

Know your menu, taste your food, and be consistent. It's key advice that Cameron Wetzler, owner of Blackout Burger, swears by.

Opening a ghost kitchen during a pandemic has had its challenges, but Cam is ready to serve his friendly neighborhood burgerholics. The best part? Blackout Burger is open until 2am, perfect for those late nights on King Street.

The Concept Of Ichigyo-zammai

Do one thing, and do it well. As Cam developed the concept for his kitchen, he knew he wanted to execute something incredible. Growing up in Charlotte, NC, there were a number of old school mom n' pop spots that had their own styles. Brook's Sandwich House, Mr. K's, Rusty's Deli, Arthur's – they each specialized in one thing, something simple, but they did it *well*. They were staples that had been open for 50+ years, proving the Japanese mindset/concept of ichigyo-zammai to be largely successful.

As Cam contemplated his approach and what he wanted to do, it all came together. What could be better than a *good* burger?

What's On The Menu At Blackout Burger

Blackout Burger's menu consists of four burgers. Made of smashed 1/4 pound patties, they're topped with melted American cheese, caramelized onions, fancy sauce, and house-made pickles on a Browns Court bun. The difference? Your dedication.

The Split-Shot burger is the perfect gateway to becoming a burgerholic (assuming you aren't one already). Just one 1/4 pound patty, this smashed burger is steeped in local history. The name Split-Shot comes from the 1973 mini-bottle law which allowed drinks under two ounces to be sold. Patrons would order shots split, or one, two ways.

Up until the mini-bottle law, liquor drinks could not be served legally in South Carolina. Our state was the last to repeal this law. On New Year's Eve of 2005, bars were finally able to free pour. While some still honor the split-shot practice, Blackout Burger honors the memory.

True burgerholics – or someone with a serious case of the late night munchies – will want the Hasselhoff Burger. Four 1/4 patties deep, it's the burger to end all smashed burgers while paying homage to the man himself.

Blackout Burger also offers Zapp's Potato Chips, a whole local pickle, and Frito Pie – fritos, chili, jalapeño cheese sauce, fancy sauce, green onions and pickles.

If it weren't obvious by the name, the menu makes it clear: Blackout Burger is there for us all when a blackout might be approaching. Their ghost kitchen concept makes it even easier.

What's a Ghost Kitchen?

A ghost kitchen exists solely on a digital platform – think Uber Eats, DoorDash, GrubHub, etc. There is no walk-up counter or dine in service. If you're looking to get your burger fix, you'll need to place your order through Uber Eats or by DM'ing Blackout Burger on Instagram.

During the times of COVID, a no contact kitchen that delivers late night eats is ideal – but the real benefit is the freedom that comes from operating a ghost kitchen.

Rather than being tied to one menu, one concept, one restaurant, a ghost kitchen can support multiple restaurants, leaving plenty of room for growth and innovation. If Blackout Burger does well, it would be easy to add another concept without having to connect the two. And Cam just might.

Behind The Burger

Never an early riser, the f&b lifestyle caught Cam's attention early on. At 15, he picked up a job shucking oysters at a dive oyster bar in Charlotte. The hours were ideal, but something else caught his eye. Watching the guys cook, the way they would do things – Cam was captivated by the idea of being creative and working with his hands. He worked his way up to being on the line cooking and never looked back.

After several years of working in CHS under Jeremiah Bacon at Oak Steakhouse and then The Ordinary as a sous chef, Cam branched out from set menus and went into business with friend Corey Burke. You've likely met them if you've ever ordered from their food truck, Roti Rolls.

“When you're working in a professional kitchen you have your menu, your execution – things that are expected of you. Being on a food truck is like a free for all where you get to be your own boss and look at flavors and cuisines – all these things you can expand on.”

Fusing Indian with Caribbean and South American flavors, the freedom of running a food truck allowed Cam to truly step out of the box. Then about a year and a half ago the to-go platform caught his attention. In early 2020, Cam decided to branch out on his own.

If you've ever struggled with not having your career or life fully planned out, take a note from Cam. Every turn in his career created the stepping stones that have led to the inception of Blackout Burger.

Supporting Local

Charleston is a city that thrives on collaboration – especially in the f&b industry. Blackout Burger sources their burger buns from Brown's Court Bakery, located on Philip Street. Grow Food Carolinas – a hub of sorts for local farmers to distribute their produce in town – is the source of all the veggies and produce used at Blackout Burger. And that's just the beginning.

Cam's hope for the future is to partner with Palmetto Pastures again, with the goal of using local beef for his burgers. He's also playing around with the idea of adding a seafood option, ideally partnering with Abundance Seafoods, one of the main sustainable seafood fisheries in CHS.

A veggie burger is also within his sights – but not just yet. True to his dedication to perfect execution, Cam is confident they'll get there once they've landed on something great.

You can also expect Blackout Burger pop-up events at local breweries in the future.

For anyone looking to open their own kitchen, Cam wants you to know that “if you're really serious you can get a job in a kitchen and start from the bottom...start as a dishwasher in the best kitchen in town and they'll teach you everything you need to know.”

And if you're torn between burgers, try the chef's favorite: The Double Blackout Style, a double patty with chili and guac, topped with Cole slaw. All the fat, acid and salt blend in and come together to tell you to place your order now and let us know what you think.

By Samantha Paternoster | June 29th, 2020
