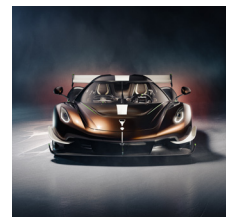
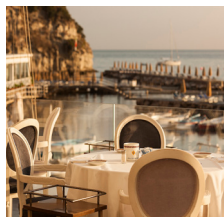


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# The JOEL PALMER HOUSE LEGACY

*Stewards of Tradition*

| BY TRACY ELLEN BEARD

Few American restaurants can claim a history as richly layered as the Joel Palmer House in Dayton, Oregon. This culinary landmark stands as both a testament to one family's dedication to fine dining and a living piece of Oregon's pioneer history. Today, fourth-generation chef Christopher Czarnecki, whose family's journey through the restaurant world spans more than a century, sits at the forefront. Joining him is Levi Seed, the dynamic Director of Hospitality and Lead Sommelier, whose precision and passion for service are pushing The Joel Palmer House into a vibrant new chapter. My daughter Brittney and I dined on the ten-course Oregon Omakase Menu during the spring.

## THE CZARNECKI LEGACY

The Czarnecki family story began in 1916 when Joseph Czarnecki opened Joe's Tavern in Reading, Pennsylvania, serving bowls of wild mushroom soup for 20 cents to his fellow Polish immigrants. Joseph's son, Joseph Jr., transformed this humble tavern into Joe's Restaurant in the mid-20th century, elevating it into a destination for fine dining and pioneering the European service charge in a defiant break from America's tipping tradition. Joseph Jr. also maintained the family's focus on wild mushrooms, a nod to their Polish roots.

In 1975, Jack Czarnecki, Joseph Jr.'s son, took the reins, building on his father's legacy with an award-winning cookbook on mushroom cuisine and a reputation for innovative dishes. Seeking fresh inspiration and new culinary horizons, Jack and his wife Heidi relocated to Oregon in 1996, purchasing and restoring the historic Joel Palmer House. This move from Pennsylvania to the heart of the Willamette Valley marked a significant shift for the family, aligning their culinary mission with one of the world's exceptional wine regions. They transformed the 1857 house, initially built by Oregon Trail pioneer Joel Palmer, into a fine dining destination renowned for its forest-to-table ethos and meticulously curated wine cellar.

## A NEW GENERATION TAKES CHARGE

After returning from military service in Iraq, Christopher Czarnecki joined his family's business full-time in 2006. Over the next two years, he worked closely with his parents, mastering the art of fine dining, and

absorbing the lessons of a century-old family tradition. In 2008, Jack and Heidi officially passed the torch to Christopher, who took over as chef-owner. Today, he continues the family's legacy with a reverence for tradition balanced by a bold commitment to innovation.

Under Christopher's leadership, the Joel Palmer House has remained a cornerstone of Oregon's fine dining scene. The historic home, listed on both the Oregon and National Registers of Historic Places, has undergone careful renovations to preserve its 19th-century charm while introducing modern touches that elevate the guest experience. The original wooden chairs his parents brought from Pennsylvania still line the dining room, a subtle reminder of the family's roots.

## GUIDING THE FRONT OF HOUSE – LEVI SEED

Levi Seed, the Joel Palmer House's Director of Hospitality and Lead Sommelier, represents the next generation of service excellence. A former chef turned sommelier, Levi's journey into the world of wine was shaped by a lifetime of culinary curiosity and a deep-seated commitment to craftsmanship. His culinary training at the Oregon Culinary Institute and international experience in Shanghai provided him with a unique perspective on flavor, which he now applies to wine pairing.

Levi joined the Joel Palmer House in 2020 and quickly became an integral part of the leadership team. Known for his precision, tireless work ethic, and unshakeable commitment to hospitality, Levi has played a critical role in expanding the restaurant's acclaimed wine program. With nearly 600 selections of Oregon Pinot Noir, the wine list at Joel



Palmer House is among the most comprehensive in the country. Levi's passion for showcasing mature, site-specific wines has helped transform the restaurant into a destination for oenophiles seeking rare and aged bottles, many of which are exclusive to the restaurant.

## LOOKING FORWARD

Together, Christopher and Levi are carrying the Joel Palmer House into its next century, blending time-honored tradition with fresh innovation. As they honor the past while pushing forward, their combined leadership ensures that every guest experience reflects the values that have defined the Czarnecki family for four generations: respect for the land, dedication to craft, and a deep appreciation for the art of hospitality. The Joel Palmer House remains a beacon of fine dining, steeped in history yet ever-evolving — a place where the past and future share a table.

## THE MEAL: OREGON ON A PLATE

The Oregon Omakase Menu is a carefully choreographed progression of flavor, starting with whimsy and building to boldness. Our meal opened with a phyllo cone filled with mascarpone, Briar Rose Creamery fromage blanc, and buttermilk, finished with chive oil and California white sturgeon caviar. It was crisp, creamy, and indulgent—a playful beginning.

The elk tartare was a standout: rich and nuanced, layered with fermented chili, black trumpet aioli, pickled shallot, capers, and a velvety yolk-truffle sabayon. Each bite revealed something new.

Another favorite was the 75-day dry-aged New York strip, topped with a garden salsa that added brightness to the deeply savory cut. It was expertly cooked, with a crust that echoed the charred edges of a backyard grill, elevated by the finesse of fine dining.

The final course dubbed the Mushroom Terrarium, was a deconstructed strawberry shortcake disguised as woodland art. With strawberry compote, freeze-dried yogurt, matcha cheesecake, chocolate rocks, and candy cap mushroom crumble, it was a sensory collage of texture, sweetness, and surprise.

## BEYOND THE MEAL: LEGACY IN MOTION

Dining at the Joel Palmer House is not just about the food—it is about being part of something enduring. The experience is equal parts history lesson, family tribute, and culinary adventure. The Czarneckis have not just built a restaurant; they have cultivated a sense of place and continuity that is rare in the modern dining world.

Together, Christopher and Levi are writing the next chapter. Their partnership strikes a balance between heritage and forward momentum, ensuring the restaurant remains relevant without sacrificing its soul. For travelers winding through Oregon wine country, the Joel Palmer House offers a unique opportunity to taste the land, meet the stewards, and sit for a while in the warm embrace of tradition.

For me and Brittney, it was more than a meal. It was a shared memory in a house built to endure. ❖