Exclusive: ‘Top Chef’ winner Kristen Kish will lead centerpiece restaurant at new Line ATX hotel

Matthew Odam February 20, 2018

Austin will welcome a new face to its culinary landscape when the Line ATX hotel opens in the coming months. “Top Chef” season 10 winner Kristen Kish, who also will be recognizable to viewers of the Travel Channel’s “36 Hours,” will serve as the executive chef for Arlo Grey, the centerpiece restaurant for the hotel that will take the place of the former Radisson at 111 E. Cesar Chavez.

The restaurant will take advantage of its urban-meets-natural location, perched just above Lady Bird Lake. While there are few details on the specific type of cuisine that will be served at Arlo Grey, a look at the Korean-born Kish’s career is instructive. The Michigan-raised chef and graduate of Le Cordon Bleu in Chicago worked at the Michelin-starred Sensing in Boston before becoming an integral part in the demi empire of Barbara Lynch, the 2014 James Beard award winner for best restaurateur in the nation, eventually serving as chef de cuisine at Lynch’s Menton, a
nationally lauded French restaurant celebrated for its technique, seasonality and sophistication.

Kish left Menton in 2014 and has spent the intervening years traveling the world, writing her first cookbook ("Kristen Kish Cooking") and appearing on "36 Hours."

The Line is owned and operated by the Sydell Group, which has a portfolio that includes the Nomad hotels in Los Angeles and New York and iterations of the Line in Los Angeles’ Koreatown and in Washington. In partnering with chefs at some of its other properties across the country, Sydell Group has often identified local talent to lead their kitchens (Roy Choi in Los Angeles, Spike Gjerde in Washington) but decided to take a different route in hiring Kish.

Sydell Group founder and CEO Andrew Zobler said that while he didn’t want to bring in a “celebrity chef” with properties in major cities across America, he was also leery of hiring a local Austin chef and possibly running the risk of having a redundant concept in the market. He wanted to respect Austin’s identity while also aiming for uniqueness and originality.

“When Kristen came along, a bunch of bells went off,” Zobler said. “She doesn’t have her own restaurant; she’s a great cook; she’s very hospitable; has a great story. Her personality to me vibes with Austin culture. We thought it would be more fun to bring in someone who is a little bit different and offer up something to Austin that it didn’t already have.”

While Kish will be new to Austin, she will be joined at the hotel by a chef familiar to discerning Austin diners. Chef Damien Brockway, formerly the executive chef of downtown tasting menu Counter 357, will helm P6, the rooftop lounge atop the hotel’s adjacent parking garage, which Zobler said will have a romantic vibe and sweeping views of the lake. Rounding out the culinary team will be Justin Ermini, previously executive chef at Las Alcobas in Mexico City, who will spearhead a ground-floor burger bar.

The Line ATX is slated to open in late spring, and while no exact dates have been set for the opening of the various food and beverage concepts, Zobler says they will have a strong impact in helping define the hotel’s personality and appeal.

“Our general theory is that people want an experience of travel. They want to go some place that gives them a feeling of being in that place, and food is one way of doing it; design is another way of doing it; art is a third way of doing it. Who you engage with locally, the people you hire … there’s lots of different facets to it. Food and beverage is clearly an important part in creating a sense of destination.”