

# COMMANDER'S PALACE

## Lally Brennan Co-Proprietor

BIOS



The pleasures of food, family tradition, and restaurants run through Lally Brennan's veins. The hospitality industry veteran counts as family eight members of the Brennan brood who successfully steer the Commander's Palace family of restaurants.

She began as part of the business at the age of 13, working the front door at Brennan's on Royal Street in New Orleans and helping with paperwork in the attic upstairs. She left New Orleans to attend Southern Methodist University in Dallas, TX, but eventually made her way back to her hometown to help with the restaurants.

Initially overseeing the front of the house as a floor manager at Mr. B's, a restaurant then owned by her father and his siblings that served New Orleans-style cuisine, within two years she was transferred to the family's legendary Commander's Palace, where she is currently co-proprietor with her cousin, Ti Adelaide Martin. Over the past two decades, she has put her tireless energy, business acumen, and artistic talents to work in many capacities,

including playing an active role in the post-Katrina re-design of the restaurant. In addition, she has been personally involved in the design of the family's other restaurants, including Commander's Palace, Café Adelaide and the Swizzle Stick Bar in New Orleans, and Brennan's of Houston.

Outside of her work with all of the restaurants, Brennan has been actively involved with the New Orleans-based organization Girls First, the principle mission of which is to build self-esteem and improve the lives and futures of inner-city girls. She has appeared alongside her cousin Ti on NPR's "All Things Considered," NBC's "Today," "The Martha Stewart Show," and "After Hours with Daniel Boulud." She is also the co-author of *In the Land of Cocktails: Recipes and Adventures from the Cocktail Chicks*, a book detailing the stories of 75 cocktails and why they're important to New Orleans. Among her many other considerable civic, charitable, and industry activities are:

- Co-founder, Les Dames d'Escoffiers, New Orleans Chapter
- International Association of Culinary Professionals
- James Beard Foundation
- New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Women Chefs and Restaurateurs
- The Audubon Institute
- Prevent Child Abuse, board member
- Longue Vue House and Gardens
- Contemporary Arts Center, past board member
- New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts
- Junior League, sustainer
- Herman Grima Foundation
- Louisiana Restaurant Association

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New Orleans native Ti Adelaide Martin credits her mother, Ella Brennan, the “grande dame” of her family’s restaurant business (which currently includes Commander’s Palace, Café Adelaide and the Swizzle Stick Bar, and SoBou in New Orleans, as well as Brennan’s of Houston) for setting the stage for her love of the restaurant business. “When I was a child, she was always hosting these lavish parties at our house,” she recalls. “There were always lots of interesting people there from around the country, many from the culinary world.”

Martin left her hometown to attend Southern Methodist University in Dallas, TX, where she received a degree in business. After earning an MBA at Tulane University in New Orleans, Martin moved to Houston, where she worked in the real-estate industry.

Martin returned to New Orleans in 1986 to assist with the family business when her mother was ill. Always an entrepreneur, she next launched a food products company called Creole Cravings, which she eventually sold to McCormick. She next got on the family restaurant bandwagon with cousins Dickie and Brad Brennan to open Palace Café in 1991, which

Esquire magazine subsequently named one of the top 10 new restaurants in the country.

By 1997, Martin became full time co-proprietor of Commander’s Palace, a title she shares with her cousin Lally Brennan. At Commander’s, Martin directs the bulk of her energies toward the food and business end of things at the restaurant. In addition to her work at the restaurant, she has co-authored three books, including the James Beard Foundation-nominated Commander’s Kitchen (2001), which she wrote with former Commander’s Palace Executive Chef Jamie Shannon. It was followed by In the Land of Cocktails: Recipes and Adventures from the Cocktail Chicks (2007), a book detailing the stories of 75 cocktails and why they’re important to New Orleans, on which she collaborated with Lally Brennan. Along with current Executive Chef Tory McPhail, she also co-authored Commander’s Wild Side (2008), an ode to hunting and fishing in Louisiana inspired by Commander’s Palace’s “Off the Menu” television series.

Of Commander’s Palace, her professional home of the past 16 years, and a touchstone in much of her life, Martin speaks with pride and nostalgia. “We may hold the keys to Commander’s, but the restaurant really belongs to New Orleans,” she says. “We try to live up to what people expect and want it to be even better and to represent what the city is all about—not just the food, but the way of life, the soul and the spirit that is New Orleans.”

