



ABOUT MATT FISH

Matt Fish is a restaurant entrepreneur and a musician. His connection to music is significant because it guides his vision and permeates every aspect of Melt Bar and Grilled. Fish wants every visit to be like attending a rock concert - exciting and memorable; and every menu item to be like a song - unique, meaningful and special in its own way.

Fish started his "real world" culinary education in 1992 when he got a job at a restaurant in his hometown of Parma, Ohio. He fell in love with the work and it derailed his plan of becoming an elementary school teacher. "Once I stumbled into the restaurant world, a light bulb went off, the stars aligned and I said, OK... I've always wanted to do my own thing. So now it's going to be a bar and a restaurant."

Matt Fish is a musician, and musicians are passionate people. They do what they do because they love it - that's all there is to it. Fish learned right away that he was as passionate about the restaurant business and creating great food as he was about music.

He augmented his self-taught, on-the-job training with a degree in Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management from Cuyahoga Community College, which he earned in 1997.

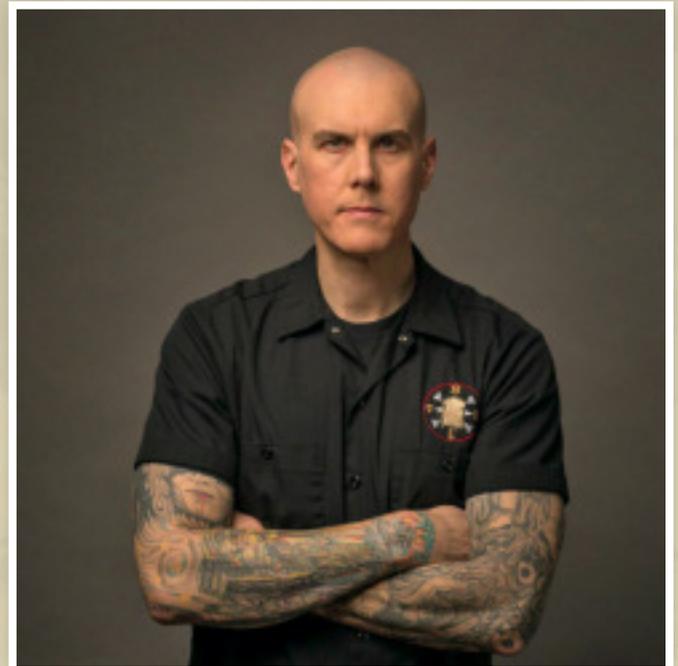
Fish, who started his career in several popular independent Cleveland restaurants, always had a dream of opening his own restaurant and came up with the idea for Melt Bar and Grilled a few years before its actual opening. He really wanted something different and needed a completely unique concept. His earliest cooking memories from childhood were making grilled cheese with his mom, and it was always his go-to food of choice.

Quick, simple and delicious. A memory of childhood. Gourmet comfort food.

DECISION MADE: GRILLED CHEESE.

The thing about being a musician is when they create their art, they don't put it in front of a focus group for validation - they put it into the world because they know it's art. The same can be said of Matt's art - the gourmet grilled cheese. It's real, it's authentic, it's nostalgic. Each sandwich has a story to tell, just like a song.

The first Melt Bar and Grilled opened in Lakewood, Ohio, in 2006, and was busy from day one, with lines around the block, lengthy waits for a table, and insanely positive buzz. Soon, there was a second Melt location. Then a third. Now, with double-digit locations, Melt Bar and Grilled remains true to Matt's vision and passion for awesome grilled cheese and gourmet comfort foods.





ACCOLADES:

- 2017 Inc. 5000 list of the fastest-growing private companies in America
- 2017 EY Entrepreneur Of The Year Finalist
- Small Business Association's 2015 Ohio Small Business Person of the Year
- 2012 Lakewood Chamber of Commerce Business Person of the Year

THE MELT BAR AND GRILLED F.A.Q. (FISH ANSWERS QUESTIONS)

Q: How did the idea of gourmet grilled cheese come about?

It was really just an innocent idea that I had. I wanted to open a restaurant that was completely different than anything in the city. Grilled cheese was always a big part of my life and I had always dabbled in making unique grilled-type sandwiches with tons of great cheese. Bread and cheese have always been two of my favorite foods on earth. My last meal on earth will hopefully include some great artisan bread and some really sharp cheese!



Q: Did you think Melt was going to take off like it did?

Hell no! I had no idea that the restaurant would be as popular as it has become. I thought I was opening a small little bar that served great beer and also had this really silly and unique gourmet grilled cheese menu. Right after that first opening weekend I realized that I had something pretty special.

