

Flee to the Cleve

Celeb chef Michael Symon will show you why his hometown totally rocks

BY NICOLE RUPERSBURG

Y now a familiar face to anyone watching the cable cooking shows — and now finding an even broader audience as the co-host of ABC's food-centric daytime talker, "The Chew," Michael Symon — or, rather, make that Iron Chef Michael Symon — began his career far out of the spotlight, in his hometown of Cleveland.

There, he was one of the city's earliest and most vocal advocates for revival, opening a restaurant, Lola, in Cleveland's Tremont neighborhood back in the 1990s, at a time when the area was still plagued by arson and the occasional car bombing. Since then, Symon has watched the city's urban core redevelop, one neighborhood at a time.

Symon, who says his New York friends like to poke fun at

him for selecting struggling Rust Belt cities like Cleveland and Detroit for his restaurants, shrugs it off, proud of what the city's become.

"There are the obvious things — the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Museum, the Great Lakes Science Center, the Cleveland Botanical Garden — that are unbelievable. But for a mid-market city we have tons of stuff," he says.

"We have one of the best symphonies in the country, an incredible number of restaurants from casual to upscale that have been driven by farmers markets for 15 years, way before it was cool to be farm-to-table, cocktail places long before Milk & Honey opened, and a market — West Side — that doesn't exist anywhere else in the country."

Where does Symon send

his visitors? We asked, he answered with five essential stops that will show even the most skeptical visitor what makes Cleveland rock so fabulously hard.

★ WEST SIDE MARKET

"One of the most special places where I bring all my chef friends when they visit," Symon says. It is one of the oldest publicly owned indoor/outdoor markets in the country and is celebrating 100 years of operation this year. "Regardless of whether I bring in chefs from New York or San Francisco or another country, it just blows them away." 1979 W. 25th St.

★ GREAT LAKES BREWING COMPANY

"Microbreweries are very hot; this has been there [almost] 30 years and Great Lakes is arguably one of the best." With exclusive brews only available at the brewpub, this place is a manda-

tory stop for any visiting beer geek. 2516 Market Ave.

★ VELVET TANGO ROOM

For a perfect cocktail, Symon recommends this spot that he calls "so ahead of its time." He adds: It's been open 18 years; they were doing all the cool things long ago." 2095 Columbus Rd.

★ ABC TAVERN

Symon recommends this solid dive bar for its cheap drinks and great burgers. 1872 W. 25th St.

★ THE GREENHOUSE TAVERN

For the "incredible" cuisine of two former Symon chefs. Ruth Reichl waxed poetic last year over their clams steamed with butter and foie gras, saying the dish would "haunt her dreams until the next time I have it." 2038 E. 4th St.

Ready to go? Learn more at positivelycleveland.com.



SYMON SAYS: Cleveland's historic West Side Market is a visitor must.



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