Outside the restaurant, Martin pursues several civic and industry-related activities and has earned numerous accolades for her work. Some of the highlights include:

## Awards and Honors

- City Business’ Woman of the Year Award (2011)
- Junior Achievement Hall of Fame (inducted 2010)
- Walk in Our Shoes Hall of Fame (inducted 2009)
- Culinary Institute of America Hall of Fame (inducted 2008)
- Loyola University New Orleans - Honorary Doctorate, Business (2005)
- Loyola University New Orleans Commencement Speaker (2005)
- Nation’s Restaurant News - 50 New Tastemakers (1999)
- Gambit - Top 40 Under 40 (1999)
- New Orleans magazine - Iberville Award Winner (1998)
- Restaurants and Institutions magazine - Ivy Award “Restaurateur of Distinction”(1997)
- Women Business Owners’ Award (1997)

## Awards and Honors

- Bravo’s “Top Chef”
- NBC’s “Today”
- “The Martha Stewart Show”
- “The Rachel Maddow Show”
- NPR’s “All Things Considered”
- “Daniel Boulud After Hours”
- Turner South Network’s “Commander’s Palace Off the Menu”
- Food Network’s “Sara’s Secrets,” “My Country, My Kitchen,” and “Into the Fire”
- CBS’s “The Early Show”
- CNBC’s “Squawk Box”

## Civic Activity

- Board Chair & Co-Founder, New Orleans Culinary & Hospitality Institute (NOCHI)
- Finance Chair and Board member, New Orleans Aviation Board
- Vice Chair and Board member, Idea Village
- Board member, GNO, Inc
- Member, New Orleans Hospitality Strategic Task Force
- Past Board member, Southern Methodist University, Cox School of Business
- Member, New Orleans Business Council
- Member, Board of Visitors, Xavier University of New Orleans
- Chair Go Red for Women Luncheon benefiting American Heart Association (2008)
- Co-founder, New Orleans “Proud to Call It Home” campaign
- Past board member, Bureau of Governmental Research
- Co-chair, Louisiana Human Rights Campaign (1997)
- Past Louisiana board member, United Negro College Fund
- Past board member, Young Leadership Council
- Past Board member, Executive Committee of Metrovision
- Past board member and executive committee member, Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Tourism and Convention Bureau
- Founding member, International Association of Women Chefs and Restaurateurs (New Orleans chapter)
- International Women’s Forum
- Girls First, development and fund-raising

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## Tory McPhail Executive Chef

BIOS



Tory McPhail has followed a path forged from hard work to arrive at the historic Commander’s Palace restaurant’s storied chef legacy, which has cultivated the likes of Emeril Lagasse, Paul Prudhomme, and Jamie Shannon.

McPhail hails from Ferndale, WA, a small town near the Canadian border, where he learned to appreciate local goods and the comfortable gathering place of his parents’ kitchen. Corn planted in the spring would become dinner in the summer; fish caught in the afternoon from his family’s stocked pond would make it to the plate by dusk. “I knew food didn’t just come from the grocery store and magically appear there,” he says. “Being able to watch it all grow gave me a passion for natural foods.”

After high school, McPhail attended Seattle Community College and received an ACF-accredited degree in culinary science. Compelled by New Orleans’ history, soul, and Mardi Gras celebrations won him over, he moved upon graduation and at just 19, he was hired by

Commander’s Palace Executive Chef Jamie Shannon. He worked diligently through all 12 stations of the kitchen, honing his craft and making a positive impression on his boss.

In search of “as much experience as possible, as quickly as possible,” McPhail later completed a series of stints at several culinary hot spots, including the Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach, FL; the Michelin-starred L’Escargot in London and its sister restaurant, the Michelin two- star Picasso Room; and the Caribbean/Creole-intensive Mongoose Restaurant in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

In spring of 2000, McPhail returned to the Commander’s family as executive sous chef at Commander’s Palace Las Vegas. Though he loved his job there, New Orleans and Chef Shannon beckoned, and he returned to the Big Easy where the Brennan family named him executive chef of the original Commander’s Palace in January 2002.

