

## The Spirit Of Austin

An Interview with Larry McGuire, Co-Founder and Partner, MML Hospitality

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Larry McGuire is a Co-Founder and Partner of MML Hospitality and Owner and Chief Executive Officer of McGuire Moorman and ByGeorge Retail. He owns and operates Lamberts Downtown Barbecue, Perla's Seafood & Oyster Bar, Elizabeth Street Café, Clark's Oyster Bar, Jeffrey's, and the Josephine House in Austin, Texas. McGuire attended the University of Texas at Austin.*



Larry McGuire

**COMPANY BRIEF** *McGuire Moorman Hospitality (mmlhospitality.com) was founded by Austin, Texas-based chefs Larry McGuire and Tom Moorman in 2009. In 2021, MMH changed its name to MML Hospitality with the addition of hotelier and partner, Liz Lambert. The industry-leading team continues to create and manage some of Austin's most successful restaurants. Today, MML Hospitality enters an exciting time of development and creativity with the addition of hotel projects as well as a wider range of hospitality, retail, and design projects across the country.*

### When did you develop your passion to pursue a career as a chef?

I was born and raised in Austin. When I was little, my mom made smoothies at the Whole Foods on Lamar & 9th, and my dad was a baker at Texas French Bread. When I was around 11 years old, my mom went back to school to get her master's degree, and I started messing around in the kitchen trying to cook for my brothers and myself. That eventually progressed into planning and cooking whole holiday meals for my extended family – trying to be real fancy. Then, when I was 15 or so, I started working summer jobs, and I started to look at cooking as a career. While at Austin High, I worked at Texas French Bread on South Congress, which is where June's is now. I met the chef, Lou Lambert, there when he would stop in for coffee. He was opening his own restaurant a few doors down as well as the coffee shop Jo's down the street with his sister Liz. I got to see firsthand the beginning of the transformation of South Congress from a sleepy and seedy commuter road to a vibrant neighborhood center. Seeing what Liz and Lou were doing cemented my love of local businesses and their power to rejuvenate a city.

A few years later, I was a student at the University of Texas, and I started line cooking more seriously at the original Lamberts – now home to our Neighborhood Sushi. I ended up dropping out of school after studying abroad in Spain, and I followed Lou to work for a hotel company acquiring properties in Texas. Eventually, I moved back to Austin to try and open a “fancy barbecue” restaurant in 2003 with my high school buddy, Will Bridges. A mutual friend introduced

me to Tom Moorman who had just moved to Austin after cooking at restaurants in Montreal. The three of us eventually got it open in 2006 when we were 25 years old. Tom and I continued opening restaurants, eventually building McGuire Moorman Hospitality and added Perla's, Elizabeth Street Cafe and Clark's. I miss the day-to-day camaraderie and grind of being a chef and hope to be back in a kitchen before I'm too old for it.

### What was your vision for creating MML Hospitality and how do you define its mission?

We never really had a vision early on except to open a few restaurants that we felt Austin needed. As we grew, we started to centralize some things, bring in more talent and tried to

do some accounting. Our vision and mission have always been to create long lasting restaurants, build spaces with nice design and details in mind and to do it with people we enjoy. We've always prided ourselves on a commitment to craft and quality, and Austin's laidback friendliness. The spirit of Austin is grounded in its approachability and loyalty to independent businesses – things MML Hospitality aims to champion as we expand into new markets.

### Will you provide an overview of MML Hospitality's restaurants and hotels?

This is going to be an annoyingly long answer. McGuire Moorman Hospitality was founded in 2009, and in 2021 we became McGuire Moorman Lambert Hospitality when hotelier Liz Lambert joined me and Tom's partnership. Today MML's home office is made up of creative, culinary, beverage, marketing, human resources, and accounting teams, and we manage 30 restaurants, Hotel Saint Vincent in New Orleans, and ByGeorge retail stores. We have locations in Austin, New Orleans, Aspen, and Houston – with California and Florida locations on the horizon.

