

THE FIRST EVENT HELD ON THE TERRACE OF WASHINGTON, D.C.'S HIGHLY ANTICIPATED MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REFLECTED THE TRADITIONS FOUND INSIDE, AND SHOWCASED THE CUISINE OF A BUZZWORTHY YOUNG CHEF.

African American History, One Course at a Time

by Kelly Magyarics, DWS / photos by Robert Chicoine



The roof terrace's long rectangular table was set with black linens and vases of fuchsia calla lilies, affording nighttime views of the Washington Monument to the 60 guests in attendance. The long-awaited National Museum of African American History and Culture had just opened to the public a few weeks previously; tonight was a celebration of its Ghanaian-British designer, David Adjaye. On October 6, 2016, Dom Pérignon hosted a dinner honoring Adjaye, with the Champagne house's offerings paired with the cuisine of Head Chef Kwame Onwuachi, the former *Top Chef* contestant whose prix fixe modern American restaurant The Shaw Bijou was set to open in the city's trendy Shaw neighborhood a few weeks later.

Onwuachi collaborated for a month with the team at Dom Pérignon to create the four-course menu and gleaned inspiration from different eras and styles of African American cuisine, including Creole, Caribbean and Soul Food. "I tried to break down each dish to its components," Onwuachi explained. For the first course, silky candied-yam velouté was elevated with black truffle, toasted pepitas added crunch and parmesan foam mimicked marshmallows placed atop sweet potato casserole.

"[Ingredients] were reimagined and incorporated into the menu—telling not only the stories of Kwame's life, but also the important history of dishes, ingredients and preparations of food that were brought to the U.S. or cultivated by black Americans throughout the history of the United States," notes Dom Pérignon Director of Communications Rachael Ruddick.

The second course, a luxe riff on gumbo, took the Creole roux-based staple apart and put it back together again. Bowls with chilled new-shell lobster, king crab and osetra caviar were brought to the table along with stoneware jugs of warm crustacean consommé which guests poured themselves. Onwuachi liked the temperature contrast and the "pop" of caviar in your mouth, while Ruddick pointed out that the pairing of the 2004 Dom Pérignon Rosé's "fresh, intense red fruit on the nose [and] signature minerality and spice" played off the briny shellfish and rich broth.



Dom Pérignon paired a different Champagne with each of the four courses served that evening.



The final course of the evening was an earthy beet butter cake served with cream cheese sabayon, sorrel and a chocolate malt snow.



Guests at the event were rewarded with nighttime views of the Washington Monument and downtown Washington, D.C.



Dom Pérignon USA Brand Director Richard Beaumont walks guests through the Champagne and cuisine pairings on the terrace of the National Museum of African American History and Culture.





Chef Kwame Onwuachi (center) is surrounded by the team with whom he worked for the four-course dinner on the terrace of the National Museum of African American History and Culture.



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A Caribbean-influenced Wagyu mojo paired beef short rib with red bean sofritos and mojo aigre douce (a sweet and sour sauce), along with a hybrid habanero that removes the heat while retaining the pepper's bright and fresh flavor. "You don't really tend to pair short rib with Champagne, but it washes away the fattiness of the Wagyu," admits Onwuachi. "You can pair Champagne with anything, really." That night, it partnered with the 1998 P2 Vintage, which boasted notes of honeysuckle, caramel, orange fruits and a smoky finish.

Capping off the evening was an earthy beet butter cake—the precursor to modern red velvet cake, Onwuachi pointed out, as the root vegetable has long been used as an intense natural food dye. It was served with cream cheese sabayon, sorrel and a chocolate malt snow reminiscent of freeze-dried ice cream.

Onwuachi had free reign that evening to shape the menu with not only his own choice of ingredients and techniques, but his own personal experiences, all in a much-anticipated space that means so much to so many people. "For me, the most memorable part of the evening was speaking to the guests and talking them through the experience," he muses. "Seeing everyone there—the whole experience was a milestone for my career, making my own story and cooking on top of the history of my culture." ■*cr*



Four courses of chef Kwame Onwuachi's cuisine were paired with Dom Pérignon Champagne at the special dinner honoring the museum's Ghanaian-British designer, David Adjaye.



On October 6, 2016, 60 or so invited guests enjoyed a four-course dinner on the terrace of the National Museum of African American History and Culture.