Today, McPhail continues his dedication to creating and sustaining strong relationships with local purveyors, as well as executing exciting dishes in the Commander's kitchen. "I'm always thinking very forward when it comes to Creole food," he says. A passionate and resolute chef who pursues culinary perfection, McPhail delights in exploring a variety of flavors in his seasonal menus—embracing Creole traditions while updating classic dishes with fresh, local ingredients. His Creole Seared Gulf Fish, for example, showcases farm-fresh produce like Spring Mushrooms, Corn, Fingerling Potatoes and seared Speckled Trout.

McPhail's masterful work has not only kept Commander's Palace at the top of critics' lists, but has also led him to numerous TV appearances, including Bravo's "Top Chef," on which he was a guest judge along-side Commander's Co-Proprietor Ti Adelaide Martin; NBC's "Today"; CBS's "Early Show"; "Paula's Party" with Paula Dean; "After Hours With Daniel Boulud"; and numerous Food Network programs, including "Sara's Secrets," "My Country, My Kitchen," "Into the Fire," and "Bobby Flay's Food Nation." Tory also co-hosted "Off the Menu," which aired on Turner South Network for six years.

A James Beard Rising Star Chef and Best Chef South winner, McPhail was also named one of the best chefs in the country by TheDailyMeal.com in 2013, as one of Saveur magazine's inaugural "Tastemaker Chefs" in 2012; awarded the winner of the Great American Seafood Cook-Off in 2009; co-authored Commander's Wild Side with Martin, a collection of recipes taken from the legendary restaurant's kitchen; has served on the Nutrition Advisory Board for Cooking Light magazine; and has been a spokesperson for Wild American Shrimp and for McCormick's Old Bay seasoning.

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## Dan Davis Wine Guy

## BIOS



At the venerable Commander's Palace in New Orleans, there is no such thing as a head sommelier. Dan Davis, the man who oversees the impressive 2,600-bottle list, is instead simply known as the "Wine Guy"—a moniker that embodies the restaurant's philosophy of making sure guests enjoy every aspect of their dining experience without intimidation. "We have a very serious wine program that doesn't take itself too seriously," Davis explains. "Our cellar is stocked with some of the finest wines in the world and verticals that would make just about anyone jealous, but none of that does you any good if people are scared to order wine."

Although his title doesn't say so explicitly, Davis is a Certified Sommelier with the Court of Master Sommeliers, and his work at Commander's Palace displays a depth of both managerial and wine-related experience. Originally from the Gulf Coast of Mississippi, Davis attended the University of New Orleans, where he was a history major. While still in school, he began working at Palace Café in New Orleans as a waiter—his first foray into the hospitality industry. "I had never even been in a fine-dining restaurant until that point," he notes.

After two years at Palace Café, Davis worked as a bartender at a number of different French Quarter establishments before working as managing partner in a small bakery and restaurant in the city's Warehouse District (now known as the Arts District), a half-block from renowned Chef Emeril Lagasse's flagship restaurant. When Davis left the bakery in the late '90s he took an entry-level job as a busser at Emeril's, which led to an eight-year career at the restaurant. It was during his time at the restaurant that he began to educate himself about wine, working as lead waiter in the Wine Room, a private dining room for 14 in the wine cellar. "I knew nothing worth knowing about wine before working at Emeril's," he says. "I began to try wines every day, working from a list that had over 1,200 selections. I would always bring books with me to work so that I could learn more about whatever we were pouring."

After working as the general manager at Emeril's restaurant on Miami Beach, Davis returned to New Orleans in 2005 to work at Commander's Palace ... just before Hurricane Katrina devastated the city and closed the restaurant for 13 months. During the reconstruction, Davis took the helm at Commander's Palace's sister restaurant, Café Adelaide and its Swizzle Stick Bar.

In 2007, he finally had the chance to return to Commander's, where he ran the bar program for a year before transitioning back to working with what he loved most: wine. "New Orleans is all about enjoying life, and part of that is enjoying great wine," he says. "At Commander's, we are not going to do anything halfway, so we are very much committed to making sure we offer diners great wine and cocktails, because it's an integral part of their overall experience with us." Under Davis's management, Commander's Palace has received Wine Spectator's Grand Award, a distinction shared by only 75 restaurants in the world, as well as Wine Enthusiast magazine's highest awards.

For the former history major, working with wine also appeals on other levels. "One of the most exciting things about the world of wine is that I will never know it all," Davis says. "I am extremely passionate about learning, and there is so much history in the world of

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