

BLUEPOINT HOSPITALITY

Paul Prager

For the love of Easton

Early on, when his remarkable revival of Federal Street in Easton, Maryland was still on the drawing board, Paul Prager informed his team that he wanted to create a bakery named “Bundt,” in honor of his ultimate gourmet pleasure: the Bundt cake. He was ultimately persuaded otherwise – but that would seem his only misjudgment in what has proven to be an exquisite transformation of the charming historic lane and neighboring area. Along the red brick sidewalk of Federal Street, Prager’s Bluepoint Hospitality Group has created a series of unique yet related commercial establishments: Bas Rouge, an elegant dining room serving fine European fare; Sunflowers & Greens, an upscale salad bistro; Bumble Bee Juice, a cold-pressed juice bar; Weather Gage, a coffee shop featuring exceptional coffee, espresso drinks, teas, and French pastries; and The Stewart, a distinguished Highland-style lounge offering premium single malt Scotch whiskeys and vintage Champagnes. On the horizon, while still no “Bundt”, Bluepoint Hospitality has plans for a pie and ice cream shop, and an emporium of wine, fine cheese, cured meats, and artisanal bread. Beyond the food, there may be entertainment venues in the offing, like a blues club, or children’s theater – or just maybe both.

A successful entrepreneur in the energy sector, Prager brings to his visionary Easton project the precision and rigor of a Naval Academy education, an insistent attention to detail, a team of loyal, talented professionals, and the uncommon luxury of time. With this undertaking in downtown Easton, he’s in the fortunate position of being able to dispense with the time-is-money formula that drives most businesses: a project can wait, if it must, as a concept gels, or for the right staff, perfect design solution, or painstakingly correct craftsmanship, because Prager has taken the long view. He has loved the Eastern Shore since his early years as a midshipman in Annapolis. His family now spends weekends, holidays, and most of the summer on their expansive farm, located just fifteen minutes from Easton, the county seat. Easton itself is a quaint town in which he sees a vibrant, nostalgic past and the prospect of a lasting renaissance.

“Easton has great bones, great architecture,” says Prager. “When you look at vintage photographs of the area, you can sense the bustling street life, the activity of local merchants, and personal interactions. I want everyone in town – whether resident or visiting – to experience that vibrancy again: a robust economy, opportunities for young people to prosper, a great public high school, more residences in town, and a rich arts scene.” All lofty ambitions – but his greatest passion is all things culinary, especially wine. So, he started there.

Prager worked in restaurants from his adolescence until he was a young naval officer, always happy to be bussing or serving tables to earn spending money. His first exposure to fine dining was during his first tour at sea, on a naval ship in the Pacific. “Typically, the Executive

BLUEPOINT

HOSPITALITY

Officer would designate a meal budget based on the officers' combined wardroom allowance. However, I was lucky enough to have an XO who said, 'I'm a food guy: let's all chip in and make this the best we can!' All the officers agreed and we each came out-of-pocket to contribute a little more to the pot," he recalls. "We'd be in Thailand, and purveyors would come on board with the customary offerings, and our officer would insist on truly special 'extras'; rainbow lobster, tiger prawns, Australian meats. We had a great chef and first-class stewards. Though going to sea was considered a 'hardship,' these meals became the great joy of that time in my life." After his naval service, when extended business travel took him far from his New York City home, Prager occupied any free hours pursuing the best local provisions and restaurants. "I became a regular at my favorite places, and found that I really enjoyed the people working in the industry. Merchants and restaurant owners began to include me in conversations, shared revelations, and urged me to explore everything I could along the spectrum of cuisine, wine, and the overall dining experience. In turn, I'd share many of my own discoveries in my travels and over time I've built wonderful relationships at the dinner table." Prager explains, "My hope is to cultivate that same social engagement, sharing an appreciation for food and wine here in the Easton community."

Beyond providing local food venues and employment to Talbot County residents, and utilizing the multitude of nearby small farms, fishermen, and poultry and livestock producers, the creation of high-quality, locally-sourced restaurants, cafés and shops showcases the area's talented chefs, artisans and craftspeople, from woodworkers to masons. Prager is deeply committed to improving his employees' quality-of-life, a principle that means all Bluepoint Hospitality Group establishments are closed on Sundays, for staff to spend time with family and "re-boot." Philanthropy occurs at a personal, direct-investment level, with Prager frequently covering tuition for employees' children and taking care to support causes that are close to their hearts – from charities helping abused women, to the local hospital and hospice, to the YMCA. He further enriches greater Easton with support for the land conservancy, the historical society, various private schools, the Maritime Museum, the Art Academy, and the Rotary Club. "All this is good for the community, to draw people in, and to keep young people from leaving," he says. "It's very rewarding to think that I might play a part in highlighting the area's history, beauty, and native artistry, while enhancing the sense of community in this vibrant, charming town."

For more information:

Simone Rathlé | 703.534.8100
president | simoneink, llc
simone@simoneink.com