



James Syhabout Bio

Born in Ubonratchathani, Thailand and raised in Oakland, California, James Syhabout is the Chef/Proprietor of Commis, the only 2 Michelin-starred restaurant in Oakland since 2010. Hawker Fare, with both Oakland and San Francisco outposts; and casual, beer-centric restaurant, The Dock, in West Oakland. Named "Best New Chef" in 2010 by the eponymous *Food & Wine* magazine, Syhabout has been recognized not only for his skill and dedication to the culinary arts, but for reviving the dining scene in his hometown of Oakland. Before opening Commis and Hawker Fare, Syhabout formally studied at California Culinary Academy in San Francisco and developed his craft at numerous Michelin starred restaurants around the globe, beginning as Chef de Partie at Manresa (Los Gatos, California). Within a few months, Syhabout advanced to Sous Chef, where his close work with Chef David Kinch inspired his interest in different European cuisines and international culinary practices. After two years at Manresa, Syhabout ventured out to continue his culinary education in Europe, where he worked with Chef Heston Blumenthal at The Fat Duck (Bray, United Kingdom), followed by Mugaritz in the Basque country, near San Sebastian (Gizpuzkoa, Spain), while experiencing numerous Michelin-starred meals along the way. Syhabout stayed in Spain as Chef de Partie at Alkimia (Barcelona, Spain) cooking new Catalan cuisine, before spending a season at Ferran Adria's groundbreaking restaurant El Bulli (Roses, Spain).

Following his continued culinary travels through France and Italy, Syhabout returned to Manresa as a consultant training, working, sharing and developing new ideas from his experiences abroad. In 2006, Syhabout worked with Chef Daniel Patterson to open Coi (San Francisco, California), providing him with the invaluable experience of opening a restaurant, from building codes and menu development, to inventory and the hiring and training of staff. Following Coi, Syhabout was scouted by the Plumpjack Group in 2006 to fill the Executive Chef position at their flagship restaurant, Plumpjack Café (San Francisco, California). Within the first year, he earned a rave three and half star review from Michael Bauer in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and was recognized as a "Rising Star Chef" by *San Francisco Magazine*, *San Francisco Chronicle* and *StarChefs.Com*. With Syhabout at the helm, Plumpjack Café became one of the top draws for dining out in the San Francisco Bay Area as voted by *Food & Wine* magazine and was propelled back onto the Top 100 restaurant list compiled by *San Francisco Chronicle*. After accumulating numerous accolades at Plumpjack Cafe, Syhabout was recruited back to Manresa in the highly coveted role of Chef de Cuisine. His return to Manresa was largely motivated by the restaurant's involvement with Love Apple Farms and grower Cynthia Sandberg. The biodynamic farm provides bountiful heirloom varieties of vegetables, fruits, herbs, edible flowers and seeds grown solely for the restaurant. Syhabout's involvement with the farm was a collaborative effort with Cynthia, focused on finding seeds of rare varieties and selecting what to grow for the restaurant through the changing seasons. His experience working with Cynthia shaped his vision when developing menus with a true farm-to-plate approach. In 2010, Syhabout's travels, studies and varied culinary experiences culminated in the launch of his first restaurant, Commis, the first fine-dining restaurant in Oakland, which was promptly awarded with one Michelin star a mere months after opening. In stark contrast to

Commis, Syhabout opened Hawker Fare in 2011, in the very Oakland location of his mother's former restaurant, serving the Laotian Thai food he grew up with in a casual setting.

Next came Box & Bells Eating House and The Dock (later to become Old Kan), both in Oakland, followed by the 2015 opening of a Hawker Fare San Francisco, and new Hawker Fare offshoot, Hawking Bird, in Oakland's Temescal area in December 2017. Syhabout currently operates Commis, Hawker Fare San Francisco, Old Kan and Hawking Bird. His first cookbook, *Hawker Fare: Stories & Recipes from a Refugee Chef's Thai Isan & Lao Roots*, is released in January 2018 under Anthony Bourdain's Ecco imprint. Additionally, Syhabout has appeared on *The Food Network's* "Iron Chef America" twice, as Sous Chef for both Mourad Lahlou and David Kinch, aiding them in achieving triumphant victories.