Alumnus opens Brooklyn restaurant with celebrity chef

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Tulane University alumnus Evan Darnell and celebrity chef Carla Hall are the founders of Carla Hall's Southern Kitchen in Brooklyn, New York. (Photo provided by Evan Darnell)

Bringing flavorful, Nashville-inspired fare to Brooklyn, New York, A. B. Freeman School of Business alumnus Evan Darnell (BSM '98) teamed up with chef Carla Hall, a fan favorite on Bravo's reality cooking competition show *Top Chef* and co-host of ABC's *The Chew*, to open Carla Hall's Southern Kitchen earlier this year.

"I first learned about the hospitality industry while living in New Orleans," said Darnell.

While Darnell constructed an accomplished career in restaurant management, he and his wife have also been business partners with Rodan + Fields, the

dermatologists behind the Proactiv skincare line, for six years.

Darnell was first introduced to Hall five years ago, when she dropped into the New York eatery that he was managing to promote her appearance on Bravo's *Top Chef All- Stars*.

"She came in for lunch, and we talked for hours," he said.

As Darnell took a new position managing the David Burke restaurant at Bloomingdale's flagship store, he began collaborating with Hall to throw pop-up dinners. The menus showcased Hall's unique culinary approach, blending her training in classic French cuisine with her Southern roots. The duo hosted five pop-up events over a span of two years.

"I saw that she had a joyous and robust fan-base, so I kept telling her to open a restaurant. In September 2014, we started a Kickstarter campaign," said Darnell.

Using the proceeds to help fund the project, Darnell found a space for Hall's first brick-and-mortar location in Brooklyn's Columbia Waterfront District.

Since opening its doors in May 2016, the neighborhood joint has become a hotspot for supremely spicy Nashville-style fried chicken and Southern sides like baked mac n' cheese and savory, golden cornbread.

Hall's chicken is pressure-cooked and dipped in chili oil for varying degrees of spice. Bold patrons like to turn up the heat by ordering the scorching signature "Boomshakalaka" chicken and sipping strawberry-jalapeño soda.

After opening an additional outpost in the Barclays Center, Darnell and Hall are looking to expand their establishment in the future.

"It's been a labor of love," said Darnell.

— Mary Cross