PERRY BATEMAN
Executive Chef at Mama’s Fish House

Fresh from the Sea

In a palm-fringed cove tucked away on Maui’s windswept north shore, executive chef Perry Mokuhano Bateman crafts the magic that makes up the award-winning menu of Mama’s Fish House. His inspiration? Aloha ke akua, mahalo ke akua. What fishermen pull from the sea every morning is what’s on the menu at Mama’s Fish House a few hours later for lunch and dinner. And Perry wouldn’t have it any other way.

The team at Mama’s Fish House, and owners Floyd and “Mama” Doris Christenson, are grateful for their longtime perpetuation of the link between local fishermen and dining. Perry is in constant contact with Maui’s fishermen, farmers and ranchers to deliver what he calls “their pride and joy,” fresh procured to diners at Mama’s idyllic oceanside restaurant.

“I work with a team who understands that it’s a gift to be able to prepare dishes with the freshest fish possible, straight from the ocean to our door every day,” Perry says. “We get to use ingredients like sweet Maui onions just picked from the high elevations of Haleakalā, and lū‘au leaf, watercress and kalo (taro) from the streams down by the ocean.”

Drawing on early experiences in his family’s Maui mom-and-pop restaurants, Perry jokes that he was a student of the school of “hard knocks” rather than a traditional culinary school. From cooking with his kūpuna (elders), to working at a local McDonald’s, to putting in time as a pantry and line cook in Denver, Colorado, Perry progressively learned the culinary trade from the ground up. He began working at Mama’s Fish House at age 19, as an evening pantry cook, while holding down a morning position as a breakfast cook at Kula Lodge.

In 2001, young, hardworking Perry was promoted to the title of Mama’s first executive chef, overseeing a team of almost 100 employees. The restaurant has since received countless accolades and awards, including, most recently, three 2016 Hale ‘Aina restaurant awards from Honolulu Magazine for “Best Seafood” (gold), “Best Place to Take Visitors” (gold) and “Best Maui Restaurant” (silver).

Perry’s appreciation of Maui’s mountain-to-sea beauty is reflected in his family’s love of hula, a gift passed down from his beloved grandmother who taught the dance for many years. Perry’s three youngest daughters are carrying on the family tradition of hula.

Beach days spent fishing, diving, surfing and watching the sunset with his three daughters and wife are cherished moments for Perry. His responsibilities at Mama’s beckon all too often: food and service ware purchasing, menu engineering, production and systems engineering, food

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handling and food safety education, building relationships with resources, scheduling, teaching, motivating, quality control. The list is endless.

Good for Perry, he loves his job.

“I’m so proud of how the community and Mama’s Fish House have become stronger together, perpetuating culture and island traditions. (There are) third-generation fishermen still fishing as a lifestyle and providing for their families (and) third-generation farmers able to lease additional land to grow more food,” Perry says. “I love being part of a restaurant that helps to make our islands more sustainable in so many ways.”

Helping to mālama (care for) Maui’s resources is especially fulfilling for Perry given his cultural understanding of food as a precious, limited and vital resource. For Perry, food is life, and gathering and sharing in the aloha spirit is what makes Hawai‘i special.

As does eating fresh fish and poi every day!

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