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# An Exclusive Q&A with Mark Wombles: The Visionary Behind Distilled on Jefferson

Distilled on Jefferson has become a cornerstone of Lexington's culinary scene, known for its elevated take on Southern cuisine and its deep connection to Kentucky's heritage. Angels & Embers founder and avid foodie, Davron Bowman sat down with Chef Mark Wombles, the man behind the magic, to talk about the journey of Distilled, its exciting future, and the personal stories that shape his menu.

***Q: Mark, let's start with the beginning. Distilled originally opened in the historic Gratz Park Inn. What inspired you to launch the restaurant in such a historically significant building?***

**Mark Wombles:** Opening in the Gratz Park Inn was very intentional. Gratz Park is one of Lexington's most historic neighborhoods, filled with 19th-century homes and that old Southern charm. Being surrounded by history was important to me because I've always believed in honoring Kentucky's heritage, and the Inn provided the perfect backdrop for that. We loved being in the hotel, where the atmosphere itself brought a sense of history and timelessness to the dining experience.

***Q: In 2020, you made the move from Gratz Park to Jefferson Street, another area steeped in history. What drove that decision, and how does Jefferson Street's heritage play into the experience at Distilled?***

**Mark Wombles:** Jefferson Street has always been known for its great reputation as a restaurant street, so when the opportunity came to move, it felt like a natural progression. The area is one of Lexington's oldest neighborhoods, rich in history and culture. From prominent jockeys to business owners, Jefferson Street has a storied past, and it felt right to continue Distilled's legacy in a location that's as historically significant as Gratz Park.

We made the move right after COVID hit, which was challenging, but it's been a great success. We're continuing to expand and grow in this space, which is really exciting.

***Q: Speaking of expansion, we understand you're adding a new dining room soon. Can you tell us more about that?***

**Mark Wombles:** Yes, we're really excited about it! This new space will be a dining room with a central fireplace and large windows all around, which will create an inviting, intimate atmosphere. It's going to be perfect for private dining, wedding rehearsals, or special events, but it will also be open for regular reservations. We're hoping to have it completed by the end of September, so we're really looking forward to welcoming guests into this new part of Distilled.

***Q: Let's talk about the menu. The Henry Burger has become one of your most popular dishes. Can you share the story behind it?***

**Mark Wombles:** The Henry Burger is really special to me. It's named after my father, Henry Wombles, who passed away in 2020. He always loved burgers, but at the time, we didn't have one on the menu. So, whenever he came in, we'd make one just for him. Eventually, we decided to add it to the menu permanently, and it's been a hit ever since. It's a classic double patty burger with caramelized onions, American cheese, B&B pickles, lettuce, and our special sauce, served with fries. It's simple, but it's a tribute to my dad, and it's become a favorite among our guests.

***Q: Another standout dish is your fried chicken. How does your version differ from the traditional Southern staple?***

**Mark Wombles:** Fried chicken is such an iconic part of Southern cuisine, but we wanted to elevate it. At Distilled, we put an upscale twist on it by pairing it with a warm roasted tater salad, tangy gravy, and roasted corn chow chow. It's not your typical fried chicken—it's refined but still comforting, with all the flavors you'd expect, but presented in a way that feels a little more special. Guests really love it, and it's one of those dishes that perfectly represents our approach to Kentucky cuisine.

***Q: Mark, you've built an incredible restaurant that's become a local favorite. Who or what has influenced your approach to food?***

**Mark Wombles:** Growing up, I was always surrounded by great food and strong traditions. My father, Henry Wombles, had a huge influence on me, especially in how I think about food and the experiences that surround it. I've always been drawn to iconic Kentucky dishes like fried chicken and hot browns, but I wanted to elevate those dishes while still keeping them true to their roots.

My philosophy has always been about honoring tradition while pushing the boundaries of what Southern cuisine can be, and of course there have been amazing local examples that have been rolemodels or people to look up to along my journey. Chefs like Cole from Cole's on Main-- [Quita Michel](#). So many amazing chefs and leaders.

***Q: What are some of your favorite restaurants or food experiences here in Lexington?***

**Mark Wombles:** Lexington has some great spots. One of my favorite restaurants is [Cole's 735 Main](#). I went to school with Cole Arimes, and I've known him for most of my life. He's a fantastic chef, and his menu is just outstanding. It's so diverse, but everything is so consistently good, and it really showcases Cole's expansive skillset.

Another place I love is [Osaka for sushi](#). They have some of the best sushi in town, in my opinion. I don't go out to eat a ton because I'm always busy, but when I do, those are two places I really enjoy.

This isn't a restaurant or experience, but I want to take a moment to also mention Debbie Long's and her restaurant [Dudley's on Short](#). She's been a staple in this town for 30 or 40 years, and she runs an amazing establishment, she's always so kind, and you can really see the personal passion she pours into her experiences. Everything about Dudley's is amazing, especially their brunch-- and they have some great cocktails.

***Q: Distilled has received a lot of praise for its service and ambiance. What can guests expect when they dine with you?***

**Mark Wombles:** At Distilled, we strive to provide not just great food but an overall experience that's memorable. Our dining space is designed to be elegant yet comfortable, with soft lighting, refined décor, and plenty of room for intimate conversations. We pay a lot of attention to detail, from the custom chandeliers to the arrangement of our tables, to ensure that guests feel welcome and at ease.

The service is a big part of that as well. Our team is dedicated to making sure every guest has an exceptional experience. Whether it's a busy weekend or a quieter Monday evening, you can expect prompt, knowledgeable, and friendly service. We've received a lot of feedback about our staff, and I'm really proud of the team we have here. They go above and beyond to make every meal special.

***Q: Finally, what's next for Distilled? What should diners look forward to in the coming months?***

**Mark Wombles:** We're really focused on the expansion right now and excited to open our new dining room. It's going to add a whole new dimension to Distilled, especially for those looking to celebrate special occasions or host private events. Beyond that, we're always looking for ways to innovate with our menu while staying true to Kentucky's culinary roots. I'm excited to continue growing Distilled and providing our guests with unforgettable dining experiences.

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***Plan your visit to Distilled on Jefferson***

***157 Jefferson St., Lexington, KY***

***Open Monday thru Thursday from 5:00pm - 9:00pm***

***Friday and Saturday from 5:00pm - 10:00pm***

***Full menu and more on Chef/Owner Mark Wombles available at***

***<https://www.distilledonjefferson.com/>***

***Make your reservation via OpenTable***

***<https://www.opentable.com/r/distilled-on-jefferson-lexington>***