

# chef profile

## Meet Chef Jason Murphy This Rising Star Commands Three Gourmet Restaurants

by Doc Lawrence

Chef Jason Murphy has assumed a high-profile status in Charleston in a remarkably brief time. With the city's many legendary restaurants and the growing number of celebrity chefs, Charleston appears to be a tough place to ascend professionally for even the most ambitious of talented chefs. Murphy, everyone soon discovered, marches to a different drummer and has more than enough drive to move upward at a breathtaking pace. What he has accomplished—holding the reins as executive chef of three Charleston restaurants—is unprecedented. But, Chef Murphy sees these responsibilities as part of all he believes in and wants to do in these hallowed kitchens of one of America's great culinary centers.

Murphy began his culinary training in the Columbus, Ohio, State Culinary Program and trained for more than three years at The Refectory, Columbus' four-star French restaurant, whose chef trained under legends Paul Bocuse and Pierre Orsi. After completing his studies, Murphy moved to Charleston to diversify his experience and study at Johnson & Wales University. In 2002, he joined 39 Rue de Jean and was swiftly promoted to sous chef and then to chef de cuisine. After several years with the company, Murphy joined Coast Bar & Grill, sister restaurant to 39 Rue de Jean, as executive chef, a position he now holds with not only these but Virginia's on King as well. These three restaurants are part of the Holy City Hospitality restaurant group, which also includes Good Food Catering and several exclusive private event venues.

Recently, Chef Murphy sat down for an interview with wine and fine dining journalist Doc Lawrence.

**What role do locally grown products have in your menus? Do you find that diners want to be assured that these are important to your kitchen?**

The movement to create and maintain local sustainable food systems is worldwide. We make every effort to source our product from local purveyors, particularly by way of the local farmers markets. Supporting local growers not only supports our city's economy, but more importantly ensures that we can continue to enjoy the flavors of the Lowcountry for many years to come.

Guests to our restaurants show a particular interest in local dishes. It is not at all unusual for diners visiting Coast to walk up to our chefs while they are cooking and ask "what's the local catch tonight?" It is great that we have an opportunity to educate our guests on the importance of maintaining our resources. We proudly support the Sustainable Seafood Initiative, serve Ashley Farms Chickens, meet with local fishermen and work with the South Carolina Department of Agriculture in their effort to garner statewide support for Certified South Carolina Grown products.

Being active participants and supporting our community is a priority for our company. The bottom line is, locally grown produce is just fresher. It just tastes better. We are fortunate to live in an area that offers an abundance of locally grown produce. Few people know how much produce is grown in South Carolina.



By making seasonal changes to our menus, and preparing additional dishes each night featuring local and unique ingredients, we maintain a focus on localism while maintaining the staples our guests know and love.

**What defines Charleston cuisine, making it different and better than that of other cities?**

Charleston cuisine is defined by the history it holds and the story it tells. Cooking in the South is not just a pastime, it is tradition. Southern cuisine is rooted in tradition. Classic Southern dishes tell the story of the region. Recipes have been passed down through generations. Southerners take pride in their land and their heritage. Dinners were not just meals; they were a way to bring people together.

**What really is a Lowcountry meal? What are some of your own Lowcountry favorites?**

Fried chicken, collards and mac 'n' cheese would be my last request.

**Why does she-crab soup remain so popular in Charleston? Tell us about your recipe.**

She-crab soup was originally so popular because of the abundance of blue crabs available in local waters. It is a preparation that dates back hundreds of years and carries a lot of history with it. It continues to be a staple Charleston dish, though every chef takes a different approach to the classic recipe. Once again, Lowcountry cuisine is centered around the flavors of Charleston's land and sea. She-crab soup is the perfect testament to that. Our she-crab soup is made with time, love and enough sherry for everyone.

**What role do you play in the wine program of the restaurants?**

Designing the wine list for our restaurants is a collaboration between me and our wine director, Michael Moore. Careful consideration is used in selecting varietals for the list. The style of restaurant is a major consideration in selecting wines from different regions in the world. Varietals are then selected to pair with the general flavors of dishes. In some instances, the style in which a varietal is produced, whether heavier or lighter for instance, plays a factor in the wine-by-the-glass selections. We work closely with the wine buyer to create an enjoyable food and wine experience for all of our guests.

**Which chefs are your culinary heroes? What about them inspired you?**

Richard Blondin. I worked with him at The Refectory. One of the most important things I learned from him was how to utilize absolutely everything—how important it is to not waste anything.

**You are a very busy man. Please describe your responsibilities with the restaurants.**

As the executive chef for Virginia's on King, Coast and 39 Rue de Jean, I oversee the culinary side of our three restaurants—working in our kitchens, menu development, building and maintaining relationships with local purveyors and taking every opportunity to contribute to community projects and fundraisers. The parent company, Holy City Hospitality, supports and contributes to many events and organizations, including Darkness to Light, Sustainable Seafood Initiative, The Ronald MacDonald House, Rock (N) Research, The Charleston Food and Wine Festival, Spoleto Festival, American Heart Association, Communities In Schools, The Susan G. Komen Foundation and more.

**When you are home with your family, what food do you enjoy?**

My favorite family meal? That's easy: meatloaf, mashed potatoes and corn on the cob—because it is fun and comforting.

Thank you.

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