

THE MODERN LUXURY

ATLANTAN

+

SNOW PATROL

From Beaver Creek to
Big Sky, Your Ultimate
Guide to Ski Season

MEN *of* STYLE

ATLANTA'S SARTORIAL STARS

The Great Escape
Atlantis Paradise Island Proves the Perfect
Backdrop for the Season's Easy Elegance

Restaurateur Michel Arnette poses in front of Arnette's personalized Knife Club library.

BUILT TO LAST

Atlanta restaurateur and founder of Word of Mouth restaurants visits with Modern Luxury.

BY VANESSA PASCALE
PHOTOGRAPHED BY REN ADKINS

"They play a key role in allowing me to live my dream," says Michel Arnette, founder of Word of Mouth Restaurants (womrestaurants.com): Haven, Valenza, Vero, Arnette's Chop Shop. Arnette is raving about his staff; he considers all 152 of them family. "Chef Stephen [Herman], chef Matt [Swickerath], and Gordon [Mahedy], who has been with me 24

years, they're my right-hand men. My goal is to inspire and promote happiness. My hope is to build this company the right way and to grow it genuinely and organically. There are many employees that contribute to its success, and my plan is to absolutely take care of them today and in the future. We're on a 10-year plan. I feel like the luckiest person in the world," says Arnette.

With his staff's help, the prolific restaurateur is gearing up to open two new concepts, The Associate (opening December 2023) and The Royal (opening summer 2024), "think Frank Lloyd Wright opens a gas station in the '60s with modern diner cuisine." The Associate is a thank-you to his loyal patrons who have supported him since he opened his first

restaurant, Haven, which celebrates 20 years this November. The upscale, members-only (\$10,000 initiation fee, \$5,000 annually) concept is slated to be a modern seafood house with immersive entertainment. The elevated menu features fresh seafood, a raw bar, a robata grill with global presentations and cooking methods, prime beef, fine wine and an upscale cocktail program.

The 6,000-square-foot space boasts a dining area and club side, "where things get really interesting," with male and female performers roaming the space—think musicians and chanteuses entertaining in their native languages. "The idea is to feel like the member is actually in the show. As a restaurant group, our focus has been on a high level of cuisine and genuine hospitality,

so we want to continue to do that. It's super exciting to do something that maybe the rest of Atlanta clamors to get into. No photography—most of these members want to detach and have the rest of the world wondering what's going on inside, which I think is kind of cool."

When Arnette isn't building prominent restaurants, he's building classic muscle cars. He built all the first-generation Mustangs (1964, 1965, 1966), a 1968 Camaro, and a 1972 Bronco. "I like building something from the ground up." Once built, Arnette and his 29-year-old son Valen take the car on a road trip. Two years ago, they drove the Bronco to Miami, Tampa, and Clearwater for 8 days. "We've done that for years," says Arnette. ◦



Michel Arnette leaning on the restaurant's upstairs bar, behind him, artwork by Carrie Penley.

PHOTO BY REN ADKINS



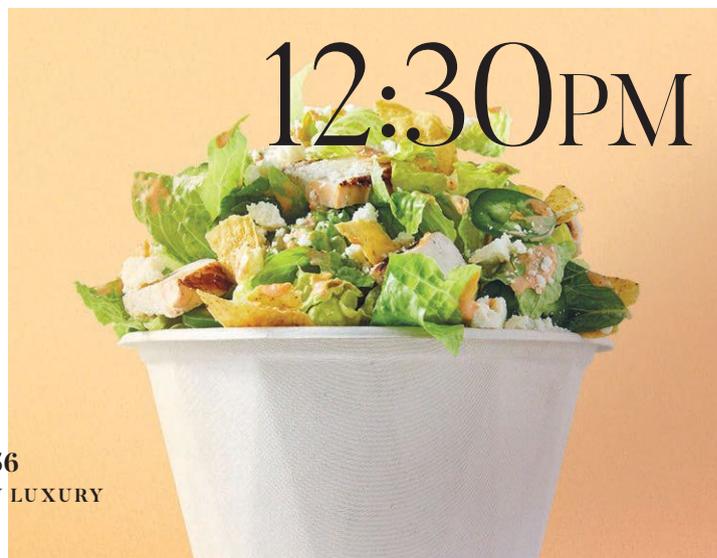
DAY TO NIGHT

No two days are ever the same for Word of Mouth Restaurants' Michel Arnette. Most days, the hands-on restaurateur can be found circulating between his restaurants, making executive decisions, meeting with his team, and hobnobbing with guests. Here, Arnette shares how he prefers to spend his time, plus a few of his favorites. *BY VANESSA PASCALE*



"Shower in the morning. Grab myself a Starbucks cold brew on ice with a little bit of cream and a little bit of simple syrup. If my girlfriend, Crissy Hura, is with me, we'll have coffee together. Check emails in my home office. Sitting in front of a computer, even for an hour, is not fun for me. What is fun for me is this: I love the actual engagement part. Checking in on what's happening with my team keeps my motor running. Next, go to the construction site [The Associate]. Now, I'm trying to figure out how to set the table for The Associate. What does that look and feel like? I'm looking at China, glass, silverware, I'm literally setting the table."

"Crissy and I will grab lunch at Chopt. I like the Mexican Caesar with roasted chicken. I'm not always health conscious; I might pop into Willy's or Taqueria Del Sol to grab a taco."



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT, PHOTOS: BY REN ADKINS; BY EVRIM ERTIK/ISTOCK; COURTESY OF CHOPT; CREATIVE SALAD CO.

1PM

“Check in at each of the restaurants. My two chefs, chef Stephen Herman and chef Matt Swickerath, are my best friends and business partners. I like to connect with them and the managers, Michael Etter, Gordon Mahedy, Javier Mendoza and Ron Eyster, my Director of Operations.”



“Step away for a little ‘me time.’ Workout—sometimes, I’ll walk. My lady and I explored Life Time Buckhead yesterday, thinking about joining.”

3:30PM

6PM

“Go to the restaurants. Now, I’m doing exactly what I was born to do: put my arms around everyone, whether they work here or are coming to dine. Showtime! I am connected to everything. I know how vulnerable restaurants can be; they come and go all the time, so I stay in this grounded, humble place. So, every single person that wants to be here, I want to be here to say, ‘Thank you.’ I’m doing that all night. I could get a call or a text, ‘Where are you? I’m over at Arnette’s!’ ‘I’ll be right there.’ I kept the restaurants close so I could be in them.”



11PM

“Time to go home. I don’t check any emails when I get home. Dive into *Breaking Bad* or some docu-drama like *WeCrashed*. I can literally lie down in bed, and in two minutes, be asleep. Then, I wake up at 3:30 a.m. because I have a million things running through my head. I am most creative in the middle of the night. The idea for Arnette’s Knife Club happened at 3:30 a.m.”



9PM

“Get a bite to eat, have a glass of pinot noir, and relax. Umi for sushi. My new favorite is Mujō omakase. I like sashimi and nigiri—tuna, salmon, yellowtail.”