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Comforting seasonal cuisine offered at The Park Bistro & Bar

By Susie Iventosch



Braised short rib, crushed Okinawan yam, Tokyo turnip and dandelion greens Photo provided

There's something fresh and exciting going on at the Lafayette Park Hotel and it involves the trio of Jason Reiplinger, director of food and beverage, Executive Chef Frank Macias and Pastry Chef Francisco Cabrera. These three gentlemen have teamed up to create a new approach to the dining atmosphere at The Park Bistro & Bar.

"Where the Duck Club was more of a special occasion type restaurant, the bistro is one where we want people to feel comfortable dining with us more often during the week," Reiplinger said. "We don't believe that guests should have to work to understand the menu, so we've evolved the menu to one that is comfortable and understandable with lots of new seasonal favorites. We're the opposite of most every other hotel restaurant, in that our regular patrons are not just traveling through, but are local community members."

While Reiplinger recruited both Macias and Cabrera from The Wynn Hotel in Las Vegas, both are originally from the East Bay and they are delighted to be back home, close to friends and family.

"I'm so happy to be back home, and it's also so much easier to create a seasonal menu being so close and accessible to local farmers," Macias noted. "This allows us to offer seasonal and approachable, recognizable fare." To these fellows this not only means menu items that are familiar, but also foods prepared as they were meant to be.

"I trained in classic French cuisine while working at Alain Ducasse's Benoit New York in Manhattan and those classical techniques continue to be the driving force behind good food," Macias mentioned. "Among the important lessons learned there is how to prepare seasonal vegetables as they should be prepared and cooked. Vegetables should be treated with respect."

Macias said that roasting with olive oil is a very good way to cook green beans, for example, which maintains the integrity and flavor of the vegetable.

Cabrera, a self-taught chef who ventured to Las Vegas when he was 19 years old to learn the trade, developed skills in chocolatier, Danish and banquet before ultimately becoming a chef de partie in chocolates. He enjoys making what he calls "comfort desserts."

"The best thing about comfort desserts is that they bring back great memories and take you back to a certain place in time," he said. "When I make them for guests, I get great feedback."

Currently, Chef Cabrera is making "cereal milk" frozen panna cotta. The milk for the panna cotta is infused with toasted cereals, strained and then combined with brown sugar and gelatin. He serves this dessert with caramelized bananas and strawberries or other seasonal fruits.

The Park Bistro & Bar menu changes seasonally. Chef Macias has generously shared his recipe for Braised Short Ribs and Crushed Okinawan Yams, which I made last week to my guests' delight. It was perfect comfort food and the colors of the crushed yams and carrots made a beautiful autumn plate. Because I did not have access to Okinawan yams, I used regular orange yams, which turned out to be delicious with his short rib recipe. Chef Cabrera has also shared a recipe for one of his "cereal milk" desserts. Unfortunately, I did not have the chance to try the dessert recipe, but hope to soon!

Cooking Term of the Week

Quenelle

A quenelle is a French term for an oval-shaped dumpling made from finely chopped and seasoned fish, meat or vegetables, and poached in water or stock. It is usually served with a sauce.

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