



Meet the Executive Chef of Eataly Las Vegas

Eataly Magazine (December 08, 2018)



Meet Nicole Brisson, Executive Chef of the soon-to-open Eataly Las Vegas!

When did you know you wanted to be a chef?

I knew from a very young age that I would be in the food industry in some way. My mom grew up working in my grandfather's restaurant and was an amazing home cook. I would help her in the garden, and we would can and preserve our harvest as we prepared for the long upstate New York winters. When she returned to the workforce, I took over cooking for our family until I moved out with my sister at age 15.

How long have you been working in the industry?

I started in restaurants when I was 14 years old, following in my sister's footsteps. We worked at country clubs, corporate retreat centers, and small restaurants. I did everything from dishwashing,



prepping, serving, and bartending to support myself and pay for college. I also enrolled in a Culinary Arts program my junior and senior year of high school. I became the president of VICA (Vocational Industrial Clubs of America) and competed in a number of competitions. Through these competitions I was able to win a good amount of scholarship money to Johnson and Wales University.

Tell us a little bit about your past professional experience.

My goal when I started to cook professionally was to be the youngest female Executive Chef of a reputable restaurant on the strip. I packed my car and moved to Vegas over 15 years ago. I opened the Wynn Las Vegas and worked with chefs Paul Bartalotta, Steven Kalt, and Mark Poidevan. I met Zach Allen the Culinary Director for B&BHG group and eventually opened B&B Ristorante. Shortly after opening I got promoted to Chef de Cuisine of Enoteca San Marco their fast-casual concept at the Venetian. A little over a year later the Executive Chef position opened up at CarneVino in the Palazzo. Zach promoted me and I spent over seven years as the Executive Chef and also managed the 5,000 square foot dry-aging facility. I was 26 years old when I got the promotion.

With a lot of coaching from my mentors, I also got into the reality TV world doing Chopped, two seasons Late Night Chef Fight, Munchies, and Beat Bobby Flay. After years of running CarneVino I groomed my replacement Arnold Corpuz. I got promoted to Culinary Director of all four Vegas properties. After 12 years with the group, I decided to join the Eataly team.

You've spent some time working in Italy. What was that like?

With the help of Molly O'Neil and Faith Willinger I moved to Italy when I was just 21 years old. This was not only my first time in Europe but my first time flying anywhere! Faith had organized a number of stages for me with reputable chefs she knew well. I started at Cibreo in Florence working under Fabio Picchi. I immediately fell in love with the Italian culture and food. I also realized pretty quickly no matter where you are or the language spoken, the restaurant industry is pretty similar everywhere. This was a very serious fast-paced kitchen. I learned so much from Fabio that helped pave my future success.

During the month of August I worked at Castella dei Ama taking care of their children and working with their chef. From there I ended up in Dario Cecchini's butcher shop in Panzano. Dario's shop felt like home almost instantly. He has been like a father to me ever since. I then traveled to the South for a short stint and ended up coming back to Tuscany because I loved it so much. I would have never been able to tell anyone at 21 years old how influential these people would be to my future.

What is your favorite Italian dish?

Hands down inzimino! I first tasted it at Cibreo. Since I have made a number of variations at other kitchens I have worked. (Inzimino is a Tuscan cooking style that uses greens and tomatoes usually used on fish or chickpeas.)

Las Vegas is full of amazing restaurants and high-quality food. What is it like being a chef there?

Vegas is everchanging and I think that's what I love about it the most. But just in the last few years I have really felt more chef comradery and community. It really is a 24/7 mentality that always keeps you excited and competitive. I enjoy eating in Chinatown after a long shift at 3 a.m.!

What is your specialty dish or favorite kind of food to cook?

I think every chef craves their mother's cooking from their childhood. I dream of my mom's perogies and kielbasa with horseradish on potato babka. I make a guanciale cabbage perogies now whenever I have a craving. I still eat them, despite having developed an unfortunate allergy to gluten!

If you weren't a chef, what profession would you have?

For a second when I was younger I wanted to be an interior designer. I just bought a house and really



enjoy decorating it between jobs.

You also serve on the board of directors for the Southern Nevada Health District (SNHD). What is your role in this project and why did you choose to be a part of it?

Vegas is growing at such a rapid rate right now. The more I got involved writing our SOPs and HACCP program I wanted to be more involved as a whole. My in-house inspector Cara Evangelista encouraged me to apply when the industry professional spot opened on the SNHD board. It is still very early into my 2-year term but I am already learning a great deal. I really feel like a Vegas resident now and part of the local community.

Why have you chosen to work with Eataly?

I've known the company well from my past work experience. When I heard they were opening in Las Vegas I was so excited to be part of it. It is such an incredible location on the strip. I think it will be a great thing for Vegas locals and tourists.

Source URL: <http://www.iitaly.org/magazine/dining-in-out/eataly-magazine/article/meet-executive-chef-eataly-las-vegas>

Links

[1] <http://www.iitaly.org/files/nicole-brisson-1jpg>