Q: Where does your sandwich inspiration come from?

I'm inspired by classic American comfort foods. I try to convert them to create a grilled cheese sandwich from the idea. Melt offers a special sandwich every month that really has taken on a life of its own. I am constantly trying to outdo myself every month and all the specials have been really well received by our fans.



Q: When did the whole sandwich of the month idea start?

The sandwich of the month started sometime during our first full year of operation. It was something that I wanted to do from the beginning but I realized that I was just too busy to pull it off. I worked open to close, 7 days a week for the first 2 years so finding time to create a special was difficult, but I eventually managed. I think the very first special was in July of 2007 and it was the Firecracker Chicken.

Q: Do you have a favorite sandwich?

I think my favorite sandwich on the menu is The Godfather. I am a freak for Italian food and that sandwich is really awesome. It combines all the elements of food that I really love. Great bread, pasta, sauce and cheese. It is so huge though that I can only eat one about once a month.

Q: Has Melt always catered to vegetarians and vegans?

Being vegetarian and vegan friendly has always been part of the Melt concept. We are actually becoming more vegan friendly than ever. I make it a point to try to create a vegan version of every special that we offer. The vegan version of the Gyro Melt is incredible!

Q: The idea that the staff are all unique in one way or another, from appearance to attitude, is a nice touch. Is this something you look at when hiring someone?

We actually look at personality first and work history second. I really want the entire staff to be filled with very interesting individuals with a strong personality. You can teach and train most people to do what you need them to do but you can't teach someone to have an outgoing personality or a strong work ethic.

Q: Was it your idea to have mostly retro movies playing and a constant stream of good music?

Yes. I believe that the atmosphere of the restaurant needs to be as interesting and colorful as the food and staff. I wanted to visually overload guests with fun things to look at and listen to. Melt is all about comfort and nostalgia.

Q: Did you ever think that so many people would get a Melt logo tattooed on them?

I never dreamed that the tattoo promotion would grow as fast and large as it has. I originally thought that maybe 20 people would do it and then it would fall off. We are up to over 700 Tattoo Family members so far! I really think that is incredible! The idea came from my favorite band Rocket from the Crypt. They have a rocket logo that they began suggesting their fans get tattooed to get into shows for free. It has grown into a world-wide tattooed fan base with hundreds and hundreds of tattoos. They created a family around the tattooed fans. I always loved that idea and I actually have a RFTC tattoo that I got many years ago. I wanted to capture the same family idea for Melt so I launched the Melt tattoo promotion in September 2009.



Q: So do you have a Melt tattoo?

That is a common question and the answer is no. In the tattoo world, getting the name of your parents, significant other, etc., is bad luck. I choose to not get a Melt tattoo for that very reason. I don't want to welcome any bad luck into Melt.

Q: Whose idea was it to put the menu on a vinyl album cover?

That was an idea that I came up with right before opening in 2006. I was looking for a unique way to present the menu. All the ideas that I had were boring and overused. My father's girlfriend at the time (now his wife) mentioned that she had been to a restaurant that used records to present the menus and that was all the information I needed to start the ball rolling. I actually raided my own record collection for the first two generations of the Melt menus. Michael Jackson's "Thriller" was the first menu that I made.

Q: How did it feel the first time you saw yourself on The Food Network or The Travel Channel?

It was quite odd. I really did not know what to expect so I hoped that I did not make a complete ass out of myself. I was very happy with the way both shows came out. I happen across the reruns every now and then on late night cable and it is still a bit weird to see them.

Q: How would you describe Melt to someone that has never been there before?

It is like reliving all your favorite childhood memories again... Only better! The ultimate comfort food fantasy-land where all your grilled cheese dreams become a reality!

Melt Bar and Grilled is a local favorite in Ohio, but has also garnered national attention from The Food Network's "Diners, Drive-ins and Dives" and "The Best Thing I Ever Ate," USA Today, ESPN The Magazine, The Boston Globe, FOX News and The Travel Channel's "Food Paradise" and "Man v. Food." Accolades for the ground-breaking menu items include Best Restaurant kudos from Cleveland Metromix, Scene Magazine, Columbus Dispatch, Columbus 614 Magazine and the Akron Beacon Journal, as well as Cleveland Magazine's "Best Sandwich" for the past several years, Scene Magazine's "Best Sandwich" in 2016, Esquire's "One of the Best Sandwiches in America" list and was named to the Inc. 5000 in 2017.

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