



Jenn Louis making her mark with U.S. Northwest cuisine

By [Richard Leong](#)

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(Reuters) - American chef Jenn Louis' culinary career is moving full steam ahead after several detours, including one where she was considering doing social work.

Louis, 40, co-owns Lincoln restaurant in Portland, Oregon, with her husband David Welch. Her simple, flavorful menu has earned a strong local following and praise from food critics.

Born in Pomona, California, Louis spoke with Reuters about Northwest cuisine, California's foie gras ban and working with her husband.

Q: What makes your guests come back for your food?

A: "I really know what the style of cuisine and the style of culture is up here. I think it's very approachable. The Northwest culture is very down to earth. People like nice things. They like nice cars, houses, clothes and all that kind of stuff. They like to be treated very well. They don't like a lot of fanfare around their enjoyment. They don't like a lot of formality. They like things very straight forward. That's very much who I am, and I think that comes out in my food."

Q: You showcase Northwest ingredients, but you don't use them exclusively. Why?

A: "I love to support local businesses. I love to support local farms. That's first and foremost what we do. If we only did that, we wouldn't have a very good variety. We wouldn't be very good cooks. Our repertoire would be narrow. So our food is well received because it's well crafted. Everything we have is made by hand with the exception of our bread, which we get from our local bakery."

Q: Why do you think your simple style works even when more people expect spectacles when they go out to eat?

A: "What we do is very un-manipulated. In a culture where food is getting fancier and molecular gastronomy is so popular, food that is very fundamental and ingredient driven and very forward with what it is -- I think people respond well to that. My goal for the menu is that there is food for everyone. If you come in with a friend who doesn't have a very adventurous palette, we have an absolutely delicious roast chicken dish. The chicken is brined. The skin is seared under a brick. It has a pan sauce on it. It's simple, but it's really well done, and the flavor is really delicious."

Q: Do you think you will be serving more foie gras now that California has banned it?

A: "We serve it intermittently. It's not something that's always on our menu. What I always say is that there's more problem with commercially raised chicken in our country than there is with foie gras. I certainly don't believe in the mistreatment of animals. We really choose our brands carefully ... But I don't have an issue with serving foie gras. I do think there are bigger issues in the treatment of animals and food production than foie gras."

Q: What is the reason you waited so long before you opened a restaurant?

A: "I started a catering business (Culinary Artistry) in 2000. It went really well, and it was a great economy so the business really flourished. I liked running a business as much as I liked cooking. In 2008, my husband and I opened Lincoln restaurant together. I always said I wouldn't open up a restaurant, but he begged me enough times so I said okay just to get him off my back. Then in 2011, we opened up Sunshine Tavern. It's never something I set out to do. But it's something if you keep your opportunities open ... the best thing for you will surface."

Q: Describe your work relationship with your husband David.

A: "It's very intensive. The highs are high and the lows are low. You learn a lot about each other. You see each other all day long, all night long. We have little rules about when we can't talk about work. You have to make sure when you have personal time, you have personal time. It's always trying to find a balance."

Baked turkey eggs with tesa, collard greens and morel mushrooms (Serves 6)

6 turkey eggs, or 9-12 chicken eggs

1/2 pound tesa (or bacon), cut into lardons

1/4 pound small morel mushrooms, cleaned

1 medium-length green garlic, use only white part, sliced thinly

1-1/2 pounds collard greens, blanched and cut into 1-inch ribbons

1-1/2 cup heavy cream

3 tablespoons olive oil

Kosher salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit. Over medium heat, pour olive oil into a 10-inch cast iron pan. Add lardons of tesa or bacon and sauté until starting to brown.

2. If morel mushrooms are large, cut into bite-sized pieces. If small, use whole. Add morel mushrooms to pan and lower heat to medium. Add green garlic and collard greens.

3. If mixture is dry, add 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Season with salt and pepper, add cream and stir until combined. Crack eggs over mixture, season eggs lightly with salt and pepper and place in oven.

4. Bake until egg whites are set and yolks remain runny. Serve immediately.

(Reporting by Richard Leong; editing by [Patricia Reaney](#))