

The New Potato

Joshua Boissy and Krystof Zizka

Maison Premiere



There is a gem in Williamsburg that has been pushing Absinthe and oysters in a spot reminiscent of the old Absinthe bars of Paris and New Orleans. **Maison Premiere** – the brainchild of Joshua Boissy and Krystof Zizka – is the perfect example of a restaurant born out of a vision for a brand rather than just a statement like: “We want to open a restaurant.”

What we love most is that the restaurant is more of a curated experience rather than just a place to eat. Every decision, from the images hanging on the walls, to the perfectly replicated Absinthe fountain (an ode to the green fairy), has been made painstakingly in order to perfect the atmosphere and create a time capsule. Always a welcome addition, the two guys behind the venture are true new potatoes; they're dapper as can be. They took us through the creation and journey of Maison Premiere...

TNP: From start to finish, what would be your ideal food day?

J: I think my ideal food day would be in Paris. I'd start off in **Café de Flore** on the corner of Saint Germaine and have breakfast there, with the New York Times. And then for lunch, I think I'd go to **Le Grand Vefour**. It's one of the oldest restaurants in Paris. I'd have a four hour lunch there with Champagne and some Burgundy. For dinner, I'd probably stop at **Harry's New York Bar** for Campari and Perrier. Then I'd go to **Aux Lyonnais** – the **Alain Ducasse** bistro – and have some Cassoulet and a bottle of Cornas.

K: I'm going to be boring and do Paris too. I would do Le Severo, an old school steakhouse. It's probably the best steak in Paris. Maybe I'd go to Café de Flore, have some coffee and do some people watching. For oysters, I'd go to this small little place near there called **Huitrerie Regis**; it seats like, twelve people.

TNP: Was this spot inspired by your love of Paris? I know it's New Orleans inspired as well...

J: I think the story started in Paris. Originally, I took over a failed restaurant in Williamsburg, called **Le Barricou**. My partner was from France and has a house in the South of France. We took a trip to research French cafés, bistros, and brasseries. So originally, the inspiration for this came from that trip. We discovered an Absinthe bar and immediately were like, “Wow, this is a very cool scene.” It was a small place in a back alleyway. You walked in and it was really bustling; the energy was focused on the door because of the horseshoe shape of the bar. And you could smell Pastis and Absinthe throughout the entire room. It was just this really unique moment and I think that's when the seed was planted.

When Krystof and I started to talk about developing a project, the original idea was based on a horseshoe bar serving Absinthe. Then it evolved into being more inspired by New Orleans, and the history of New Orleans, because of the French and the architecture. There was also the cocktail movement; Absinthe and all these things kind of played into American history, the Civil War, and American antiques and craftsmanship. So it really started to develop into an American concept, but definitely inspired by the French and French architecture.

TNP: Do you think that for kind of restaurant you need to be bit of a history buff? Were you very into history?

J: For sure. I'm into history and American history. I grew up in New England, so antiques and Colonial and Victorian houses were all over. My mom used to take me antiques shopping up in Maine and New Hampshire. I never realized I had a passion for it until I dined at **Balthazar** when I first moved to New York City. I think it was the first time since growing up in New England that I really felt like I was somewhere else. I hadn't been to Paris, so walking into Balthazar I really felt like I was there. I remember walking around and going down to the bathroom and noticing everything – just all the details from every part of the room. And it made me think very differently about how restaurants were built. I think that inspired us to think outside of the box and to really take it to a different level of design and research. A part of that was that the concept was in New Orleans at the turn of the century, so we started to research that period. We looked at the **Old Absinthe House** - the old plank floors, the ceiling fans and the old bent wood chairs. Marble, zinc and brass were all used during that time period. There was this kind of grand Southern turn of the century movement that was happening. The design that we were trying to catch here was reflective of that.

TNP: How would you define your two roles?

K: We work quite well as a team because I think our personalities are quite different. We're not trying to do the same thing, which a lot of partners – who are kind of married in this type of business – do. It can be a big problem. We definitely do different things.



J: Half is the creative part of the relationship, which Krystof manages – the wine program, the oyster program, the seafood purveyors and relationships, the music and the selection of spirits. So he'll research and find spirits that have never been used in craft bars or that haven't been seen in New York, hunt them down and find out how to get distribution for them. Also [he handles] product placement, graphic design, and a lot of that back of the house stuff that's critical to the operation. What I do is more of the Director of Operations in terms of physically being visible and managing the team day to day – from marketing and advertisement and the evolution of the brand to the maintenance and design of the space and the day-to-day events that are taking place. It's more of a hands on, on the floor approach, whereas Krystof is more of a Creative Director. He spends a lot of time in the office; you don't see him as much. But what he does is critical to the brand and the product. If you look at the menu, you'll find these interesting products throughout – these oysters that you've never seen on menus in New York. It's the broadest oyster and Absinthe menu in the country. That's definitely because of the research that he does behind the scenes. Thirty-three varieties of oyster and twenty-seven Absinthes are on the menu!