More than 15 years in, we are starting to turn some of our most successful concepts into growing brands. Clark's Oyster Bar has locations in Austin, Aspen, Houston and will soon add Montecito, Menlo Park, Malibu and Dallas to the roster. Our bakery and cafe



Rendering of Sixth & Blanco in Austin, Texas



Renderings of Sixth&Blanco pool (above), spa lower level (below) and suite (right)



Swedish Hill recently took over the Aspen Art Museum Cafe and will add a few more locations in Austin soon.

In 2021, we opened our first hotel project in New Orleans, Hotel Saint Vincent, originally built in 1861, which has been restored and reimagined and holds several restaurants, a pool and courtyards, a ByGeorge boutique, private event spaces and more. This year we will begin remodeling The Aspen Mountain Chalet, an iconic family-owned hotel in Aspen that we were lucky enough to purchase in 2020 with our families and friends. The historic building boasts panoramic views of the mountains and is nestled between the gondola and the forthcoming new lift 1A Project. My wife and I have spent our vacations – and wedding – traveling throughout the Alps to develop and hone our vision with the intention of bringing a real alpine chalet to Aspen, one that marries luxury hospitality with outdoor adventure. In addition to traditional design and craftsmanship, there will be an adventure guide service, a kids club, an amazing spa and pool, a traditional alpine stube, a small Japanese restaurant, a fancy grill, and a 5th floor cocktail lounge with great music edited by New York DJ Stretch Armstrong.

In Austin, we are about to break ground on our first mixed-use real estate development, the Herzog & de Meuron-designed Sixth&Blanco on West 6th Street. Sixth&Blanco spans 2.5 acres combining historic bungalows with a five-story Swiss designed mass timber building. This project is very special to MML because we have

been able to bring our expertise in hospitality and design to a real estate development for the very first time. Once Sixth&Blanco is complete, it will have ten private residences, a 57 key hotel, a beautiful bath house for residents and hotel guests, private members dining club, and a collection of retail, art galleries and restaurants.

**Are there common characteristics to an MML Hospitality restaurant?**

MML Hospitality is known for our attention to detail, but more and more, I think it's our people and our culture. Our businesses can be hotspots when they open, but they often get a lot better as they age and find their footings – it's the day to day that makes me the proudest. We have a huge team of collaborators that are behind every concept. Today, we have restaurants that are more than 15 years old while also opening new spots, so we have to create a balance between maintaining and improving our older spots while finding the inspiration and excitement to keep creating. Our people make that possible.

**Where do you see growth opportunities for MML Hospitality?**

It's exciting to see our little one-off concepts start turning into brands on their own, with their own leaders, chefs, and a reach into different markets. At the same time, our small collection of hotels deepens our passion for surprising and giving our guests an immersive design, service, and culinary experience through super unique placemaking. I hope we can keep the healthy balance of artistic quirk and solid business that has made us successful.

**Did you always know that you had an entrepreneurial spirit and desire to build your own business?**

Yes, definitely. I knew early on that I couldn't really work for anyone. I'm just too stubborn. Also, I was growing up and looking at Whole Foods and Dell coming out of Austin and then the tech boom. I was driven to work for myself and create something – I knew that I was super lucky to be coming up in Austin



during the 2000s and people were super willing to invest and help us along the way.

**What advice do you offer to young people interested in pursuing a career in the hospitality industry?**

I'm all for kids being kids – but I think we waste a lot of time in college when we should be a bit more serious: working, traveling, figuring things out. Making things with your hands, doing hard things, building things, being in hot sweaty kitchens or bussing tables – these things build character and grit. Believing in yourself, having the ability to take risks, and digging deep when things get tough are super necessary in this industry. Almost every one of our places could have gone out of business, especially early on. We willed them to happen, and we asked for and received a ton of help along the way. ●