

WESLEY MORTON

executive chef *17

Wesley Morton is the fresh face behind the culinary offerings at Alden-Houston's award-winning restaurant, *17. Prior to joining *17, Morton spent two years in California at NAVIO Restaurant at the Ritz Carlton's Half Moon Bay locale, a Mobile AAA Five Diamond rating. It was there that Morton captured the essence and importance of using locally available and seasonal ingredients in his cooking. At *17, his passion for bringing the "farm to the table" allows Morton the opportunity to continue his philosophy of creating dishes that are at their seasonal peak in terms of flavor and eye appeal.

"I've been in California for a while now, so I have to say it has really influenced the way I cook," said Morton. "Every Saturday morning we visited the Embarcadero Farmer's Market. Everything on our menu was based on what was fresh. And we always gave credit to the farmer on our menu – it was our way of giving back." Morton says that is the approach he will bring to *17.

Morton is quick to acknowledge and praise his mentors, including Chef Eric Torralba. "He had a huge garden just outside his kitchen, instilling the importance of utilizing only the freshest ingredients available." Closer to Houston, in his hometown of Abbeville, LA, Morton's grandmother can be lauded for being one of his earliest influences. "I was by her side every Sunday when she cooked a big spread for the family – about 25 of us – I was always interested, learning (and) watching. Every Sunday the menu was different."

After graduating from the New England Culinary Institute, Morton landed a job in California's Napa Valley, where he worked at the Domaine Chandon winery, the home of the famed Etoile Restaurant. This is where he honed his French techniques of cooking, as well as the importance of pairing food and wine. Morton then moved from California to Washington DC to work at the award-winning restaurants Circle Bistro, Cityzen Restaurant and Citronelle. It was at Citronelle, under the tutelage of Chef Michel Richard, where Morton learned the importance of creative expression, as well as writing a great menu. "I can't give this guy enough credit for how he has influenced me to become the chef I am," said Morton. From there he returned to California to work with the Ritz Carlton in Half Moon Bay.

Of Houston, Morton says, "It offers great opportunity. It is a big, 'small' city, and I look forward to bringing my style of cooking here. I hope to play an instrumental role in helping change the way Houstonians eat in terms of local, fresh and organic."