

March 6, 2013

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## FORK LIFT

# Coombs beefs up

### CHEF GOES 'NOSE TO TAIL' AT BOSTON CHOPS

By KERRY J. BYRNE



**IRON CHEF:** Enameled mini-cocottes from Staub are among the \$20,000 worth of cast iron gracing tables at Boston Chops. Chef Chris Coombs, below, also has partnered with Brian Piccini on dbar and Deuxave.

STAFF PHOTO, BELOW, BY TED FITZGERALD

**B**oston Chops opened Monday, a sumptuous "urban steak bistro" in the South End from developer Brian Piccini and chef Chris Coombs, the tandem behind neighborhood boite dbar in Dorchester and sophisticated Deuxave in Back Bay.

Their new restaurant offers "a nose-to-tail approach to the cow," said Coombs, citing a concept primarily associated with pork. "We want to use as much of the animal as possible."

That approach means

small plates of "rarely celebrated" cuts: chicken-fried sweetbreads, grilled marinated heart and incredible crispy croquettes stuffed with savory, melt-in-your-mouth oxtail, in addition to traditional steakhouse fare.

Coombs is just 28 and his fast-track career is a tribute to ambition, passion, talent — and to the curious story of former Boston food writer Peter McNamara, the restaurant critic for the *Improper Bostonian* in the 1990s.

The flamboyant McNamara often landed in the gossip pages, but dropped out of the limelight in the late 1990s after an ill-

ness. Word spread that he had died. He resurfaced suddenly in the spring of 2007 after dining at dbar, so impressed that he called old food friends after years of silence to report that "I've found Boston's next great chef."

It was like hearing from a ghost.

"Chris' food was flavorful, clean, it was brilliant," said McNamara, now a Dorchester community activist. "I asked the waiter, 'Who cooked this?' I said, 'I need to talk to this guy.'"

He was shocked to find baby-faced Coombs in the kitchen. Even then, at 22, the Peabody native was destined for success. Coombs began cooking in North Shore restaurants as a preteen, worked the line for Ming Tsai at Blue Ginger at age 17 and honed his skills at fine-dining establishments such as the acclaimed Inn at Little Washington in Virginia.

Rave reviews followed McNamara's unsolicited PR campaign, including the first from former Herald restaurant critic Mat Schaffer.

"You gotta remember, at the time nobody was going to Dorchester for fine dining," McNamara said.

Dbar remains one of the best places to eat in Dorchester, while Coombs

flexes his culinary muscles with sophisticated fare at Deuxave, which opened in 2010.

The stylish Boston Chops is his and Piccini's modern interpretation of the tried-and-true steakhouse concept, with butcher-block style flooring, faux snakeskin chairs, reclaimed French oak bar with iron straps, and branded leather wraps on the utensils that diners are tempted to wear as bracelets.

In addition to the nose-to-tail cuts, diners can order a la carte, pairing steaks with decadent sides such as the poutine-style twice-baked potatoes or duck-fat fingerling potatoes, each with savory chunks of lardon.

The steak frites, meanwhile, come with a choice of six cuts, each paired with all-you-can-eat house-made fries.

