

Christopher Czarnecki, Chef and Owner of Joel Palmer House Restaurant

Honoring History while Forging Ahead: The Integrity and Innovation of A Fourth-Generation Restaurateur

Christopher Czarnecki is fond of saying, **“We stand on the shoulders of giants, and we continue to reach higher.”**

The fourth generation in a family of wild mushroom restaurateurs, Christopher grew up in the Czarneckis’ fine dining restaurant in Reading, Pennsylvania – filling water glasses for guests by age 9, and analyzing every meal to determine how it could be made more delicious. He learned the importance of beverage pairings early in life when his grandmother recommended a glass of milk with his pancakes, rather than the orange juice he had asked for. Forty years later, the **Czarnecki family recipe for wild mushroom soup** (it’s a vegetarian dish, but everyone swears it must have beef stock, but doesn’t) shares the spotlight with new, globally influenced dishes that offer a uniquely **Oregonian forest-to-table dining experience**. As the steward of his family’s legacy, Christopher welcomes innovation and evolution while never losing sight of his history.

Christopher joined the **U.S. Army** in 2003, and found himself cooking in combat boots in war-torn Iraq. He credits his experience as a **veteran** with bringing him greater patience, a thicker skin, and a clear sense of how *not* to lead a team. When Christopher’s parents were ready to retire, they entrusted the keys of the Joel Palmer House to him in 2008 without hesitation. Under his watch, the restaurant has only deepened its commitment to **outstanding hospitality, responsible business practices, and properly aged Willamette Valley wine**.

Christopher has nurtured close relationships with his vintner neighbors since his parents moved the family restaurant to Dayton, OR in the mid-1990s. His conviction that properly aged Willamette Valley Pinot Noir ranks among the absolute best in the world inspired him to offer a **wine list focused nearly exclusively on Oregon – and especially, mature Pinot Noir** – which now includes over 2000 bottles, many of which are exclusively available at Joel Palmer House, and verticals stretching back to the 1990s.

Christopher is a man of principle beyond his unique dedication to an all-Willamette wine program. The restaurant uses only wild-foraged mushrooms – never cultivated – because of their greater intensity and character. **All of his employees participate in a 401(k) match**; the **restaurant pays the full cost of medical and dental** coverage for full-time staff. He strives to lead from the front, greeting his staff as worthy professionals and his diners as cherished guests. Every experience at the Joel Palmer House – from the guest in the garden to the dishwasher in the kitchen – is spotlit by his genuine hospitality, humility, and integrity.

“You live your values or you don’t,” he says simply. “There are plenty of ways to make money, but how do you do it without compromising your soul? **You make money, ethically**. It hurts a lot of the time. But in the long run, you win AND you’ll have a family that loves you.”