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Miami Herald

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Fish Bar
leads Sunset
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+ The INDULGE 25: See Who's Firing Up the Food Scene

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Fresh Finds

In a city as fast-paced as ours, where new restaurants open at a dizzying pace and culinary trends shift on a dime, keeping up with the latest and greatest can be daunting.

Relax. From a roadmap of Miami's best dining neighborhood to our inaugural list of the local people, places and dishes making a mark on our food scene, we've got you covered.

Now stop counting calories — and start planning your next mesmerizing meal.



New Kids on the Block

How a girl from **Australia** and a boy from the Florida **Panhandle** met over meatloaf, fell for each other in the **kitchen** and opened a crazy-good **restaurant** in Miami's best dining **neighborhood**.

*S*unset Harbour's Stiltsville Fish Bar is an homage to the love story of chef-partners Janine Booth and Jeff McInnis. The culinary power couple met when McInnis was executive chef at Gigi in Midtown Miami, and Booth paid a visit twice in the same day, lured by his meatloaf special.

"I'd never even heard of meatloaf," recalled Booth, a native of Australia, who was in culinary school at Le Cordon Bleu at the time. "But of course, it wasn't just any meatloaf. It was made with short rib and caramelized onions and smoked plantains and barbecue sauce. It was amazing. I wanted to know how to make it."

The chance encounter led to an internship with McInnis at Gigi and moving with him to Yardbird Southern Table & Bar when he opened it in Miami Beach in 2011. Since then, Booth and McInnis went north to open the wildly popular Root & Bone in New York as chef-partners, and they returned to Miami in 2016 to open The Sarsaparilla Club inside the Shelborne Hotel. That restaurant converted into a Root & Bone offshoot around the time Stiltsville was gearing up for its launch late last year. Booth and McInnis, both Bravo *Top Chef* alums (her, Season 11; him, Season 5) also are the proud parents of a baby girl, Sunny.

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PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANCE BY FEDERICO VELEZ / HAIR AND MAKEUP BY VICKY MEJIA



Booth and McInnis answered Miami's call for a chef-driven fish house. Stiltsville unites McInnis' passions for locally caught fish, farm-fresh produce and Southern hospitality.

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: An Absolut Elyx cocktail served in a custom copper mermaid vessel called 'The Janine'; cobia tiradito with crispy hominy and popcorn; flourless Meyer lemon cake; wood-grilled oysters with herb butter and charred sourdough.

STRIKING COUPLE

On the sun-drenched patio of Stiltsville during a lull before a recent brunch service, the couple reminisced about how their attraction simmered in the kitchen before either of them acted on it.

"I think Jeff was a little more interested at first," Booth said innocently.

"Whatever, you liked me," he rebuffed, unfazed.

"Well, maybe I thought you were cute," she conceded.

They have an easy chemistry, and their love is apparent in the way they interact with each other and the way he looked at her during our photo shoot that morning. Both are blessed with beautiful bone structure and beachy blonde hair, making for a striking couple.

Their first date actually started across the street from the restaurant, at the boat ramp in Sunset Harbour next to Maurice Gibb Memorial Park. McInnis took Booth out on his boat, cruising across the Venetian Islands through Biscayne Bay to the original Stiltsville homes, first erected on the bay in the 1930s.

"We put a couple of lines in the water," Booth said. "I don't think we caught much of anything."

McInnis is a native of the Florida Panhandle who grew up fishing the Gulf and working on his grandparents' farms in Alabama. In many ways, Stiltsville unites his longtime passions for locally caught fish, farm-fresh produce and Southern hospitality.

"We have the Atlantic, the Gulf and the Caribbean right here in our backyard with this abundance of fish, and there really wasn't a chef-driven fish house," he said. "For a long time, seafood in Miami meant sushi flown in from other parts of the world."

CATCH OF THE DAY

Two claw-foot tubs filled with ice showcase the day's fresh catch at the front of Stiltsville Fish Bar: yellow jack, black grouper, wahoo and triple tail, all sourced from local fishermen from the Keys to Stuart. The daily catch figures prominently onto the menu, served with choices of sauces (everything from cilantro salsa verde to aji amarillo) and sides (stoneground grits to sweet plantain mofongo).

Other creative menu highlights include smoked scallops with crispy ham chips, corn spoon bread with butter-poached lobster tail, and an elevated take on coconut shrimp: sweet local Royal Red shrimp wrapped in shredded phyllo dough, flash-fried in coconut oil and topped with toasted coconut bits.

The restaurant's design plays up the seaside fish house concept with a convertible open-air dining room and a chic-ramshackle aesthetic with exposed wooden rafters, support columns resembling pilings, beer taps made of dramatic swordfish bills, translucent-shell chandeliers clusters of purple barnacles as *objets d'art*. There also are plans for a forthcoming rooftop deck to savor prime sunset views alongside their rum-forward cocktail menu.

So what brought Booth and McInnis back to Miami after their success in New York?

"It was really this neighborhood," McInnis said, polishing off a pre-shift salad of butter lettuce topped with Florida avocado and heirloom tomatoes. He gestured at the unobstructed views of Biscayne Bay from his sidewalk table in Sunset Harbour. "I mean, look around. There's no other place in Miami like this. The city's best chefs are here. We wanted to be a part of it and bring something new to the neighborhood."

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stiltsvillefishbar.com.

