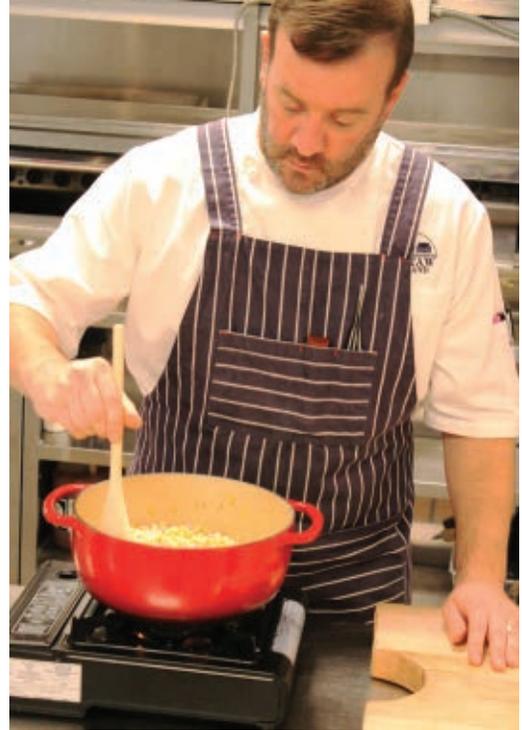


# Culinary Toy Box: *The perks of being a country club chef*

with Matt Felix, Executive Chef

by Fanny Slater

**A**s a food writer, I often have the privilege of gaining the inside scoop into the fascinating world of culinary masterminds. In a traditional restaurant environment, I've discovered that chefs are usually affixed to one category of dining—limiting them from activating all the imaginative outlets that are within their capability. When it comes to being the Executive Chef of a country club, however, the kitchen's flavor flexibilities seem to be an entirely different story. I sat down with **Chef Matt Felix of Dataw Island**, and he shared that just as members enjoy the range of cuisine (from a casual lunch at the lively, social pub to an elegant special occasion dinner in the private dining room), he has the pleasure of sparking it to life. Chef Felix takes full advantage of his southern roots—and the bountiful ingredient of South Carolina's coast—to dish out inspiring fare in an environment that feels less like a place to simply dine, and more like a home.



## **Do you create the menus for each of the club's restaurants?**

I do create all of the menus for The Pub, Tide's Edge Grille, and Cotton Dike Deli, as well as all banquet and specialty menus. I also create specialty menus for our Wednesday night themed dinners and special occasion fine dining events. Recent ones include a Taste of Bordeaux and Evening in Tuscany, for example. I love creating these events as it provides an opportunity to get inspired and be creative with menu options.

## **Other than seasonality, what inspires you to change around a menu? Reading cookbooks, watching food programs, travel?**

I enjoy reading and collecting new and old cookbooks. My wife and I dine out frequently. I also enjoy watching travel shows, as well as Chef's Table and Mind of a Chef. I also like to watch documentaries on food and wine.

## **What was it that drew you into the country club environment?**

The second cooking job I had before going to The Culinary Institute of America was at a private club in Greensboro, Georgia. I liked it so much that after I graduated culinary school I returned for seven more years. I enjoy the ability to get to know the members and their families. What I also like is not being stuck to one type of cuisine. One night we could be doing classical French, and the next—Vietnamese.



# Cornmeal Dusted Oysters & Tarragon Creamed Corn

by Matt Felix, Executive Chef

**12 oz** Oysters (around 36), shucked  
**3/4 C** Buttermilk  
**1 tsp** Old Bay Seasoning  
**1 c** Cornmeal  
**1 c** AP Flour

**6 oz** Applewood Bacon, Slab, Diced  
**1 ea.** Shallot, diced  
**8 ears** Corn, Cut off Cobb  
**1 tbsp** Flour  
**1 ea.** Fennel Bulb, Small Diced  
(Reserve Fronds for Garnish)  
**1-1/4 c** Heavy Cream  
**2 tbsp** Sugar  
**1 tbsp** Tarragon, Chopped

## Oysters

Heat oil in deep fryer to 350 degrees.

