



STAR CHEF

MAWA MCQUEEN

ASPEN'S 'CREPE CRUSADER'

BY LORENZO SEMPLE

As I relaxed in the bar of Mawa's Kitchen, I was heartened by the welcoming community space she had created there. On a typical cold, sleepy, off-season morning, her restaurant was bustling with regulars. The dining area was warm, the staff was amiable, and the food was colorful and nourishing.

When Mawa walked into the room, the space instantly lit up with her infectious energy. She worked the dining area like only a true restaurateur can; greeting regulars by name, casually inspecting the dishes they were eating, and making her customers smile before disappearing into the kitchen. It's easy to see why she's a success.

Owning and operating an eatery in Aspen is no easy task. Our ever-expanding restaurant graveyard is filled with shattered dreams, failed ventures, broken wait staff, and defunct restaurant equipment. Mawa stands out as an outlier to me, someone who has poured blood, sweat, and tears into each of her three restaurants – Mawa's Kitchen and Crepe Therapy Cafés (formerly known as The Crepe Shacks) in both Aspen and Snowmass – and succeeded.

"Aspen," she said with conviction, "is a place of irony."

Mawa then went on to detail her unlikely path to becoming a locally beloved and nationally heralded culinary figure. Her journey has been over a road paved with potholes, roadblocks, and seasonal closures, fueled by grit and perseverance. Her story reads like a motivational speaker's resume, her lists of accomplishments like a recipe for "success gumbo."

Today, Mawa is quite the powerhouse. She's appeared on "Good Morning America," been profiled in *Forbes*, nominated for a James Beard Award, authored her book "Unstoppable Ambition," and landed her restaurant on the Michelin Travel Guide. You could even say she's a "cereal" entrepreneur as she has her own "Mawa's GrainFreeNola" granola line, as well.

As Aspen's locally owned restaurant landscape continues to get hollowed out like a sourdough boule and filled with a more common corporate chowder, Mawa remains steadfast in her will and resolve to not only succeed but to grow. She's bullish on Aspen as a place to incubate and support local culinary talent.

That's why I was wholly unsurprised to learn of her next venture, a restaurant called "Crepe Therapy Café" opening in Boulder, Colorado, this summer on 31st Street. Mawa considers herself the "Crepe Queen" of Aspen and wants her concept to be recognized as being born in Aspen. Aspen's ubiquitous alpine environment is a place she holds dear to her heart. Whenever anyone asks Mawa where she's from, she proudly declares "Aspen!"

Mawa cherishes the opportunity to shatter stereotypes, form new perspectives, and show her sense of pride for the town that has given her so much, a place she first saw on "The Young and the Restless" while watching TV in Paris as a teenager. In return, she has given back to Aspen by providing affordable, accessible meals and inclusive gathering spaces.



Mawa considers herself an “Aspen SkiCo foster child” as she credits her start through the company owned The Little Nell hotel, where she was able to get her first foot in the kitchen door and leave her other foot propping it open. An astounding 23 years later, she is a local Aspen institution.

We love our nostalgia in Aspen and serve it up like comfort food to anyone within earshot, regardless of whether they’re hungry to hear it or not. Ever since I was a kid growing up here, our town has always had a storied and flavorful history and a fascination with crepes.

Crepes are my childhood. I remember eating cinnamon sugar, chocolate, or strawberry crepes from Poppycock’s, ham and cheese crepes from the Popcorn Wagon, the famed Crepe Suzette at the bottom of West Buttermilk, and the crepe-specific restaurant on Cooper Avenue called The Magic Pan. More recently, the French Alpine Bistro and ultimately Mawa’s Crepe Shacks bridged Aspen’s crepe gap from past to present. The future of crepes in Aspen and beyond looks bright, thanks to Mawa and the Crepe Therapy Cafés.

I like her concept of “Crepe Therapy” being born in Aspen and the notion of food providing guidance. If you get confused, listen to the sizzling of the crepe batter as it dances across the hot pan, smell the fragrant cinnamon or pungent cheese fillings, and feel the spongy crepe in your hand. The triangular folds of her crepes form a potent, edible shape. Crepes will always hold a special place in my heart, my stomach, and on my waistline.



LEFT: James Beard Award-nominated Chef Mawa McQueen in the kitchen at Mawa’s Kitchen and [right] enjoying a glass of Champagne at her bar.

If you’d like to see her live, in person, head over to the St. Regis Hotel on Sunday at 10 a.m. where she’ll be making her Food & Wine Classic seminar debut presenting at the “Between Buns – a breakfast sandwich showdown” with Shota Nakajima and Justin Chapple. Or make your way to Mawa’s Kitchen in the ABC or either of the Crepe Therapy Cafés.

Welcome to Aspen, and have a wildly enjoyable Food & Wine weekend. See you under the tent, and cheers!

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