



*At Honey Bunny's Chicken, the second pop-up in a series at Maison Yaki highlighting Black entrepreneurs, the chef Jared Howard showcased the fried chicken of his native Maryland.* Photograph by Myles Loftin for The New Yorker

TABLES FOR TWO

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# BLACK ENTREPRENEURS BRING REGIONAL DISHES AND VEGAN TREATS TO MAISON YAKI

THE NEW YORKER

*The Prospect Heights restaurant's pop-up series has showcased pastries from Brutus Bakeshop and Jared Howard's Maryland-style fried chicken; next up are Southern- and Caribbean-inspired comforts from Good IV the Soul.*

**By Hannah Goldfield**

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**T**he other day, as I spoke to the chef Michelle Williams by phone, she paused to explain a faint beeping. “Oh, sorry, that’s a timer,” she said cheerfully. “I’ve got a poundcake in the oven.” As we hung up, she was logging on to a virtual meeting to discuss the new school year; in addition to running Good IV the Soul, her Brooklyn-based catering company, she teaches culinary arts in New York City public high schools. After the meeting, she would finish preparing a dinner that she was catering that night, setting portions aside for me to try in advance of her next venture: launching the third pop-up (through Aug. 16) in an ongoing series at Maison Yaki, in Prospect Heights, showcasing Black entrepreneurs.



*At left, a fried-chicken biscuit sandwich, with dill pickles and béchamel. At right, a basket of Old Bay-and-vinegar waffle fries with sriracha aioli.* Photograph by Myles Loftin for The New Yorker

The dinner included strip steak topped with parsley compound butter, salmon stuffed with lump crabmeat, and roasted broccoli, all hearty, comforting, and abundantly seasoned, fragrant with a concentrated, garlicky saltiness. Williams’s mother is her primary culinary inspiration, she told me, as well as her best friend. A retired bus matron who used to get up at 4 A.M. to commute from Brooklyn to the Bronx, her mother “always made sure she had food on the table,” Williams said. “A protein, a starch, and a veggie.” Good IV the Soul’s repertoire is loosely organized around traditions of the American South and the Caribbean and miscellaneous in the manner of someone game to take requests. The menu for the pop-up includes not one but three preparations of shrimp: deep fried; smothered, atop grits; and mixed with cheese in an empanada-like “soul pocket.”



*Michelle Williams, who runs a catering company called Good IV the Soul and teaches culinary arts in New York City public high schools, is the third chef in the pop-up series.* Photograph by Myles Loftin for The New Yorker

Williams has long dreamed of opening a restaurant, or, better yet, six. May she follow in the footsteps of Lani Halliday, the first chef to be featured at Maison Yaki, in July, whose five-year-old cake-and-pastry company, Brutus Bakeshop, is going brick and mortar later this year. I can think of nothing I've eaten recently that has buoyed my spirits more than Halliday's passion-fruit-glazed, guava-filled pop tart, and of no confection I've tried, ever, that's more complex than her miso-chocolate-chip cookie, which is as funky as an unfiltered wine.

*Howard's oyster-mushroom po'boy (upper left) was vegetarian but hinted at seafood. A trio of salads—corn, watermelon, and potato—accompanied the sandwich. Photograph by Myles Loftin for The New Yorker*

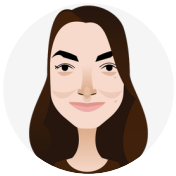
Both are gluten-free and vegan, designations that, in Halliday's hands, seem less like restrictions than like powerfully wielded creative constraints. Her dark-chocolate cake, made with aquafaba and a rice-based flour mix, has an exceptionally soft and glossy crumb. The leaves of raw collard greens that she wrapped, burrito style, around sliced heirloom tomato and sautéed mushrooms struck me not as a substitute for something starchier but as the best

possible option, sturdy yet supple. In the U.S., collards are associated with the South; Halliday grew up in Hawaii and Portland, Oregon, but much of her family is from Alabama, where her uncle grows vegetables, including collards. “Systemic racism has sort of strangled my connection to my lineage,” she told me. The wraps were a way to acknowledge her heritage on her own terms.

*Diners at the pop-ups can take their food to go or seat themselves at socially distanced tables outside.* Photograph by Myles Loftin for The New Yorker

As Jared Howard developed the menu for Honey Bunny’s Chicken, the second pop-up in the series, he considered the optics of “being an African-American serving fried chicken,” he told me. “I did not want to be a cliché.” But he did want to highlight the cuisine of his native Maryland, which he began researching years ago. As expected, there was much to learn about Chesapeake Bay seafood; what surprised him was the chicken. Some of his mother’s techniques, he realized—like covering her cast-iron pan with a lid mid-fry, which retains moisture—seemed Maryland specific. In Escoffier’s “Ma Cuisine,” published in 1934, Howard found a recipe for Maryland fried chicken finished with béchamel, and another source suggested that a dish of the same name had been served on the Titanic. At Maison Yaki, he dusted his in Old Bay and sandwiched it—with béchamel—in an herb-flecked, Red Lobster-inspired buttermilk biscuit. There were no crab cakes, but a clever oyster-mushroom po’boy hinted at the sea, and at what more Howard has in store. (*Pop-up dishes \$7–\$30.*) ♦

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