



Guests line up to get their fill of the hot Louisiana staples being served.

# Talking Turkey with



# Madonna Broussard

AT LAURA'S CAFE TWO IN LAFAYETTE, FOUR GENERATIONS OF FAMILY HAVE BEEN SERVING UP PLATES OF CLASSIC CREOLE COMFORT THAT TASTE LIKE HOME

STORY BY SHARON McDONNELL



Meatball stew,  
fried catfish, and  
corn on the cob

“I went to the Culinary Institute of Laura,” Madonna Broussard says with a laugh. “I was raised on rice and gravy.”

It's such a beloved mainstay in Lafayette, Laura's Cafe Two is where the late Anthony Bourdain ate lunch in *Parts Unknown*, his CNN travel series, in the south Louisiana episode. “Don't change the concept of what you have going—the food is good and the camaraderie of the people,” the late TV star told chef-owner Madonna Broussard in 2018, calling it one of his best meals in the region. High praise indeed, and the family-owned eatery, known for top-notch Creole comfort food in a homey setting, also received a 2025 James Beard nomination for Best Chef: South.

Back in 1968, Madonna's grandmother Laura Williams Broussard started the restaurant in her home in Lafayette, and is believed to be the city's first Creole “plate lunch lady.” Today, her granddaughter faithfully serves the same recipes on University Avenue, where Laura's Cafe Two opened back in 2000. Stuffed baked turkey wings, the most popular dish, consists of one massive wing, where a paste of cayenne pepper, garlic, and what she calls “a secret seasoning” is tucked beneath the skin, topped with more Cajun Chef Cayenne Red Pepper, and then baked for three and a half hours with water and oil in a pan until golden brown. So tender and moist, the meat

falls off the bone but somehow still has a semi-crispy skin. It gets served atop rice and gravy with a choice of two sides, like mustard greens, seafood okra, or red beans. “I'm all over it like a heat-seeking missile,” Bourdain said of the wing, whose heft is at least 1½ pounds. “If you have any plans for the rest of the day, you should just lean back and relax; you're gonna cancel them after this meal,” Bourdain advised.

Many loyal customers have eaten here for many years, and some drive more than two hours from New Orleans just to have breakfast or lunch. Some travel farther—much farther. After watching a video from YouTube food influencer Mark Wiens, who gave it a rave review, two couples flew to Lafayette from Southern California just to eat a certain dish and then flew home afterward, Madonna notes.

Madonna's favorite dish: fried pork chops, with pork from Hebert's Specialty Meats that is pounded so thin, it becomes delightfully crispy. “We've bought from the same company for 40 years,” she says. Her menu also features her version of shrimp and grits—Gulf shrimp in a cream and butter sauce with habanero cheese grits—

along with smothered oxtail, crawfish étouffée, fried chicken, fried catfish, and barbecue ribs or sausage. “My husband, Olies, is the barbecue guy, every weekend in the pit room behind our building,” she says.

Madonna’s a proud self-taught cook. “I went to the Culinary Institute of Laura,” she says with a laugh. “I was raised on rice and gravy.” In fact, that tagline adorns T-shirts Laura’s Cafe Two sells. Every morning, she starts making a roux, seasoned with cayenne and salt, cooking and stirring until it attains a rich, strong depth of flavor. “The blacker, the better,” Madonna notes.

Her grandmother Laura grew up cooking for her sisters and brothers, and after serving the public in her home, she moved her cooking to a metal trailer. After her grandmother retired in 1984, her mother, Dorothy Broussard, “Miss Dot,” took over, until her health failed. In 2000, Madonna took the helm after she and her husband purchased the restaurant’s current building. The year before was a very difficult one, but her extended family, from her mother’s sisters to her in-laws, helped her. “We all had to come together and figure out how to save it. I have been truly blessed with family,” says Madonna. She grew up watching her grandmother and mother in the kitchen and took over after working 11 years at the clothing maker Fruit of the Loom.

Madonna is a country girl who still lives in Parks, a small town of 1,200, about 5 miles from Breaux Bridge, where she was born and raised. “I will never leave Parks. I get to wind down, being at home,” she says. As a child, she picked cayenne peppers at her grandfather’s farm. A photo of him amid his peppers hangs on the wall in Laura’s Cafe Two’s down-home, no-frills, no-white-tablecloth interior, where you order at the counter in front and then sit in a booth or at a table. So do photos of the original eatery, the family, and Clifton Chenier; the late King of Zydeco, whose 100th birthday would have been in 2025, was her grandmother’s favorite musician.

Laura’s Cafe Two caters lots of events, from weddings and company parties to serving crawfish étouffée and her fantastic pecan caramel cheesecake at Maison Madeleine, an inn in an 1840s Creole cottage by the shore of Lake Martin, whose Secret Supper series hosts acclaimed chefs and live music. While she revels in carrying on her family’s Creole cooking legacy, Madonna isn’t a slave to tradition. Besides changing the ever-popular turkey wings from a weekly to a daily menu item, she replaced the original platters for dine-in to Styrofoam boxes in 2010 for easy takeout. Her daughter, Lacey, joined Laura’s Cafe Two in 2017 and runs the front and back of the house. “She’ll carry the torch and be a plate lunch lady just like my mother, grandmother, and myself,” Madonna says, beaming. ♣

