

BUSINESS

Going Big Time in the Denver Restaurant Scene

Telluride Native Son Noah Price Comes Full Circle With The Populist

BY GUS JARVIS

DENVER – The beauty of communal seating in one of Denver’s newest and most popular restaurants is that you can always see what strangers next to you are ordering. Generally they order something you wouldn’t. But when it arrives, and the satisfaction manifests on their faces, you quickly turn to the person you are dining with and say, “We need to try that.”

That’s how Torie and I made it through the menu of small plate specialties at The Populist, a much-talked-about eatery in Denver’s revitalized Curtis Park/Five Points neighborhood started by Telluride native Noah Price and his business partners, Jonathan Power and Cliff White.

From the creation of menu items to the communal tables both inside and outside the restaurant, the three emphasize a communal dining experience at The Populist, which opened its doors in November 2012.

“It’s a place where everyone can come to eat, drink and be social,” Noah said on the patio of the restaurant on a recent summer evening. “The plates are meant to be shared.”

After sipping Presbyterians (bourbon, ginger, soda), we began with the smoked fish rillettes (\$9) and chicken liver mousse (\$9). It didn’t take us long to understand why it was named one of *Westword’s* “10 Best New Restaurants of 2012.”

The chicken liver mousse was silky smooth and outrageously rich. The flavors were simple yet powerful. As we scraped the two plates clean, the three guys sitting next to us dug into the bacon-and-egg dish (\$8), which is anything but your normal breakfast plate. The bacon in this dish is chopped and then served as a sweet and salty jam. The jam is formed into a small cup on the plate, which then holds a



FOR THE PEOPLE – Telluride native and The Populist co-owner Noah Price on the patio of his restaurant. With communal tables and a menu designed to share, The Populist is all about eating, drinking and being social. (Photo by Gus Jarvis)

soft-boiled egg. We watched as our neighbors joyously spread the yolk and bacon jam on toasted bread.

“We need to try that,” I said.

The Populist is Noah’s second culinary venture in the neighborhood. Just a few blocks south, on Larimer Street, is his popular Crema Coffee House, which he co-owns with Power. Already on the radar for properly pouring traditional coffee drinks, it too has an eclectic menu. Take, for instance, Crema’s sweet potato waffle (\$6), or its PB&J (\$8) made with almond butter, date-balsamic jam and chèvre.

Now 31, after growing up in Telluride in a family of restaurateurs, Noah said he didn’t expect to find himself at the center of two wildly popular restaurants in one of Denver’s newly hip neighborhoods. In fact, he initially set out after graduating from Telluride High School to get away from the restaurant industry.

“I spent a lot of time trying to get out of the restaurant industry,” said Noah, whose father, Lucas Price, owns La Cocina de Luz in Telluride. Many other family members are in the restaurant business as well. “I used to ask those

guys, ‘Why do you do this? It’s so hard to make any money.’”

In his efforts to move away from restaurants, Noah went to school for a year, studying film. That interest eventually led him to designing and working at a cloth-

ing company, in Denver. He eventually went to school at Fort Lewis College, in Durango, majoring in business with a minor in marketing. Following his studies, Noah joined up with two other business partners to run a clothing design company

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– Noah Price, The Populist Co-owner

in Denver for about five years. His snowboarding background in Telluride, he said, heavily influenced the clothing’s design. Due to inventory issues, Noah and his partners even-

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tually closed the business, and that's when he came full circle back into the restaurant business.

"My idea," Noah said, "was opening a coffee shop," and Crema opened in 2009.

Noah enjoyed serving properly poured cups of coffee to people from all walks of life. "I love it. Being in the clothing business, I was stuck at a computer all the time, and because things took so long, the business had a delayed gratification. At the coffee shop, it's instant gratification when you serve people their coffee. The really great part about coffee is you get to see different people from all walks of life come in."

Noah's new direction surprised his father. "I thought he was going to stay in clothing," Lucas Price said. "Growing up in a family of food, he developed a sense of entrepreneurship" that didn't seem to extend to the food business.

"I didn't think he was going to get into it," Lucas Price said, "but then Noah said he was opening a coffee shop, and pretty soon it became quite the place. It's had a real positive influence on that neighborhood. His coffee drinks are amazing; what they do" at Crema, Lucas said, "is tremendous."

On the heels of Crema's success, Noah and Power decided to broaden their horizons, in the same neighborhood.

"This neighborhood has a lot



THE SILKY SMOOTH chicken liver mousse plate (left front) and the smoked fish rillettes (left rear) served at The Populist, co-owned by Telluride native Noah Price. The Crema Coffee House brings properly poured coffee specialties as well as an eclectic menu to the revitalized Curtis Park/Five Points neighborhood in Denver. (Photos by Gus Jarvis)

of character and potential," Noah said. "It's close to the city, yet it has a neighborhood feel."

Noah and Power built and salvaged most of The Populist's contemporary décor, and then created a menu that's easy to share and unique. "The menu is full of flavors you know and trust," Noah said, but then "done differently," Noah said. Plus, there's the price point: "If you want to try most of the menu items, you can and still

not break the bank."

The Populist offers a chef's seven course tasting menu that's \$70 for two – to which you can add a wine pairing for \$20 a person.

"It's been really fun," he said. "This project is kind of like an art project. We are creating a space for people to come and enjoy."

"It's an art piece," Lucas said of The Populist's salvaged décor. "It catches me off guard a bit. He doesn't just go and buy

'Growing up in a family of food, he developed a sense of entrepreneurship.'

– Lucas Price, Noah Price's Father

brand new furniture, like a lot of people in the industry do; he has reused a lot of materials, and it has made a difference."

As for The Populist's food, Lucas said its urban contemporary menu brings enjoyment to the table.

"I think it's all really interesting and fun," Lucas said. "The eggs and bacon and the mussels and marrow are great."

From its cocktail menu to its wine menu to its happy hour specials, Noah, Powers and White have created a dining experience to remember (and talk about) – and that's the driving idea behind the restaurant.

As we polished off our own eggs-and-bacon plate, the neigh-

boring table ordered the mussels and marrow plate (\$12) – because their neighbors had ordered it.

And, in the chain reaction that moves down along the communal table, we were next in line to say, "I think we need to try that."

The Populist is located at 3163 Larimer St. in Denver and is open for dinner and drinks from 5-10 p.m., Tuesday-Saturday. Reservations for parties six or more call 720/432-3163. Crema Coffee House is located at 2862 Larimer St. and is open daily from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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