Place shucked oysters in buttermilk and let soak.

Mix together cornmeal, flour, and Old Bay together.

Dredge oysters in cornmeal mixture, tap any extra breading off before frying.

Fry oyster for 2 minutes in a couple of batches.

Remove oysters from oil and place on paper towel covered plates.

## Creamed Corn

In a heavy bottom pot, begin by rendering bacon with the diced shallot and diced fennel.

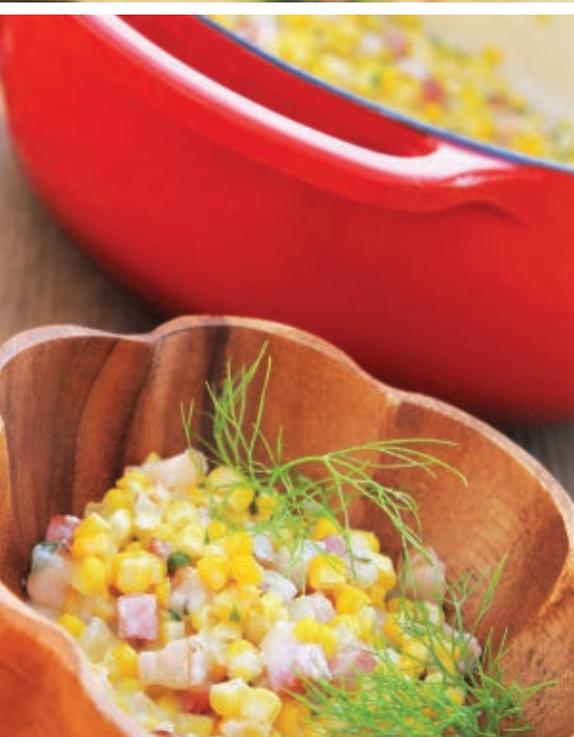
When bacon is rendered, dust bacon, shallots, and fennel with flour and cook for 2 more minutes.

Next add heavy cream, corn, and sugar. Bring everything to a boil then reduce to a simmer.

Allow to simmer for 5 minutes.

Remove pot from heat, then stir in chopped tarragon and season with salt and pepper to taste.

Place creamed corn in bowl. Top with fried oysters, and garnish with the fennel fronds.



**Tell me about the clientele at Dataw? Are most of the diners folks that you know well and see often?**

The members are dedicated to their club and will dine with us multiple times a week if not multiple times a day. It's great. We get to know their preferences and for those who have a regular favorite, the bartender often sees someone coming and is making their drink as they walk in the door.

**How do you describe the personality or POV of your cooking style?**

I generally start with the South in mind, then depending on where my mood is I will put different twists on the recipes by using spices and ingredients from different cuisines to enhance the dishes.

**Does a lot of your influence come from using the local ingredients of South Carolina's coast? And if so, what inspires you most?**

I grew up in Athens, Georgia and spent many summers going to St. Simons Island in Georgia. I have been immersed in southern cuisine and ingredients my entire life. This part of South Carolina is rich with ingredients to use—like shrimp, oysters, blue crabs, tomatoes, melons, beans, and many more. It is a chef's toy box of ingredients and they are all just outside of the club's doors.

**What are your favorite local or regional ingredients?**

To choose one ingredient is difficult, but I would have to say shrimp or oysters are favorites of mine. We also have a great climate here for year-round local fresh produce which I enjoy weaving into our dishes.

**What's your favorite comfort dish to make for yourself at home?**

My wife and son enjoy when I make Pho or Ramen Bowls.

**For those home cooks who are intimidated by the kitchen but still want to attempt an impressive meal, what's your best advice?**

Always test recipes beforehand, as generally the first time you prepare a recipe it will not be perfect. Make the recipe for yourself, and then make the appropriate changes in amounts and seasoning to make it your own. Most of all, have fun! What's the worst thing that can happen if your dish does not turn out? You end up coming to see us at The Pub and have a great story to tell! 