

Magazine writing sample: Feature on Chowder House Café for *Savor Ohio* magazine  
Kara Hemphill

Once you find the colorful building that houses Chowder House Café, tucked just off of State Road in Cuyahoga Falls, it's obvious that the restaurant is anything but ordinary. That's because when Chef Louis Prpich opened Chowder House in 2009, he was setting out to do something new and to fill a void in the region.

"I would ask friends of mine, 'If someone came in from out of town and wanted some really good seafood, where would you take them?' And nobody really had answer except to go up to Cleveland," Prpich says.

Prpich served in the military for a time before discovering a love for cooking while working in various local restaurants, deciding to make a career out of it and attending Pennsylvania Culinary Institute. He worked in downtown Akron restaurants, including at Greystone Hall, as well as running his own place, The Grotto, in the Merriman Valley. He moved on to Chowder House with the idea that regional specialties from other parts of the country, like lobster rolls and étouffée, should be more widely available in Ohio.

The Chowder House menu started with Prpich's clam chowder, which is unique in that it contains only sustainably sourced clams and doesn't rely on potatoes for filler. The simple dish is in some ways emblematic of the entire Chowder House menu: Based on availability, Prpich uses only sustainable, fresh-caught fish and turns to local vendors for other ingredients. For that reason, he says, he wants the fish to be the star of the dish, and he doesn't fuss with myriad accompaniments. And although his ingredients are fresh and high quality, he's able to keep food prices reasonable thanks to low overhead costs.

Also setting Chowder House apart is its eye-catching, distinctive decor. From the splashes of vibrant color on every wall to the repurposed household items (shutters, mirrors, banisters) woven into the décor in unexpected ways, the small space is packed with personality. Prpich says about 70 percent of the décor came with the building, which was decorated by artist and former owner Jimmy van Hoose. Prpich's niece put on the finishing touches after the building became Chowder House.

The eclectic décor also influenced Prpich's menu and overall vision for the restaurant. He points out a sign near the front door that reads "Food, Art, Joy"—words that came with the building and became a sort of motto for Chowder House.

"I want people to come in and have great food. If they have great food and they experience the art, then they'll leave with joy," Prpich says.

Asked what he thinks sets Chowder House apart from other area restaurants, in addition to the seafood-focused menu, Prpich cites the importance of his loyal customers.

"There are certain customers, when they come in, they always have somebody different with them," Prpich says.

And as loyal as these regulars are to Chowder House, Prpich is just as loyal in return.

“If people ask for something and we have the product, we’ll do it. It might take a few extra minutes, but we cater to our customers,” he says. Because his specials change daily, he even takes requests from customers to put specific dishes on the menu—just give him a few days’ notice to hunt down the aforementioned fresh fish.

With its weekday lunch and dinner specials, a cash or check only policy, and bring-your-own-wine offer in place of a full bar, Chowder House isn’t short on small business charm to complement its eclectic menu. Prpich didn’t want to run a pricey, special-occasions-only type seafood spot, instead opting to fill his menu with dishes that are unique yet accessible, refined yet affordable.

“If people want real food, where I can tell them where it came from and exactly how it’s made and how it’s simple yet elegant and delicious, this is where they should come,” Prpich concludes.