

A 100-Year Legacy

The Secret to Joe's Stone Crab's Success

WORDS BY VANESSA PASCALE

Everyone knows about Joe's Stone Crab. The Miami staple has served everyone from Jennifer Lopez, Tom Cruise, Cameron Diaz, and Tom Brady to regulars like Gloria Estefan. The highly acclaimed restaurant is known far and wide for their mouthwatering stone crabs. Recently, our April/May cover star, Harry Connick Jr., told me that when he's in the Magic City he heads to Joe's. Ask any *true* foodie for a list of their favorite restaurants in Miami and you'll find Joe's at the top of it. So, what makes this restaurant so appealing? We went to Joe's in search of the secret to their long-lived success.

Established in 1913 by Joe and Jennie Weiss, you might be surprised to find out that Joe's

did not begin serving their world-famous stone crabs until 1921. Back then, they charged 75 cents for four or five crabs, 25 cents for potatoes, and 25 cents for cole slaw, recalls Joe's son Jesse on the restaurant's website. I arrive at the restaurant and am escorted over to Stephen Sawitz—the great-grandson of Joe and Jennie—who kicks off our Joe's experience with an exclusive tour.

We begin in the lively kitchen, which is divided into designated areas: food prep, dessert station (they are known for their delicious key lime pies), shipping area... As we navigate through the space, Stephen explains what each station does. Over 400 employees

contribute to the culinary magic that unfolds here daily. Then, we arrive at the stone crabs section, where buckets upon buckets of stone crabs are carefully appraised and prepared to perfection by diligent chefs. Off to the side is the Chef's Table for guests seeking a truly special dining experience.

On the opposite end of the restaurant is Joe's Take Away, a gourmet market that caters to guests craving Joe's exceptional fare in a more relaxed setting. Open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, Joe's Take Away serves the restaurant's specialties: stone crabs, hash browns, cole slaw, lobster rolls, fried chicken, and more. And they have an excellent wine bar. Also on this side





of the restaurant is an intimate dining room. Appointed with a table large enough to host an entire football team (and they have), the room is stately yet cozy and enables privacy.

After the tour, we are seated at the best table in the house: the “family table” (the table Stephen’s family has eaten at for decades). The see-and-be-seen table boasts an expansive view of the restaurant and the large-scale picture of Stephen’s grandfather and friends seated in a Moonshine automobile. A prime spot, the list of notables who have broken bread, and some stone crabs, at this table include Al Capone, J. Edgar Hoover, and Muhammad Ali.

We entrust Stephen with the ordering for the table. He asks our server Ronaldo to bring us the chopped salad to start, lamb chops, grilled tomatoes, and, of course, a large plate of stone crabs. The lamb is tender and tasty, the grilled tomatoes are a light, complementary side dish, and as expected, the stone crabs are outstanding. The stone crab claws are served in their cracked shell with a side of melted butter and their signature mustard sauce. We savor every succulent bite of sweet, tender meat —

even now my mouth waters just thinking about their stone crabs. While Joe’s is best known for their stone crabs, Stephen tells me that their fried chicken (which his mother insisted be on the menu as it’s very affordable at \$6.95), grilled tomatoes, creamed spinach, hash browns, and salmon are also very popular with patrons. New additions to the menu are introduced by the head chef of Take Away and Stephen’s mother, who is “a food savant.” Though we’re quite full at this point, we find room for dessert. I highly recommend the key lime pie and massive brownie à la mode.

Over the four hours we spend at Joe’s, Stephen charms us with stories about his tenure at the restaurant (he started out peeling potatoes, clams, shrimps, and working in the dessert pantry as a child, and went full-time in 1979) and the special deliveries he has made —including a notable trip to the White House. (If you’d like to enjoy Joe’s stone crabs and aren’t near South Florida, you can place an order online.) As we chat, laugh, and indulge in appetizing fare, a number of regulars pop by our table to say hello to their favorite restaurateur, including former

Miami Dolphin Yatil Green, who steals Stephen away to catch up after he politely introduces himself. It’s at this point that I realize what sets Joe’s apart from other restaurants with excellent food: they honestly make you feel like family here. And that warm-fuzzy-feeling is priceless. Come for the stone crabs, and fall in love with Joe’s family. Here’s to another hundred years! **ML**

Joe’s Stone Crab is located at 11 Washington Avenue, Miami Beach, FL 33139. Phone 305-673-0365. For more information, visit: www.joesstonecrab.com.

Note: Joe’s doesn’t take reservations; guests are seated on a first-come first-serve basis. It’s suggested to come in before 7 pm, if you want to avoid the crowd. Fridays, Saturdays, and holidays are typically busier than weekdays. Valet parking is available for \$7 at dinner time, and there’s metered parking and limited free self-parking across the street.

A special thank you to Stephen Sawitz for a memorable evening and to Lisa Mozloom for arranging.