

# KEVIN ASHWORTH

potluck pride

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Kevin Ashworth is a treasure hunter on a quest. He treks to exotic locales to acquaint himself with the vibrant flavors and heady aromas of unfamiliar spices, adding new culinary colors to his curious palate. Having thrived under the tutelage of Chef Edward Lee at three successful restaurants in Louisville, Ashworth has returned home to take the helm at Khora in Cincinnati's new Kinley Hotel.

For this latest adventure, Ashworth and Lee took an inspirational expedition before finalizing the concept for Khora. Their travels led them near and far and prompted them to partner with a bold explorer from, of all places, northern Ohio.

"As we were conceiving this nontraditional pasta idea, we basically got caught in a wormhole. We started focusing on the flour we were using. It's very common to use 00 and semolina flour, but we wanted to see if there was a local person, a native Ohioan, who was making the traditional Italian flours as well as flour made from non-GMO heirloom grains," Ashworth says.

They found a generational farmer who, out of desire rather than demand, was growing einkorn and Red Fife varieties. "This guy just went after it, growing heirloom grains, a very specific specialty product. For all I know, this was his first opportunity to do whatever he wanted on this land, and this was the focus that he chose. And it's beautiful. He's making a beautiful product."

They also flew to Los Angeles to experience the work of two revered chefs, Evan Funke at Felix Trattoria and James Beard winner Jeremy Fox from Birdie G's, who were already tapping into the well that Ashworth was eager to draw from. Inspired by the boastworthy beef stroganoff of his mother, Sara, he wanted to create a menu that would include a few of his familial favorites, but his vision of blending fine dining with potluck regulars was unclear.

"Fox is cooking Midwestern food and killing it, which really empowered me to be like, 'I can stay true to my church potluck kind of ideas.' Jeremy is someone I look up to, and

he's also an Ohio boy. I looked at his menu, and he has a blue plate category! I have had these ideas and thought it would be cool to do something like this, but I wasn't sure how it would be received. I didn't know if I could have a nicer dining experience and still work Midwest classics into it, but his menu was just chock-full of it. A lot of my fond food memories are based around a church potluck or family table. There's so much love that people put in there, that they put out there for people to eat."

Ashworth unearthed more riches from his past in an overlooked, underappreciated place. He asked his dad, David, the minister of the church, a potentially thorny question: Who was the best cook in the church?

"Right off the bat, he was like, 'Gladys Ravenstein! Hands down!' So I went and asked my mom for the church cookbook, because I wanted to see if it had any of Gladys's recipes. I wanted to see them. And lo and behold, it seemed like every other recipe was one of hers."

You can almost see Ashworth, reverently exploring this forgotten time capsule, gently turning the dog-eared pages, a soft glow coming from the book, a hint of a hymn floating in the air.

"That's the kind of stuff that speaks to me. I'm glad I took the time to pick my dad's mind because I can't pick Gladys's anymore. There's so much honor we can give to people like that. I do feel like in my youth I was handed some of the best







Dry Aged Beef Tartare

food in the world. And some of it was from the lady who sits two pews behind you. When you have time to reflect on the past, some of these gems start popping up.”

Khora and the Kinley opened their doors in October 2020, and the excitement of their debut was not limited to locals. Both *Vogue* and *Food & Wine* included Khora in their most anticipated openings in the country. “To already have that kind of buzz shoots everyone’s expectations and the level of excitement through the roof.”

In the run-up to seating their first guests, Ashworth and his team were spinning lots of plates, creating a space that would be accessible yet elevated with a menu that stays in step with the seasons.

“You can come on a date. You can come to celebrate a birthday. Since we’re inside a hotel, you come in the middle of the day and still get a level of service that we associate with fine dining, but you’ll still get satiated.”

After more than a decade together, Ashworth and Lee still feed off each other and search for ways to satisfy their need to explore uncharted gustatory terrain and foodways.

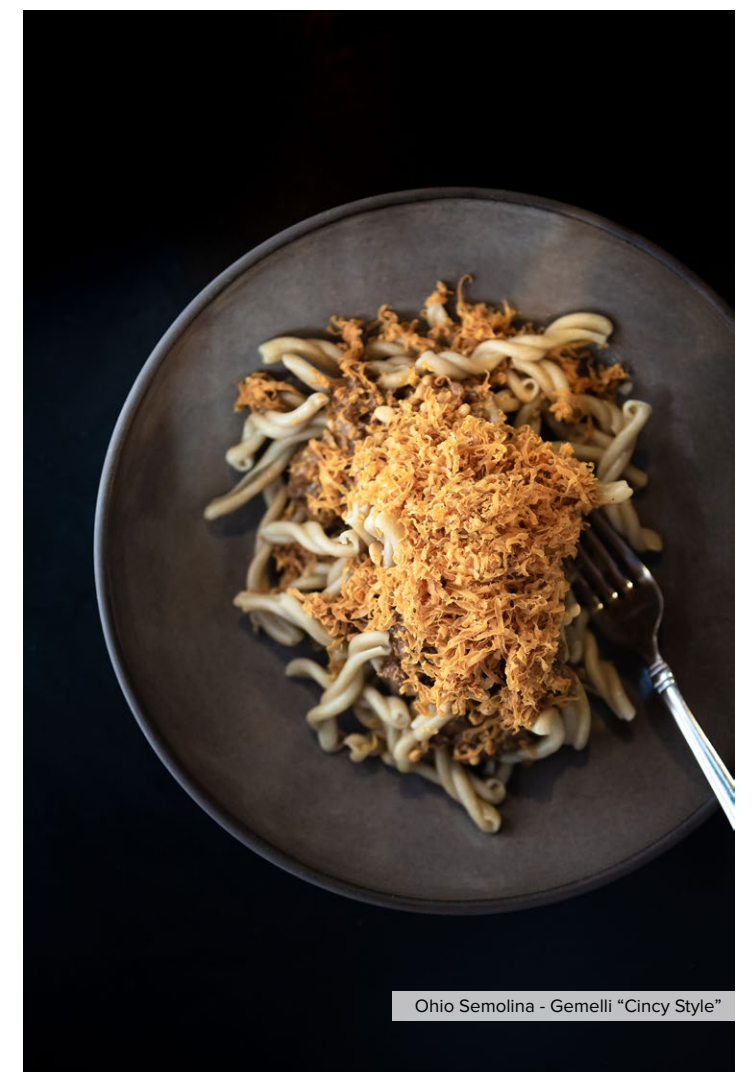
“Edward will always be one of my favorite people to eat with because, with both of us being chefs and business owners, we don’t disconnect from working. We don’t get to just sit at a table and not talk about work. He and I can just go on for hours with ideas getting passed back and forth. That’s how this whole restaurant came to be. It wasn’t his narrative that pushed it but more, ‘What do you think about this? What do you think about that?’ Who says we can’t do a pasta restaurant that’s not Italian?”

It’s clear in speaking with Ashworth that his relationship with his friend and mentor continues to be profoundly empowering, spurring him on to be his best. To be himself.

“I’ve worked with him for over a decade now and he’s like, ‘This is your place, this is your restaurant, your vision. This is you.’ Best boss I’ve ever had. Just to be able to get a shot, to have this opportunity. In my hometown, no less. I’m just very grateful.”



Nasturtium Cacio E Pepe, Black Pepper, Parmesan, Seasonal Flowers



Ohio Semolina - Gemelli “Cincy Style”