

City's Best > San Francisco > News

Submit Tweet

Sign up for our e-mail newsletter so you'll always know what's happening at City's Best!

Email Address

sign up

SPQR's Chef Hunts for Wild Greens and Ways to Inspire

Jan 31st 2011 1:00PM / by Tami Yu

As the former opening sous chef at Thomas Keller's Per Se and chef de cuisine at Craft Los Angeles, [SPQR](#) executive chef Matthew Accarrino knows a thing or two about good food. With a packed house nearly every night, his technique-driven menu and local seasonal ingredients result in satisfying, delicious dishes with a rustic Italian sensibility. Here we discuss his culinary inspirations, working in Italy and what it takes to excel in the kitchen.

What's new for the SPQR menu?

I always work seasonally and as much as possible locally. I'm really excited by things that are local and wild. I'm always looking for new sources for product that is evocative of where we are in the world. I hope to continue to refine my own definition of what it is to cook Italian-inspired food here in Northern California. We change items on our menu constantly, so there is always something new and new opportunities to use products. I recently started a menu of primi (think first courses in the Italian kitchen -- pasta, rice, grains, dumplings). We call it an "assaggi di primi," where we offer a set number of courses for a set price. It allows us to really cook for our customers; they don't have to make any choices. Right now we change the lineup of dishes weekly and it has been a big success.

Where do you go for inspiration and is your cooking style flexible? Do you have rules?

It's pretty wide open in terms of inspiration. I try to think about not just flavor but texture and temperature too. I'm always inspired by things I find from farms, purveyors and even when out foraging. I'm always on the lookout for products I have not seen before or worked with. But as any experienced chef could tell you, the longer you are a cook, the less often you find something completely new as much as you might find it in a different form or find a new use for it. For example, right now there are sorrel flowers that I find out foraging, which I love to use. They are a different form of the more common sorrel leaf but something seasonal and unique. As a cook, I believe you should strive to learn and understand basic cooking and classic technique. Once you know the how and why, then it can make sense to experiment. I strive to impart to my staff the importance of working in a professional and consistent manner. Its not as much a rule as a demeanor.

Having worked and traveled in Italy, what are your best food memories?

It was a real eye-opener, working in Michelin-starred restaurants and going around each morning to get the lamb from the lamb guy, sheep's milk ricotta from the ricotta guy, picking really actually wild arugula, stopping to pick wild porcini. My best food memory from Italy was spending a birthday with my family in Puglia, where they prepared a dinner from ingredients either grown or wild on their property in the hills around their olive grove and all local products. Think burrata from the place down the road, still warm, foraged greens, pork braised with wild fennel and wild capers, my great aunt's potato doughnuts -- they call them ciambella. Pretty amazing. It definitely set a tone for me at an early age.

What's the most challenging ingredient to work with?

Every ingredient has its challenge. It really comes down to cooking technique and discipline. Knowing what to do with each cut when you only buy whole animals. Striving to coax the best flavor from a vegetable. Considering the different applications for each part of something. I forage constantly, but it really is no different than thinking like a farmer. A vegetable has a life span, a radish starts out as a tiny vegetable best eaten raw, turns into something larger where you might use the greens as a salad, puree or garnish and save the radish



Like 0

Like

ADVERTISEMENT

We're told our light bier doesn't taste like a light.



FOLLOW US



Newsletters



Facebook



Twitter

MORE IN SAN FRANCISCO

Cold Soups Are Hot In SF: 6 To Try

It's hot outside (err, well, in certain 'hoods at very...



5 Haute Hot Dogs in SF

While there's nothing wrong with a pre-packed sausage...



SF Weekend Agenda: Frozen Films, Craft Fair, Oyster Happy Hour

If the weatherman is correct, this weekend promises sunny...



Glamping: 5 Campsites With A Bit More Glam

Most of us love the idea of camping: sleeping under the...



turns into something larger where you might use the greens as a salad, puree or garnish and shave the radish. It ends up as a mature vegetable that might be best pickled or braised. You have to consider what you have before you and what's right to do with it.

You've worked with so many top restaurants and chefs. What's the most important trait to have in the busy kitchen?

It is all about standards and consistency. You have to connect with the very real concept that you are feeding people. When someone chooses to go to a restaurant for a second time, they are most often going back for an experience or feeling they left with the first time. You have to be committed.

SPQR, 1911 Fillmore St., 415-771-7779

Photo Courtesy of Ed Anderson



Tami Yu - *Writer*

feteafete.com | [@feteafete](https://twitter.com/feteafete)

A San Francisco native, Tami loves to write about dining, fashion, beauty and travel. She has also written for AOL Digital City, Caviar Affair magazine and AOL's When.com.

COMMENTS (0)

[Sign in now to add a comment](#)

[AOL Inc.](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [About Our Ads](#)
[Trademarks](#) | [Help + Support](#) | [Feedback](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Business Center](#)

Patch Network

© 2011 AOL Inc. All Rights Reserved