

# Secretly to Success

BY: VANESSA RUST ★

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW THOMAS LEE

"We're going to keep doing what we set to do: family neighborhood restaurant, period. We wouldn't be here if it wasn't for our community."

— Chef Terry Koval



< The Deer And The Dove, 155 Sycamore St, Decatur, GA



Left: Chef Terry and wife Jenn Koval. Above: Duck smoked breast + confit duck leg pâté en croute

**Chef Terry Koval is overflowing with gratitude and admittedly emotional about winning the coveted 2023 James Beard Award for Best Chef of the Southeast when I meet him in August. Since he won, his Decatur, Georgia restaurant, The Deer and The Dove, has been booked a month and a half out.**

**IT** feels like a lifetime achievement. I think it's going back to: What are you doing for your community? How do you treat your staff? All those things play into why I was recognized. I was confident in opening a restaurant and knew it would be successful, but not

as successful as it is now. Now, it's national. We're doing numbers we never dreamed of, which is incredible," says Koval. Business has been so good that he paid off his SBA loan in August.

Now, Koval is adjusting to people recognizing him. "It's a little awkward to go to Home Depot and have people walk up to you and be like, 'Hey, congratulations!'"

The prestigious award has brought him more opportunities, including cool dinners and charities for underprivileged children. "Next year, I get to do Okefenokee with Andrew Zimmern and The Giving Kitchen. My brain is like..." Koval makes an exploding sound. "What kind of weird stuff is he going to cook? What weird stuff am I going to cook? I can't

believe it!" Koval is dedicated to giving back to his community through events and has been doing so for years.

Since 15, Koval has been honing his culinary skills in restaurants in Colorado, Michigan, Florida, South Carolina, and Atlanta. He worked long hours, sometimes unpaid, and absorbed everything he could. He learned to cook from scratch and helped open restaurants from the ground up. This transient lifestyle ended when he met Jenn (his wife now) at 21. The two moved to Decatur when he was 24; this is when his mission became clear: to go from line cook to sous chef to chef. Koval became a sous chef in a year and a half, worked at Canoe, became a chef at twelve hotels downtown, then, opened Farm Burger. "Wrecking Bar was the first time someone was like, 'Here's the keys, do whatever you want.'"

In 2019, Koval and Jenn opened The Deer and The Dove and B-Side, their adjoining wood-fired-bagel/coffee/sandwich shop. Jenn works the front of the house, while Koval cooks in the back, where they're blasting punk-rock and hip-hop music. So, what's the secret to his success? "We cook food for ourselves. We don't think, 'Well, we have this type of clientele, we should probably not do that.'" The restaurant's focus is on wild game cooked over an open fire. The ever-changing, elevated menu features sweet breads, bone marrow, venison, pheasant, duck, and beef tongue -- the latter is the entrée Koval is most excited about, a dish he has perfected over the span of his career.

So, what's next? When the time feels right, Koval plans to open another B-Side and a high-energy, seafood restaurant. One day, he'd like to collaborate with Chef Chris Consentino (Cockscomb). "He's an inspiration of a chef I've always looked up to, and he's an incredible skateboarder," says Koval, also a skateboarder. "Right now, we're going to keep doing what we set to do: family neighborhood restaurant, period. We wouldn't be here if it wasn't for our community." ■

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