

# What's Cooking With One Of Boston's Brightest Chefs

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*Chef Chris Coombs*

On the surface, Chris Coombs and Kendrick Lamar may not have much in common: Coombs is a 33-year-old chef from Peabody, Massachusetts, and Lamar is 30-year-old rapper from Compton, California. But look beyond obvious differences and you begin to see similarities: both are talented, extremely focused individuals doing more than a little shaking up in their respective fields. And they've got the acknowledgements to prove it.

Coombs, who was named one of *Forbes'* "30 Under 30" chefs in 2013, was one of the fans in attendance at Kendrick Lamar's [Boston](#) show this past summer. "It was crazy," Coombs says. "He's a monster. He was so full of energy, you know? To see someone that talented in their prime is a rare thing."

Tell us about it. As co-owner of Boston Urban Hospitality, Coombs oversees popular area restaurants [Forbes Travel Guide](#) Recommended [Deuxave](#), Dbar and Boston Chops with passion, precision and just the right amount of shishito pepper.

When we spoke to Coombs a few days after seeing Lamar, of course, he was still on cloud nine. We'll let you decide for yourself if the reason has more to do with the rap concert or the fact that he's on the cusp of making an even bigger presence on the Boston culinary scene.



Andy Ryan  
*Deuxave*

**Much like Kendrick Lamar, you're a young talent with a host of accolades to back it up. Did you expect your life to play out like it has thus far?**

No, man. I come from pretty humble beginnings. My dad was a millwright, which is a profession that doesn't even really exist anymore. And the one thing he ingrained in me is that you gotta work hard.

And I believe to this day there still is no substitute in life for good hard work. And when I first started cooking, as a preteen, as a young man, as a teenager and even into college, my goal was just to become a chef and to try and make as much money as my dad had, and work hard for it.

I fell into entrepreneurship; it wasn't something that I was seeking out. I took a job at 22 years old as executive chef at Dbar. I did really well at it and tripled sales, and I became partner in the business, which was my first introduction into being an entrepreneur.

But it was never even a thought process. My goals for the longest time were just to make nice food and make people happy with it. And maybe if a little recognition came along with making nice food that people enjoyed, that would be great.

We've been fortunate enough to achieve things that I didn't think I'd achieve in a lifetime.

**Hard work is one thing and being able to cook is something totally different. When did you know that you were special in the kitchen?**

Through most of my career, I always felt like most of the people cooking around me were better or more talented, but the one thing that was pretty consistent was that I was typically the youngest person in the kitchens I was working in.



When I started to emerge as a talent, people would be like, “How old are you?” I was like 20 or 21 years old and I would be telling people that I was 25, just because no one had any respect for a 20- or 21-year-old kid at the time. And it was different back then, too, because you couldn’t just like go on Facebook and find out how old somebody was.

I’ve always had to work twice as hard as some others to achieve the same results, but I’ve always been willing to put in that work. I’ve always had pretty severe ADHD, so even through culinary school, there’d be kids in my class who would study for an hour for a test to get an A, and I would study like four and a half hours to get like a B+.

It’s really not about me anymore. It’s about the team. I’ve got such tremendously talented chefs and managers and cooks, and everyone really buys into the culture of Boston Urban Hospitality. And that’s from the top down.

I don’t look at other chefs in Boston or in [New York](#) like I’m a better chef than that person is. It’s not really competition; it’s more like a self-fulfilling prophecy for me — this is what I’m supposed to do in life, and I am going to do it the best I can.



## **What kind of advice do you have for young chefs?**

The message to the younger generation of cooks is, “Put in your time and good things will come.” I never really had anything handed to me in this business. Even after culinary school, I took jobs for \$8 an hour when I went down to [The Inn at Little Washington](#). The first few months there, there were nights I was washing dishes and polishing brass and cleaning windows. I was a dishwasher with a culinary degree.

I think that this generation of young millennials, they are coming out saddled with debt. But you just need to be patient. You gotta pay your dues.

At the time, I didn’t realize what it was that I was learning or what it was that I was gaining by being in a Five-Star kitchen. But when I was washing windows and dishes, I was trying to be the best damn dishwasher I could be. And while I was doing that, I was keeping my eyes on everything else that was going on.

## **What should someone expect from a Deuxave dining experience?**

I’ve got three restaurants and the fourth opening here in the next couple months. But Deuxave truly is a dining experience. You’re coming in, you’re greeted with gracious hospitality, you’re treated well the entire evening and you’re going to eat with your eyes and your stomach.

And I think that with Deuxave, you’re going to recognize your food. I’m not going to serve you blowfish tails. I’m not that type of chef.

But I like to serve really beautiful interpretations of ingredients maybe a little more familiar, but really responsibly sourced. If I’m going to serve you duck, I would try to serve you the best duck you’ve ever had.

The recession happened and a lot of these fine-dining giants had to evolve into this smaller-plate, shared format. Your food comes when it is ready, but not necessarily in any order. That's the on-trend dining experience that you'll see in Boston, in New York, in major cities around the country.

We are still really focused on that sequenced, special, fine-dining experience.



Andy Ryan

*The Bar Scene*

### **What are your thoughts on the Boston culinary scene?**

I've never been more excited about the Boston food scene. On a national scale, the city of Boston is tremendously underrated.

There are world-class chefs in this city — Jamie Bissonnette, Ken Oringer, Barbara Lynch, Matt Jennings and Michael Scelfo. And there's a lot of other younger guys coming up, too, like Colin Lynch over at Bar Mezzana.

You've got Carl Dooley over at The Table at Season to Taste who is doing really cool things. You've got Juan Pedrosa over at Yvonne's doing really, really cool things. And I've seen this explosion of talent in the Boston restaurant scene. specifically in the last five to seven

Even when I travel, whether it's within the United States or outside the United States, I think the food in Boston really holds up. And I'm very proud of where the scene is now.

Where I think the Boston food scene lacks is in diversity. If I'm like, "Hey, I want to go get an awesome Korean meal," there is literally nowhere. Whereas, if you're in Manhattan, you've got K-town. If you're in [L.A.](#), you've got Koreatown. You've got places you can go.

There is also a hole in Middle Eastern cuisine. We have two good examples with Oleana, from Ana Sortun, and then Sarma, which is another good restaurant from Sortun and Cassie Piuma, who is also a super talented chef.

But if I wanted to go get Iraqi cuisine... I was in [London](#) last week and I had this amazing Iraqi lunch. There is nowhere to get that in Boston.

### **Tell us about your new venture.**

We're opening a second Boston Chops in Downtown Crossing in a space that, 10 years ago, was an iconic restaurant called Mantra.

The demand for Boston Chops in the South End had been so high that we just built it straight out as a restaurant. We didn't really get focused on private dining space or anything like that, so we've been turning away I would estimate between \$1 million and \$2 million a year in private events requests. So, we wanted to build a bigger, better version of Boston Chops.