



# Fox Restaurant Concepts

## *Curating Culinary Devotees Across U.S.*

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*How two of its highly popular eateries—Olive & Ivy and The Henry—will continue to surpass expectations in the Arizona market and beyond*

According to the National Restaurant Association's 2017 State of the Industry report, the United States boasts more than one million restaurant locations employing as many as 14.7 million staffers. In a seemingly saturated industry that's rife with competition and replete with culinary creativity, it can be difficult to stand out—to rise above—to raise the bar. But one epicurious entrepreneur is doing exactly that, making extraordinary strides in the national marketplace while carving out a niche all his own: Sam Fox, the creative visionary behind his eponymous Fox Restaurant Concepts (FRC).

Although headquartered in Phoenix, Arizona, the numbers are proof positive of Fox's impact across the nation. His company operates nearly 50 locations and 13 unique concepts in six states throughout the country, boasting a team of over 4,000 employees—with no end in sight. In fact, Fox is reportedly throttling forward for substantial, near-term growth with 18 planned openings heavily focused on Southern California, Washington D.C. and Texas. Amid such sustained expansion, it's easy to see why, even after 20 years in business, FRC is more relevant and on top of its game than ever, maintaining a stronghold as one of the fastest growing hospitality groups in America.

I've had the good fortune of dining at numerous FRC eateries throughout the country, including North Italia, The Arrogant Butcher, and most recently Olive & Ivy and The Henry. Each of those experiences left me in awe of the extent to which this hospitality group not only truly "gets it," but also "nails it" with consistency. Fox's company has managed to combine hugely compelling restaurant concepts that resonate with modern consumers with an impeccable attention to detail across the board—from menu creation, ingredient sourcing, and food execution to open kitchen architecture, interior design elements, and tableware styling to creating just the right vibe with music, lighting and stylish staffers with swag. No detail is overlooked.

So adept is Fox at this holistic approach to restaurant service, he's amassed numerous awards and distinctions throughout his career, during which he's opened more than 80 restaurants. In addition to

being an 11-time James Beard Award semifinalist for Outstanding Restaurateur, Fox is also a New York Times best-selling cookbook author and was named one of the 50 most influential people in the restaurant industry by Nation's Restaurant News for the fifth consecutive year. Impressive for this college dropout who took money earmarked for his tuition to instead open his first eatery at the ripe age of 20. A decision that's clearly panned out as, today, two decades later, FRC is one of the country's most esteemed culinary concept powerhouses.

Having most recently dined at Olive & Ivy for dinner service and The Henry for brunch, both in Scottsdale, I was keen to connect with a spokesperson at FRC for a deeper dive into these particular locales—one quite different from the other but both adeptly over-achieving and cultivating a beholden fan base. Here's a bit of that conversation.

**Q: How would you sum up Olive & Ivy's approach to hospitality?**

FRC: Time slows down as soon as you step into Olive & Ivy. Inspired by the French Riviera, the approach to dining allows guests to enjoy a few stolen moments with those who matter most. Start the day with a cup of coffee and freshly baked Cinnamon Rolls at the marketplace or share a plate of Bacon-Wrapped Dates, and entrees like the Bone-In Ribeye and Wild Mushroom Pappardelle pasta in the evening. Bringing people together over food comes naturally in this little slice of the Mediterranean. Everything is slow-cooked and prepared carefully so guests can savor all the appetizing flavors in every bite. Settle into the comfort of the fire pit lounges on the outdoor, tree-shaded patio and sip a Blood Orange Paloma.

**Q: How about The Henry, what is the vision for that brand?**

FRC: The basis for The Henry was to create a versatile, all-day restaurant serving breakfast, lunch and dinner. It's the neighborhood go-to gathering spot for any occasion, whether to work, hold a meeting, celebrate a special occasion, or grab a casual drink. The Henry showcases made-from-scratch American fare that is both comfortable and refined. The restaurant features a warm interior adorned with rich evergreen banquettes,



navy and gold-studded walls, and a mix of modern and industrial décor that will make guests feel like they have a place in the neighborhood that immediately feels like home. Take the things you love most about your favorite neighborhood café and your beloved bar and restaurant around the corner, and you've got The Henry. This is what's made celebrities like Cindy Crawford, Adrienne Bailon and Chuck Liddell all fans of The Henry.

