

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL THURSDAY, JUNE 25 AT 7 A.M. CT/8 A.M. ET



Memphis Art Museum Selects John-Paul Gagliano to Operate its New Riverfront Restaurant

The Memphis Restaurateur Behind Ecco, Libro and Tonica Will Run the Destination Restaurant in the Museum's New Downtown Home



Rendering courtesy of Dryden Studio.

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (June 25, 2026) – Memphis Art Museum, opening December 6, 2026, announced today the selection of Memphis restaurateur John-Paul Gagliano to lead a full-service restaurant inside its new downtown home. Gagliano, whose family-owned restaurant group is behind acclaimed local dining destinations Ecco, Libro, and Tonica, will debut an original dining concept within the 123,500-square-foot building designed by Herzog & de Meuron. The restaurant is scheduled to open in January 2027.

The restaurant will introduce a version of the Libro concept to a 4,595-square-foot dining space designed by Nashville-based Dryden Studio. The partnership places one of Memphis's most respected hospitality operators within one of the city's most anticipated cultural landmarks. Open to museum visitors and the broader community,

the restaurant will help make the riverfront campus a lively destination throughout the day.

Anchoring the building's prominent street-facing corner, the restaurant features a dramatic double-height dining room, a 20-seat bar, and both indoor and outdoor seating designed to welcome guests throughout the day and evening. A dedicated exterior entrance will allow the restaurant to operate independently of museum hours, while interior connections seamlessly integrate it into the museum experience. The restaurant will be supported by a full-service catering kitchen capable of hosting weddings, private events, and other culinary partnerships, further establishing the museum's role as a gathering place for the city. Interiors will embrace sustainability and local craftsmanship, creating a cohesive design experience that flows from custom furnishings to lighting and tableware. The result will be an immersive hospitality experience that reflects the creativity, character and cultural richness of Memphis, offering guests a serene setting to pause, gather, and connect.

"Memphis Art Museum is somewhere you come for the art, and also for a long lunch, a glass of wine after work, or a Saturday night out. The restaurant is an integral part of how people will experience the museum and the riverfront, with its own entrance and its own life on the street," said Dr. Zoe Kahr, Executive Director, Memphis Art Museum. "Choosing a Memphis family to run it mattered deeply to us. The Gaglianos have long been known as innovators in dining, bringing the city so many beloved spots, and bringing that to Front Street is exactly the ambition we wanted on this campus."

For Gagliano, the address is familiar ground. His mother, German-born restaurateur Sabine Bachmann, opened her first Memphis restaurant, Fratelli's, on Front Street in the early 2000s. Bachmann has since opened several restaurants in the historic Evergreen neighborhood, rooted in house-made pasta and a Mediterranean-leaning menu. Gagliano returned to Front Street in 2025, opening Tonica Downtown, just a few blocks from where his mother first established roots. Today, he owns and operates the family's restaurant group, Arjosama, and with the new restaurant at Memphis Art Museum, the family's connection to Front Street comes full circle. Spanning more than two decades and three restaurants, the project represents both a homecoming and continuation of a multigenerational commitment to shaping Memphis's dining culture.

"My mother opened her first restaurant on Front Street when I was a kid. I bused tables there, worked the register, and learned the whole business from the floor up," said Gagliano. "Coming back to this street to open a place of my own, inside a building like this one, is about as close to full circle as it gets for my family. This restaurant belongs in Memphians' regular rotation, and we're going to earn that spot."

The new restaurant's interior is home-grown, too. Founded in 2001 by third-generation architect and Tennessean Nick Dryden, Dryden Studio is dedicated to creating meaningful places that contribute to healthy communities and thoughtfully engage local resources. Through a collaborative, context-driven approach, the studio designs environments that elevate everyday experiences and foster lasting connections between people, place, and culture.

Material choices for the restaurant draw inspiration from the museum's timber construction and its proximity to the Mississippi River, demonstrating a shared commitment to creating a world-class space for Memphians and visitors that is deeply reflective of the local landscape. Rooted in the movement of water and its ability to carve, erode, and soften the landscape over time, the design incorporates flowing forms, layered textures, and a warm, natural material palette. Key elements include Tennessee Pink marble, bleached maple, oak millwork, reclaimed wood, natural stone and organic textiles, lit by custom fixtures including hand-blown glass sconces. Custom furniture and tableware extend the same design language from the banquettes to the plates, and biophilic touches — natural light, plantings and tactile surfaces — keep the space warm and connected to the river outside.

The restaurant is just one of many accessible public spaces across the cultural campus that was designed for daily life on the riverfront and a reimagined downtown neighborhood. Memphis Art Museum will open with a rooftop sculpture garden, central community courtyard, theater and the new restaurant, all meant to keep the museum active from morning into the evening. As the oldest and largest art museum in Tennessee with a collection of more than 10,000 works, the museum anchors the city's artistic legacy while welcoming global perspectives, and its move downtown is built to expand access, deepen community engagement, and strengthen Memphis as a cultural destination for generations to come.

About Memphis Art Museum

Opening on December 6, 2026 along the Mississippi River, Memphis Art Museum ushers in a new era for art, culture, and civic life in Memphis. As the reimagined home of the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, the 123,500-square-foot cultural campus expands access to exhibitions, abundant public spaces, and new studios for learning and creativity while establishing a dynamic new landmark on the riverfront.

Designed by Herzog & de Meuron as an open and welcoming destination for all, the museum features world-class architecture, expansive galleries, a rooftop sculpture garden, and year-round cultural programming. More than a museum, it is a place where creativity and shared experiences bring people together, inviting Memphians and visitors alike to engage with the transformative power of art.

Memphis Art Museum is one of the leading art museums in the American South. Its collection of more than 10,000 works spans five millennia and six continents, including ancient works from Greece, Rome, and the Ancient Americas; Renaissance masterpieces from Italy; English portraiture; American painting and decorative arts; contemporary art; and African Diasporic art. For more information visit brooksmuseum.org.

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