was someone who was very poised and mature, someone who knew who she was and was open to what would be coming next in her culinary future. She had just left a Chef's position at Skies Restaurant at the Hyatt downtown and she described to me her culinary style as Low Country

Delta cooking meets Mediterranean food, which I thought was an interesting combo. But, what struck me the most was listening to her talk about all of the various skills and jobs she had held on her way to becoming a Chef and how her father, who is a well known Chef, was also a major influence in her life and her "waste not, want not" approach to cuisine. At different points in her career, she had worked for a fish monger and a butcher. She had held high end cuisine jobs and casual cookin' gigs. She had worked the gamut and was still in the game. She was also the perfect person to step into The Drop and help Eddie figure out how to get the most from every dollar of food cost. She breaks down her own proteins, makes delicious sauces from what's already in inventory like Apple Cider Vinegar and yet she doesn't cut corners where it counts by using local Campo Lindo Chicken and Elysian Field's Farm lamb or more widely known among foodies as "Chef Thomas Keller's lamb."



When I did make it in to eat dinner with Eddie, Chef Kelli sent out the dishes she wanted me to see and eat and I was struck by the fact that these were not nibbles or small plates, these were full on entrees. The Drop was officially serving dinner in lovely little, picture perfect portion sizes. Eddie ordered the crab cakes to start and they were very good, with little flecks of fresh herbs mixed in with the crab, but it was the Greek

Antipasti platter that made me forget all about The Drop's bruschetta. Literally, as good as their bruschetta is, it is old news, compared to this plate of slices of delicious pork sausage, grilled Halloumi cheese, fresh feta cheese and house made Naan bread toasty

warm served with a side of cucumber kalamata olive topping. (If you follow me on Twitter, you know what a freak I am for cucumber.)

After that was a series of her "serious" entrees:

House made gnocchi with roasted chicken, shitake mushrooms, toasted walnuts, arugula in a whiskey butter sauce for \$12.

Half a rack of lamb with truffle mint potatoes, wilted spinach and apple cider reduction sauce. \$22



Pork Tenderloin encrusted in cumin & cinnamon, grilled polenta, apple slaw and a romesco sauce. \$13

I asked Eddie why he had never served food like this before at The Drop. He said, from the day they opened, they had really been severely limited by the kitchen, or lack of kitchen, that they had.

Then Chef Kelli came out to the table and we began talking about her amazing food, and that's when Eddie said "What Kelli has been able to do with a hot plate, a toaster oven and a small convection oven is impressive."

"Wait, a minute", I said, "are you telling me that there is no stove or commercial gas range in the back?"

They both looked at me and shook their head, no.

How can this be? The food I just had could not have come from a kitchen without a stove, impossible. Without another word, I picked up my camera and said, "show me, right now." Behind the black curtain, is a very small T-shaped kitchen. With a medium sized walk-in, a dish pit on one side and a prep station and convection oven on the other side. By the back door, which is kept propped open when it is nice out to help ventilate a room with no hood, is the safe with a little stainless table on top and two hot plates next to the slicer. This is what serves as the range top at The Drop.

I turn to Chef Kelli and shook her hand. I said, "you are one creative, talented lady to be cooking with this set-up."



She showed me her prep list which she has to carefully organize her time around with only two hot plates in the back. She starts most things off on the hot plate and then finishes them off in the convection oven.

She talked about the fact that because they have a smaller oven, it means that only certain sized pots and pan can even fit in there.

It totally makes sense now why my friend Chef Josh Eans went bruschetta as their hero small plate . . . look at what he was working with back there. It is with new eyes, that I now have to reconsider what I thought the food at The Drop was all about. Let's just say, I now have a new appreciation for the labor it takes to turn out a beautiful plate of food like the ones I enjoyed above. Go eat at The Drop and see for yourself why Chef Kelli and Eddie deserve to be remembered