

# Masseria

BY NICHOLAS STEFANELLI

## Per Favore

*Chef Nicholas Stefanelli's First Restaurant is a Testament to his Roots in Puglia*

Back in the 1970's, Americans had an early love affair with Italian food. As our familiarity of the regional cuisines of Italy grew, it deepened our appreciation of Neapolitan pizzas with roasted tomatoes and mozzarella di bufala drizzled in olive oil, and Venetian risotto enhanced with a dose of parmigiano-reggiano. But not much was known about lesser-known regions, like Puglia, an area that showcases an organic approach and exploratory sensibility of Italian cuisine that emerges from its daily markets and seasonality of ingredients. The diversity of Italy's fare proves that the country's foodways are defined by both traditional and unique flavors.

**Masseria**, chef **Nick Stefanelli's** first solo-venture—which earned a Michelin star in the city's first-ever guide, October 2016—delves deeply and deliciously into the cuisine of Puglia region. Stefanelli grew up near the shore of Maryland, on meals prepared by his family and grandparents comprised of freshly caught fish, olive oil, capers, and the spices of the coast. Masseria's menu is reflective of Stefanelli's past, and an ebullient mix of classic dishes like *Seppia*, a tender *Cuttlefish* tossed with *Extra Virgin Olive Oil*, diced *Potatoes*, and daubs of charcoal-hued *Squid Ink*. The natural and vibrant *Pinzimonio* is a colorful prism of raw summer vegetables. More modern tastes come in the *Crudo* of delicately sliced *Cobia*, *Watermelon Rind*, toasted *Basil Seeds*, tangy *Green Tomatoes*, *Lime* and touches of *Basil*, presenting an aromatic essence of the plate.

Of all Italian dishes, pasta is the most defining of the cuisine. *La Paste* on the carefully created menu at Masseria offers four choices with a concentration on market-driven produce. On the signature *Linguine*, Stefanelli eagerly tosses in his Asian-influenced house-made *Spicy XO Sauce* giving it a pungent kick from the dried chilies rehydrated and ground into paste with garlic and parsley. A playful ode to his heritage is found in Masseria's *Agnolotti*, a summer stand-out with *Cacio di Roma*, *Quail Egg*, *Black Pepper*, and *Housemade Pancetta*.

Stefanelli applies his tried-and-true formula to the *Pesce* and *Carne* dishes that are refined, with a touch of rustic compositions and a spotlight on locally driven vegetables. The seasonal *Moleche* consists of meaty *Maryland Soft Shell Crab*, pastel yellow *Summer Corn* and hints of *Oregano*. *Vitello* showcases *Chapel Hill Farm Rose Veal*, *Bone Marrow*, *Chantrelle* and a *Salsa Verde*. Begin or end the dinner on a sweet, acidic or bitter note with one of mixologist Julien-Pierre Bourgon's artisanal and complex cocktail offerings inspired from the romance-speaking countries. A fruit-forward focus is found in "*The Hennessy Jed*" with *Hennessy VS Cognac*, *Peychaud Bitters*, and an aromatic surprise of *Plum Infused Glycerin Smoke*.

Leaf through the killer wine list composed by General Manager and swanky Sommelier, David Kurka, and a hand-crafted selection of Champagnes to appease the passion of Stefanelli. Vintages assured to please the palate are a range of namesake wines and lesser-known boutique vintners with a concentration in the fruit-yielding soil of the coastal countries in Europe and America.

The conclusion of the meal complements the progression of courses with a centrally sweet surprise – fanciful desserts by Pastry Chef Jemil Gadea like *Oro Cioccolato* with *Chocolate Crème*, *Flourless Chocolate Cake*, *Piemontese Hazelnuts* and *Coffee Gelato*. A scent of pungent offerings -- through the hand-picked selection *Formaggio* and rotating fine Cigar menu -- completes the experience of dining at Masseria.

It is love at first -- and last -- bite of the prix fixe tasting menu. Nestled in the emerging and bustling Union Market district, Masseria is a chic and cosmopolitan Italian enclave preparing modern interpretations of cherished dishes and authentic favorites. Each course is a virtual trip to the lovely seaside of Puglia.