

INSIDER



MUSSELS WITH
CHORIZO, TOMATOES,
GARLIC, AND HERBS

Q&A

STILL COOKING

Last year, **Alexander's** celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in Naples. Chef Alexander Bernard grew up in Maine and graduated from Johnson & Wales culinary school in Rhode Island. His culinary journey included stints at the Fontainebleau Hotel on Miami Beach and at Key Largo's Ocean Reef Resort, where he worked with Swedish chefs and honed his appreciation for classic, old-world techniques.

Upon moving to Naples, Bernard served as chef and partner at the now-defunct Margaux's before opening Alexander's. His devoted clientele includes many regulars who have been dining with him for three decades. He hosts frequent cooking classes during the season and is the author of *Alexander's Restaurant Cookbook*. Turn the page to read our Q&A with chef Bernard. (alexandersnaples.com) —Mark Spivak



MICHAEL CARONCHI

INSIDER

STILL COOKING CONT.

NI: What are some tips for surviving 26 years in the restaurant business?

Bernard: Work hard, listen to your customers, and find your market niche; don't try to be all things to all people. Be flexible—the importance of that was demonstrated last year, when we and many other restaurants had to shift to a carryout format. On



MICHAEL CARONCHI



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: CRISPY DUCK WITH SWEET POTATO FLAN, LINGONBERRIES, AND A PORT WINE REDUCTION; FAROE ISLAND SALMON ATOP SPINACH, PARSNIP PUREE, AND A VANILLA BEAN-SAFFRON EMULSION; CAULIFLOWER AND SWEET POTATO CURRY WITH GRILLED SHRIMP AND JASMINE RICE.



a practical level, open with enough capital to survive for two years until you become established. Above all, don't sit on your laurels—you need to continually change and market yourself.

You identify your cooking as “American cuisine.” What does that mean to you?

It really revolves around American applications to traditional European dishes. We have shrimp cocktail, Caesar salad, and macadamia-crusted snapper. But we also offer duck liver paté and veal ragout, and we even have a few Asian influences, such as our miso sea bass.

Your wife is a personal trainer and fitness instructor. Has that influenced your cooking style?

Absolutely. I have an emphasis on healthy eating that I might not have had otherwise. All our meats

are free from hormones and antibiotics, and we seek out sustainable seafood. We have a spa menu that changes every month: a freshly squeezed juice, an appetizer, and the choice of two entrées. And there are items on our menu such as the watermelon, burrata, and tomato salad with toasted pistachios.

How does today's menu differ from 26 years ago?

The portions are slightly smaller, and the sauces are lighter but more intensely flavored. Many of the items are presented differently—we're using healthier side dishes, such as grains in place of mashed potatoes. We have appetizers like lettuce wraps filled with pulled duck, kimchee, and hoisin sauce that you never would have seen back then.

Many restaurants advertise farm-to-table cuisine. How are you different?

I'm not sure if we're different, but we do source our ingredients as carefully as possible. We get about 70 percent of our meat and poultry from D'Artagnan Foods in New Jersey. Their animals are raised in a stress-free environment and are grain-fed without additives. We deal with small fisheries and selected fish farms. Most of our produce comes from Inyoni Farms, which is a USDA-certified organic family farm in Naples owned and operated by Nick Batty. We try to balance good nutrition with wellness.

You close for three months every summer.

How does that benefit you?

My wife and I rent a house in Carmel, California, near Big Sur, which is a beautiful part of the country. It gives us the chance to relax, go out to restaurants, and see what other chefs are doing. Frequently we come up with new ideas or fresh angles on existing dishes.

CREATIVE TYPES

THE ART OF NETWORKING

Mother-daughter duo Olga and Leeza Arkhangelskaya founded **East West Fine Art** 20 years ago, with the goal of creating a gallery that was more than just a selling space. In January of last year, East West launched a program to allow artists and clients to get to know one another in a casual setting. Initiatives like these, however, were temporarily put on pause due to COVID-19.

“When the Corona crisis hit, like every small business, traffic into the gallery fell,” says Olga. “While we were temporarily stunned, we were not deterred.” Instead, they set up an online gallery and virtual studio to keep the interaction going. “This made it easier for our clients to get acquainted with Southwest Florida's best artists—to view their new works, write to them, ask questions, schedule studio visits, and purchase original art directly from the artist's studio.”

Since things have opened back up, East West has introduced an artist membership program. “One local artist blossomed late in life,” explains Olga. “We sponsored his art in our studio, and then he went on to win awards. We like to think our encouragement helped him.”

The gallery works with artists in various stages who are seeking guidance in preparing their portfolios, tailoring artwork to a market, receiving professional advice, or gaining exposure. Emerging artists can have consultations with gallery director Joann Clemente, who is a trained artist and art tutor with three decades of experience. (eastwestfineart.com) —Christina Cush



OLGA ARKHANGELSKAYA WITH ARTIST JOY STANLEY