**Q: As a high-end eatery, does Olive & Ivy have a "signature dish?"**

FRC: At Olive & Ivy, menu highlights include Bacon-Wrapped Dates with Italian sausage and piquillo pepper; Beet Salad with arugula, goat cheese and pistachio; and Veal and Spinach Ravioli with parmesan and mizuna.

[MK Edit: My own experience at Olive & Ivy was overwhelmingly impressive, starting with the Lamb Meatballs—five aromatic morsels of meat served atop a rich and creamy tzatziki and feta mixture punctuated with fresh herbs. The flavor profile of the Pesto Chicken Flatbread was equally on-point, with generously pesto-dressed chicken intertwined with caramelized onion, tomato and pine nuts atop a beautifully-crisped golden-brown dough.

The entrée course was truly to-die-for, most certainly including the Wild Mushroom Pappardelle. Even without a protein, this earthy dish is hugely satisfying courtesy of the large ribbons of hearty pasta with just the right amount of firmness. Meaty foraged mushrooms crown this bed of noodles along

with large shavings of sharp parmesan—all ensconced in just the right note of truffle and topped with fresh-cut herbs. It's a must-try menu item.

Another standout during my visit was the Bacon-Wrapped Pork Tenderloin—three thick-cut medallions served with smoked onion all moistened by a sherry jus, accompanied by fingerling potato and Swiss chard. Appropriately cooked so its slightly pink at the center, this lean cut of meat was full of moisture and flavor-rich—albeit due in large part to the bacon around the perimeter. For its part, the Filet of Beef was truly exceptional primarily for the cut, itself. Lean, tender, and expertly seasoned and seared, this steak nary needed a sauce although the red wine shallot accompaniment still managed to elevate—as did the horseradish dauphinoise potatoes—sliced potatoes baked in milk, hailing from south-east France's Dauphiné region.

Dessert here also delivered in droves. A large-sectioned Frozen Chocolate Bar with marinated cherry garnish, pistachio cake and cherry chip ice cream was decadence at its finest, while the light and airy Strawberry Shortcake with almond, white chocolate and a scoop of refreshing strawberry sorbet was a lovely counterpoint.

I would also be remiss to not give a shout out to the on-site DJ spinning at Olive & Ivy, helping create a truly electric and exciting atmosphere. Here, wining, dining and craft cocktail "is" the night out and the copious tables of large parties—interspersed with those clearly out for a fun-filled

"date night"—was a testament that this is a weekend night destination—not just a starting point.]

FRC: At The Henry, menu standouts include the Quinoa Breakfast Burrito, Little Gem & Asparagus Caesar, Korean Style Skirt Steak, Skuna Bay Salmon, Short Rib Pot Stickers and Salted Caramel Rolls. The extensive coffee menu showcases the restaurant's signature Forster & Burnett Coffee blend, with featured coffee drinks including the Go North and their famous Cold Brew.

[MK Edit: My brunch service at The Henry also exceeded expectations. Despite the fact that the space is large, it's uniquely styled to have a residential feel—as if you've entered someone's personal home. The effect is quite powerful and unexpected in the best possible way. Charming old-fashioned touches are weaved all throughout, so do take the time to take a visual tour of the entire space for which it's clear much time and effort was spent.

Be sure to start with a Custom Bloody Mary from the cart wheeling to-and-fro. Pick your vodka iteration (horseradish and dill my choice) and your accoutrement (pickles, peppers, bacon, and celery, among others) it's created and tendered tableside.

