Restaurateur gives lessons in history and hospitality

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As president and CEO of Brechtel Hospitality, Kyle Brechtel (MBA ’11) develops new hospitality ventures throughout the New Orleans area. Photo courtesy of Kevin Elwell.

Most college students fill their days with classes, football games and parties. But when Kyle Brechtel (MBA ’11) was an undergraduate at LSU, he was opening a restaurant.

“As a 20-something kid with no real experience, I decided I would go into the chain restaurant world,” he says. “And thankfully it worked out.”

In 2002, Brechtel became the owner of New Orleans’ first McAllister’s Deli franchise, launching a 23-year career in the hospitality, food and beverage industries.

Today, as president and CEO of Brechtel Hospitality, the New Orleans native operates four franchises in the area, including Smalls Sliders and Walk-On’s Sports Bistreaux. He’s also the founder of Fulton Alley, an upscale gaming parlor in the Warehouse District; Vintage Rock Club, an immersive, throwback dance club on Poydras Street; and Copper Vine, a gastropub specializing in wine. His most recent project is Copper Vine Inn, which opened in 2024 and is located on the second floor of the Copper Vine restaurant.

Given his background, it’s no surprise that Brechtel gravitated to the hospitality business. Entrepreneurship, he says, runs in the family.

“My grandmother was a Ruth’s Chris Steak House franchisee, and my father was also a small business owner,” he says. “I remember watching my grandmother in her restaurants when I was growing up and being inspired. There’s something about hosting and entertaining people that speaks to me.”

Of all his ventures, Brechtel says Copper Vine is closest to his heart.

“Copper Vine is my baby,” he says. “At one point, I lived right across the street from the property, and I would look over and dream of opening a wine gastropub. I’m really proud of what we created. We built something that the neighborhood really needed.”

Located on the corner of Poydras and O’Keefe, Copper Vine sits on the former site of Maylie’s, one of the city’s most storied restaurants. Founded by French immigrants in 1876, Maylie’s specialized in Creole dishes like deviled eggs remoulade and gumbo served on a fixed price menu. When the restaurant shut its doors on New Year’s Eve of 1986, it was the second oldest in New Orleans, just behind Antoine’s.



Brechtel’s gastropub, Copper Vine, pays homage to the New Orleans of yesteryear, while creating a contemporary dining experience in the Central Business District. Photo courtesy of Jacqueline Marque.

Brechtel drew on that rich history when he was developing Copper Vine. In conceptualizing the project, he wanted to pay homage to the New Orleans of yesteryear while creating a dining experience suited to the needs of today’s Central Business District.

“Maylie’s was originally a restaurant for the neighborhood,” he says. “At the time, Poydras Market was right across the street, and all the workers would come over and eat at Maylie’s. We knew that we were going to have this shared history, so when we were reviving the space, we wanted to be the restaurant that served the neighborhood just like Maylie’s did.”

Infused throughout the restaurant are references to its past. The name Copper Vine, for instance, evokes both the material used to fabricate the original building and the iconic purple wisteria that once wound around Maylie’s balcony.

“We tried to keep as much of the historic fabric as possible while also modernizing for the needs of today,” Brechtel says. “We were able to save the bones of the historic building while also making the space feel contemporary and fresh.”

Today’s guests can enjoy wines selected by sommelier Charles Regnard while sitting in the original Maylie’s bar. Those staying in the inn, meanwhile, can take a break in “Maylie’s Living Room,” a second floor gathering space connected to private dining rooms with floor-to-ceiling windows and views of the business district below. The room pays homage to the Maylie family, who for years lived above the restaurant on the building’s second floor.



At Copper Vine, guests can sip wine at the original Maylie’s bar. Photo courtesy of Jacqueline Marque.

Copper Vine’s kitchen offers modern Southern cuisine that puts its own spin on New Orleans’ most beloved dishes. Brechtel says the goal is to create a polished dining experience that appeals to many different palettes.

“We’re in a trade area that gets a lot of tourists,” he says. “We have all sorts of guests, from Saints and Pelicans fans to people going to a monster truck show, a Taylor Swift concert or a theater production like *Hamilton* at the Saenger. To cater to all those groups, our food is interesting but not intimidating. We nod to New Orleans in a way that’s not too cliché or on-the-nose.”

Brechtel says any food from Chef Amy Mehrtens is a delight, but he especially recommends the pork belly and corn fried oysters, the restaurant’s seasonal risotto,

and the smoked duck and andouille gumbo.

No matter what guests choose to dine on, the goal is to bring them together.

“Whether people are celebrating or grieving, a restaurant creates community,” Brechtel says. “It’s a place of respite where people can leave their worries behind. That’s what appeals to me most about the hospitality industry — it’s the human connections that it fosters.”

And after two decades in the industry, Brechtel has a message for anyone looking to get involved in hospitality: “There’s no better place in the world to do it than New Orleans.”