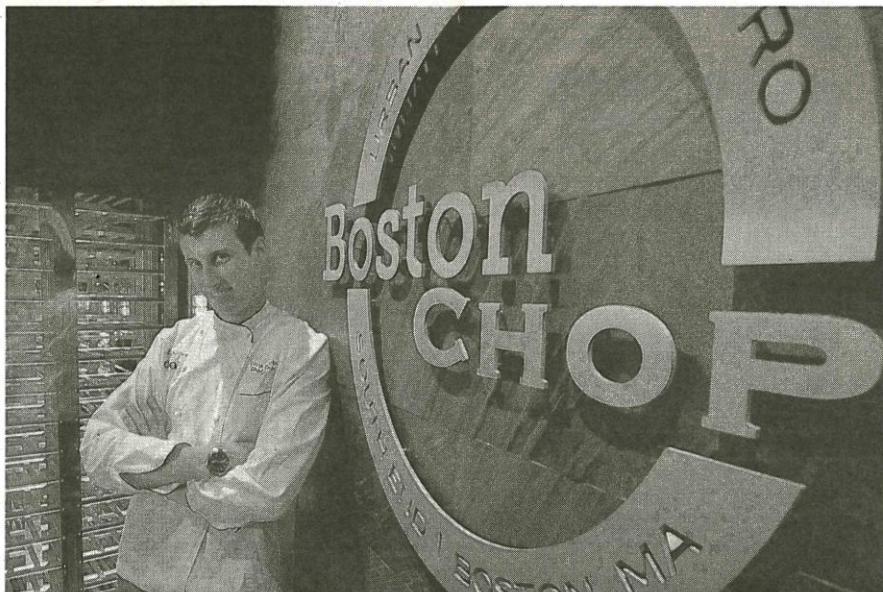
Check out the lavish use of cast iron in the service: Coombs spent \$20,000 on Staub cast iron alone, including colorful enameled mini-cocottes that give the service a hefty, opulent vibe worthy of the more traditional steakhouse.

#### **BOSTON CHOPS OXTAIL CROQUETTES**

For the oxtails:  
2 lbs. oxtail  
Salt and pepper to taste

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fork lift A BLOG for food, fun & drink

Make kitchen prep easier with today's tips on BostonHerald.com's Fork Lift blog! As the warm weather (slowly) approaches, blogger and "Ciao Italia" host Mary Ann Esposito has great ideas for



**1 c. red wine**  
**2 onions, chopped**  
**1 carrot, chopped**  
**2 ribs celery, chopped**  
**¼ c. tomato paste**  
**5 c. chicken stock**  
**10 black peppercorns**  
**5 whole coriander seeds**  
**2 bay leaves**  
**6 cloves garlic**

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Season oxtails generously with salt and pepper. Sear oxtails in hot pan until dark brown, strain off excess fat and deglaze with red wine. Transfer oxtails and wine to braising pan and set aside. Saute onions, carrots and celery in a stock pot until golden brown, add tomato paste and cook 2 minutes. Add chicken stock to vegetables and bring to a simmer. Pour into braising pan. Liquid should just barely cover the oxtails. Add remaining ingredients. Cover braising pan with aluminum foil and cook in oven 3½ to 4 hours, until oxtails are fork tender. Remove vegetables after cooking and cool oxtails in liquid.

*For the meat mixture:*

**1 shallot, diced**  
**1 small carrot, diced**  
**2 ribs celery, diced**  
**1 clove garlic, minced**  
**2 sprigs thyme, chopped**  
**1 pinch nutmeg**  
**1 t. Dijon mustard**  
**1 t. whole-grain mustard**  
**½ lemon, juiced**  
**1 t. Worcestershire sauce**

**1 sprig rosemary, chopped fine**

Saute vegetables and thyme together until soft but still retain shape and add to large mixing bowl. Add all other ingredients to mixing bowl. Remove oxtails from their braising liquid, take meat off the bone and add to mixing bowl with vegetables. Discard bones. Mix the meat with the vegetables, making sure to break up meat. Add some braising liquid to the mixture (about 1 to 2 cups). The mixture should be loose but not watery. Let mixture cool.

*For the croquettes:*

**1 c. all-purpose flour**  
**3 whole eggs**  
**½ c. milk**  
**3 c. panko bread crumbs**

Heat oil to 350 degrees in deep, heavy pan. Place flour in one dish; whisk eggs and milk together in second dish; place bread crumbs in third. Scoop desired amount of meat (about 1 to 2 tablespoons) into a ball or disc shape. Roll evenly in flour and dust off excess. Coat with egg wash, followed by panko breadcrumbs. Fry until golden brown, about 2 to 3 minutes. Makes about 8-10 croquettes.

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