



CLARKE MERRELL

morehead city, nc

chef clarke merrell



Executive Chef and Owner of Circa 81 Tapas & Cocktailleria, Clarke Merrell, created everything you see at the restaurant; from the custom-built coppertop bar, to the ever popular Circa 81 martini, Clarke has his hand in every aspect of Circa 81's operations. Clarke completely renovated the restaurant space in late 2009 to truly reflect his style. Circa 81 then opened on January 20, 2010. In July of 2012 Clarke opened up the Twisted Spoon, a frozen yogurt bar. The Twisted Spoon gives Clarke an opportunity to offer another great family destination in Morehead City.

In March 2013 Clarke opened up Beaufort Olive Oil Company, offering premium oils and vinegars, exotic salts and specialty provisions. Beaufort Olive Oil Company allows shoppers to sample any of the oils and vinegars and see recipe and pairing suggestions. He now has four locations of Beaufort Olive Oil Company in Beaufort, Morehead City, Swansboro and Emerald Isle. As well as an expansion of the Beaufort location called The Kitchen at Beaufort Olive Oil Company, offering specialty cookware/kitchenware, culinary treats and many of Clarke's favorite products.

In May of 2014 Clarke rolled out a food truck, called the Dank Burrito. Dank means "fresh" or "of high quality." The Dank Burrito opened its first restaurant location in October 2015 in Morehead City, while continuing to also travel with the food truck. The food truck operates all around Carteret and surrounding counties. Dank Burrito was named National Food Truck Rookie of the Year.

Clarke was named 2015 Arnold Murray Small Business Person of the Year by the Carteret County Chamber of Commerce. Circa 81 has participated in the NC Seafood Festival Chef's Tent and People's Choice Crabcake competition, the Beaufort Wine & Food Festival (where Clarke won 3rd place in 2013's Chef's competition), and the Fire on the Dock culinary competition (where team Circa 81 was a 2013 finalist and 2014 semi-finalist). Circa 81 was also finalist for the 2011 Best Dish NC contest. Clarke was named Favorite Chef in 2015 by Coastal Magazine Reader's Choice Awards. Circa81 was named "Best Eats on the Crystal Coast" by Cooking with Paula Deen magazine in 2015. Circa 81 has been named Open Table Diner's Choice 2013-2016. Circa 81 is also a Trip Advisor Certificate of Excellence Winner. Clarke's goal is for Circa 81 to provide creative, quality, delicious food in a beautiful setting. Offering small plates that are perfect for passing around the table in true tapas style, our dishes are meant to inspire and engage our diners.