

## Have your cake...and Whiskey, too!

Greg Elwell - September 11th, 2013

### Food and Drink Features



"I don't know. Would you call two links a chain?" asked Tanner Fleming, general manager of Whiskey Cake Kitchen & Bar, 1845 Northwest Expressway, when he was queried about the restaurant's classification.

There are a few hallmarks of a chain — a strong corporate structure, a disciplined waitstaff, etc. — but to mention Whiskey Cake in the same breath as Chili's or Applebee's would be entirely wrong.

Whiskey Cake in Oklahoma City (the second iteration of the restaurant after the original in Plano, Texas) takes a lot of pride in being local.

"We source as much of our food locally and fresh as we can," said chef de cuisine Kenneth Hardiman. "That way, we're feeding our customers and the community."

It's not only about a grand vision, though. It's the little touches — the way the coasters are cut from produce boxes and branded in-house and the way Fleming scouts brunch plates and coffee cups from local Goodwill shops. "We really strive to be a farm-to-fork, garden-to-glass restaurant," Fleming said. The Whiskey Cake in Plano was his favorite stop when visiting his brother, and when he learned one was opening here, he left a decade of seniority at P.F. Chang's to be a part of a restaurant he loves.

Inside, it's hard to believe Whiskey Cake lives in the bones of the big chain Elephant Bar, the building's previous occupants. There's a garden with basil, sun gold tomatoes and squash. Not all of the restaurant's veggies come from the garden, but it does its part to keep it fresh. There's a bit of grandma's kitchen and a bit of exposed brick and tables that look like exactly what you wish you had in your house — rustic, urban, welcoming.

But the real draw is the food, and that's where Hardiman shines. Yes, there are similarities to the menu at the original, but recipes morph and change to fit the resources OKC has to offer. Where the Texas location serves redfish, this location serves Idaho Ruby Red Trout grilled over a wood fire and served with a roasted cauliflower puree and a potato-spinach hash.

"I tasted Kenneth's trout, and I was sold. We ran it as a special and thought it would last the weekend. Nope. It was gone by 9 p.m. that night," Fleming said. There are a few dishes that will likely stick around forever: the OMG Burger (topped with a hand-breaded onion ring, port salut cheese and chili mayo on a house-made bun) and the BBQ Bahn Mi filled with succulent roasted pork.

And the rotisserie chicken — an organic bird that is brined and marinated 48 hours before going on the spit — is the best in the city, Fleming said. But others will come and go with the season. A tri-tip steak was added, and an appetizer of Thai-fried duck wings, possibly the most must-have item on the menu, is a new crowd favorite.

The bar also stands out not only for the wide selection of whiskeys but because of the attention to detail. The bar is just as important as the restaurant, Fleming said, and it has added an expo manager to make sure the drinks go to the tables with the same quality as the food. A crisp blend of gin, cucumber, basil from its garden and lime, Tracy's Garden is a rare treat. It's a drink that begs to be savored but tastes too good to leave sitting for long.

And, of course, there's the eponymous Whiskey Cake dessert: a toffee torte on a bourbon anglaise sauce with spiced pecans and fresh whipped cream on the side. It's big. You can share. But you probably won't want to.

