

**Chef Cat, Raw Vegan Craftsman Terra Flora & Bucha Fresca
words & photography: Brian "BT" Twitty**

At first mention of the phrase "raw vegan food" most people peer back at me with a look that is as confused as it is filled with instant disdain. They think of sprouts on bean bread with maybe only a spread of bland hummus to add a little flavor. But they are not knowledgeable. They have no understanding of the groundbreaking techniques used to make the food "more palatable." Nor do they understand the detoxification qualities involved in such a lifestyle or the pure, artistic craftsmanship that is involved. I know these insights to generally be true because I've been there, but for almost a year now I have blessed Brian Williams, aka Chef Cat, with my devout interest in his craft and, of course, my biting wit that leads to the sketchiest jokes on the planet. My reward: a learning experience unlike any other.



I first met Chef Cat in the music world. He was a young hip hop head and emcee known as Cataclysm, hence the moniker "Chef Cat". He was hungry, he was smart and he was good... the latter two traits being those needed to struggle as a hip-hop musician these days. Fortunately for vegans of the world, this would prove to be a good plight for Cat because his interest in the creation of food became more of a focus. He became hungry for food in many different contexts.

Chef Cat's interest in cooking was born when his father began teaching him so he could prepare food for himself in college. Says Cat, "...bachelor food, burritos and stir-fry, lol, but it instilled a love for the process and a fascination for international cuisine. I studied poli sci and languages with the intent of traveling and much later my trips to China, Japan, Taiwan and especially Mexico lit up my brain and forever made indelible impressions." He became vegan in 2008 and continued building his style around international cuisine, stating, "[with] all the colors on the plate, I didn't understand how anyone could ever be bored." What followed is his current vegan platform but as he grew to learn more about and embrace the benefits of healthy eating, he took it a step further into raw veganism.



This journey to better his health and gain as much knowledge as possible led Cat to Matthew Kenney Culinary in Santa Monica during the summer of 2014. "This took my skills to the next level, giving me a foundation in advanced raw techniques and fermentation from Kombucha to cheeses, to mustards and kimchi." While there, he also worked at Kenney's restaurant, M.A.K.E. to gain commercial experience in the raw fine dining world.

Fermentation became a great interest and an integral part of Chef Cat's style and like many health and food academics, he believes society's movement away from such natural preservation concepts and toward chemical-based preservatives explains many current poor health trends.



Chef Cat owns and operates Terra Flora, a raw vegan platform through which he offers raw vegan pop-up dinners at various locations in Charlotte. His recent dinners have been at Packard Place, a downtown co-working space that offers local entrepreneurs a place to “set up shop.” At the pop-ups, Cat’s creativity is genuine and technical. Chef Jonas Marcho took sous responsibilities at a summer dinner and had this to say: "Cutting edge concepts in raw dining that transform humble and healthy ingredients into fascinating and delicious works of vegan cuisine. Chef Cat is part Matthew Kenney, part Beastie Boy, and uniquely Charlotte's own." The dinners are as much a display of culinary art as they are a peek into the world of Chef Cat himself. Realizing that not everyone can afford the cost of his dinners, he hosts workshops regularly, including a recent workshop as part of the International Breakin’ Convention, a collaborative effort between Blumenthal Performing Arts and the Zulu Nation that combines the elements of hip hop with theatre.

He thrives in the world of education and is driven to inspire children and adults alike to be more health-conscious and he usually finds a productive way for children to be involved. Be sure to take them to the workshops because Cat loves the kids and he makes it fun for them. Nourish co-owner, Julia Simon says, “Brian's food is fabulous, but it's also about his attitude.. curious, kind, eyes twinkling, he's thrilled to feed you, there's all this grace and gratitude - and that pushes you to think harder, taste more deliberately, be more open.” Cat’s stage experience, approachable personality and knowledge unite to lend him great comfort when addressing an audience. His passion is obvious and it is clear he loves his craft.



Chef Cat's knowledge of fermentation and belief in probiotics as preventive and alleviating agents inspired him to start his kombucha brand, Bucha Fresca. He offers new and refreshing flavors like tamarind ginger habanero and orange basil achiote on a limited basis but is currently searching for the perfect space to conduct a larger brewing scenario. He also has confirmation of future dinner events at Birdsong Brewery (tentatively November) and is open to hosting dinners at other locations. I have purposely not detailed Chet Cat's processes with hopes that you will either attend a dinner or workshop or go a step further and host one at either your establishment or home.

If you are interested in hosting events or want to place an order for Bucha Fresca, contact Chef Cat. He would be as delighted to share his love with you as I know you'll be to experience it.

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Facebook: Terra Flora and Bucha Fresca