Also, don't let the fact that this is a "casual" eatery fool you, as the fare is primed to impress. Unique among their offerings is the Smoked Norwegian Salmon with the lox-esque salmon, itself, used as a wrap around a crisped potato hash brown. Fairly rich, the dollop of crème fraîche is an apt foil as





are the sprigs of fresh arugula sprinkled atop. I also adored the Short Rib Pot stickers and appreciated the traditional pan-fried preparation versus deep fried as well as the clever use of well-rendered short rib instead of ground pork. Served with toasted white and black sesame seeds, Mizuna Japanese mustard greens, and ponzu, this is a worthy appy.

For a sweet and sassy side, I highly recommend the Brûléed Pink Grapefruit—a simple yet ever-tasty approach to “a side of fruit” that I have sworn to replicate at home. If dessert is indelibly in your sights, I recommend the Warm Croissant Bread Pudding. Arriving in a mini All-Clad cast iron skillet, the warm and dutifully moist bread pudding with toasted pecans is topped with a full layer of golden, whiskey-soaked raisins and a dollop of dense caramel ice cream. It’s a filling finish, so save room for it!]

**Q: What are some of the imminent goals for these two restaurants?**

FRC: For the near future, a top priority will be introducing The Henry to Dallas diners and making sure the winter opening goes smoothly. Also, in the near-term at Olive & Ivy, the team is working on a seasonal menu change for fall, in addition to elevating the wine program even further. Expect in-house sommeliers and a Wine of the Month program similar to the popular #RyansWines at The Henry (a wine from the reserve list is featured each month by the glass).

**Q: Having realized so much success already, how will these eateries elevate their image even further?**

FRC: Every restaurant should tell a story. Our vision for Olive & Ivy is to be more than just a Mediterranean bistro—it’s more about creating a place where friends can share a few stolen moments together while sipping on sangria and enjoying

Mediterranean fare. Olive & Ivy is a living example of our goal with each concept: to deliver a sense of culture through food, setting, and service to provide guests with extraordinary dining experiences.

We also know that, to be successful, restaurants should have a personality and tell a story. If guests at The Henry experience this, then the value the team provides during their time dining is so much greater. The Henry was designed to be a community space used for much more than a typical restaurant—to feel warm and welcoming from every ingredient on the menu to the fabric on the curtains to the bookshelf display to all the natural lighting. The Henry is billed as “The Best Neighborhood Restaurant,” so it better feel like that to guests when they walk through the doors.

**Q: What might people NOT know about the restaurant but should?**

FRC: Olive & Ivy is a Wine Spectator Restaurant Award winner for ten consecutive years. The large cellar room holds more than 2,000 bottles of wine. And, to ensure the best quality, reds are stored at 58 degrees while whites are stored at 48.

Also, guests can win a gift card to The Henry by posting a picture in front of the arrow (which hangs directly on the restaurant’s exterior pointing toward the front door) on social media with the hashtag #FollowTheArrow. The Henry will also send a matching donation to a local charity in the neighborhood. One winner is chosen every Monday.

Eating at these and certainly other FRC locales is far more than just grabbing a bite to eat. It’s a truly immersive experience where patrons come to linger, decompress, indulge and delight in a warm hug of hospitality that’s remarkably all-encompassing.

## ABOUT AUTHOR

*As the Executive Editor and Producer of “The Luxe List,” Merilee Kern is an internationally regarded consumer product trends expert and hospitality industry voice of authority—a travel, dining, leisure and lifestyle expert who spotlights noteworthy marketplace innovations, change makers, movers and shakers. She reports on exemplary travel destinations and experiences, extraordinary events and newsworthy products and services across all categories. Reach her online at [www.TheLuxeList.com](http://www.TheLuxeList.com), on Twitter at [www.Twitter.com/TheLuxeList](https://twitter.com/TheLuxeList), on Facebook at [www.Facebook.com/TheLuxeList](https://www.Facebook.com/TheLuxeList) and on Instagram at [www.Instagram.com/LuxeListReviews](https://www.Instagram.com/LuxeListReviews).*