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Bidwell the final piece of Union Market's food puzzle (Video)

Bidwell will be one of the most-watched restaurant openings of 2014. See TopShelf's top restaurant openings of 2013.

When it opens Thursday, Bidwell, the full-service restaurant from chef John Mooney, will occupy the last big chunk of space available at Union Market. By the spring, he plans to leverage another portion of the market for his menu: the roof.

Mooney is ready to open the 120-seat restaurant at the west end of Union Market, which has been promising a full-service restaurant since it opened in Northeast D.C. near the Noma/Gallaudet station on Metro's Red Line more than a year ago. The name, Bidwell, comes from John Bidwell, a 19th century general and farmer who developed heritage varieties of a number of plants, including an heirloom melon.

Mooney plans to grow those melons on the roof of Union Market, where he will set up a large, vertical "aeroponic" farming operation. As the weather warms up, he plans to use as much roof-grown produce as he can, changing the menu seasonally and more often as needed.

"It's going to be straightforward American food done my way," he said. That includes Swedish meatballs and venison chili as well as escargot and a "gin and tonic" wild salmon. Look for some southwestern influence — "I love chiles," he said — as well as some more international flavors down the road.



The pieces of Union Market continue to fall into place. Last summer, we talked to Edens Director of Culinary Strategy Richie Brandenburg about the market's development, including its special events, farmers market and future plans.



Bidwell is a 120 seat restaurant with an open kitchen opening in Union Market Jan. 9.



Chef John Mooney comes from Bell, Book & Candle in New York.

kitchens at restaurants in India and Europe and is eager to cater to D.C.'s diverse population, he said.

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At least for now, Bidwell will likely be a destination restaurant. Foot traffic at Union Market is heavy on the weekends, but not exactly a dinner or late-night hub.

Mooney acknowledges that he and his business partner, Mick O'Sullivan, went into this new venture with an eye toward the evolving neighborhood.

"My decision was really foresighted," Mooney said. "The amount of residential happening in the next two years is tremendous."

He expects the restaurant to be busy on weekends right away, "and then up and up from there."

The restaurant will initially be open for dinner and weekend brunch, and then add lunch in the next couple of weeks. He's also been making friends around the market; Bidwell is working with Harvey's, the butcher, and getting some of its cheese from Righteous Cheese, its gelato from Dolcezza.

But even with so many of the Union Market vendors specializing in prepared foods — the venue has become a prime spot for weekend lunch — Mooney isn't worried about everyone trying to pull from the same customer pool. "It's apples and oranges," he said. "I don't think there's a cannibalistic element to it at all. Some businesses bring people in, which increases foot traffic. It's a positive environment in here."



Chef John Mooney in Bidwell's open kitchen. The restaurant opens Jan. 9



The restaurant will feature American cuisine pulling from ingredients grown on the Union Market roof whenever possible.



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