

El Luchador Q&A with Chef Stephane Lemagnen

In celebration of Cinco de Mayo, we sit down with Chef Stephane Lemagnen of South Street Seaport's Mexican taqueria, El Luchador, to chat all things taco, nachos and the Seaport's rising dining scene!

El Luchador will be hosting the first course at Dish on Downtown, a private moveable feast honoring Lower Manhattan's restaurant renaissance, on May 12, 2016.

1. The South Street Seaport is currently undergoing a major transformation, with chefs like David Chang and Jean George Vongerichten moving down. El Luchador first opened in 2014 - a neighborhood trailblazer! What first brought you to the Seaport?

My business partner Tony came across that spot on the corner of John street and South Street just driving by. We thought it had a lot of charm and a good vibe to it. It was previously used as a horse stable, a gas station and a bike shop and it was left vacant after hurricane Sandy. It just looked like a really good spot for a Taqueria.

2. El Luchador sits on the easternmost part of South Street, an oasis overlooking the river. Above prime real estate, you happen to have the coolest decor, retro Airstream and all. Where did the design concept come from?

The design element came through the creative minds of several people and the hard work of Tony's team. When the Lucha Libre theme came up it kind of clicked with the space and every element just fell into place. Our designer found a 1960's Airstream on Ebay and it was trucked in. It wasn't a long thought-out process. On the contrary it was very instinctive. By the end we thought it looked like a Taqueria you would expect to find in Southern California so we adapted the menu to fit the space.

3. With the South Street Seaport's restaurant renaissance taking hold, who are you most excited to welcome to the neighborhood? What restaurant and/or bar would you love to see open alongside El Luchador?

We're very excited about the new pier and all the new developments in the area. We're looking forward to welcome David Chang and Jean-Georges to the neighborhood. We think the area will be much more destination driven and that South Street Seaport will become like a new neighborhood to discover for New Yorkers. As far as a new restaurant or bar? Maybe we should open something else beside us?

4. You'll soon be opening a 2nd location in the Lower East Side. What can we expect from your new outpost?

We're opening a 2nd location of El Luchador at 132 Ludlow in the Lower East side this week. On Cinco de Mayo! It will be more of the same delicious food but once we run smoothly we'll start introducing more special items (duck carnitas, anyone?). Small place with a lot of attitude. Open very late at night. So if you're craving El Luchador past midnight head straight to the Lower East Side.

5. Today we're celebrating Cinco de Mayo! What would be the perfect El Luchador order to celebration?

A fish taco, a short rib taco and a carnitas tacos with some nachos on the side. Don't forget to try our salsas!