

Greetings from



IN COLD MONTHS,
ATLANTIC CITY
REALLY HEATS UP

2

LAUGHTER &
BEDAZZLEMENT:
COMICS & CIRQUE

12

STAR CHEFS WHIP
UP A.C. OUTPOSTS

6

MADONNA, THE WHO,
DAVID BYRNE MAKE
MUSIC IN A.C.

14

The Village Voice Fall Atlantic City Guide was
reported and written by Steve Weisstein

STAR CHEFS WHIP UP A.C. OUTPOSTS

New Yorkers who travel to Atlantic City can be forgiven if they rub their eyes and feel like they never left home. While it may be far south of the city on the Jersey Shore, more and more of New York's top restaurants are establishing Atlantic City beachheads. They join several top chefs who have already transformed the resort into a culinary destination.

The latest entry has been ranked the number one Italian restaurant in New York for over two decades by Zagat—Il Mulino, opening at the Trump Taj Mahal. This is actually the Greenwich Village landmark's 11th restaurant (there are two under construction, in Atlanta and Aspen). But significantly, this marks the first time Il Mulino will operate two separate dining rooms in the same location. Il Mulino New York will offer the traditional white tablecloth experience, with tuxedo-clad waiters and an extensive list of daily specials and wine recommendations. The Trattoria will offer a more casual dining experience, featuring pizzas, pastas and lighter fare.

The concept points up the way Atlantic City combines fine dining with a relaxed feel. "We've tried to offer something family-friendly with the same food Il Mulino is famous for," says Jerry Katzoff, who operates the mini-chain out of New York. "It gives us an opportunity to do both concepts in the same location. The uniqueness is that they opened right next to each other," he adds; there is one freestanding Trattoria open in Orlando.

Il Mulino joins staples like the Palm, Carmine's, Patsy's, Bobby Flay Steak and Buddakan. Some restaurants with their own branches in New York are finding a prominent presence in Atlantic City helps bring them to more attention to jaded New Yorkers. A case in point is McCormick & Schmick's, which opened last summer in Harrah's and has a successful restaurant on Sixth Avenue. A spacious respite just off the casino floor, this Oregon-based seafood house claims all of its catch is fresh that day. Having feasted there recently, this reporter can testify that everything tastes as though it came directly from the fishing boat.

These restaurants join several top-end establishments run by famous chefs who have bypassed New York entirely. Martin Doyle might be a brand name in Boston, but if you want to sample his seafood entrees, it's either north to Boston or the Turnpike south. Similarly, Michael Schulson opened Izakaya in June. Chances are, you've heard the name; more than likely, you've seen

him on "Pantry Raid" on TV. He also appears regularly on "Martha Stewart" and "The Today Show." Schulson got his start under David Burke at the Park Avenue Café. Led by his fascination with Asian cuisine, he did stints in top restaurants on the Pacific Rim before returning Stateside to launch Buddakan.

That experience has culminated in Izakaya at the Borgata, where he joins Wolfgang Puck, Michael Mina and Bobby Flay. Schulson, who The Times raves "breathes intelligence and creativity into his food," meant for Izakaya to be nothing less than revolutionary—an entirely new approach to fusion cuisine. The menu has many of the items expected from a Japanese restaurant, but with a unique combination of flavors and ingredients, all served in a breathtakingly beautiful setting of Zen-like calm and comfort designed by New Yorkers Rafael Alvarez and Brannen Brook.

Schulson admits that at first, he felt some trepidation about coming to Atlantic City. Many people still associate casino food with the traditional surf-and-turf or all-you-can-buffets—not that there's anything wrong with that; they're fun and frequently delicious. But he didn't know whether there would be enough foodies to take innovative items like teriyaki pork belly with spicy shallots and steamed buns, hamachi salad with ramps spring onions and hot oil, and robotayaki-grilled meats and seafood. So he's been pleasantly surprised to find his comfortable banquettes packed night after night. "It's impressive how well it's taken off," says the Philadelphia-based chef. "I'm happy to see how many people have gravitated to the more adventurous

items on the menu."

Like Schulson, master chef Geoffrey Zakarian set out to change the way people look at a food setting—only in his case, it's the room service and poolside snacks at the Water Club. Zakarian, who has had stints at Le Cirque, 4 Royalton and 142 Mercer and is a well-known cookbook author and also a TV personality, is happy to serve fare that New York Magazine calls "a cut above the usual institutional food." Room-service entrées include filet of bison, and braised lamb shank with basmati rice and pomegranate. He's even taken on the most beloved institution for the Philadelphians who flock to the shore: the Philly cheesesteak, giving it his own upscale spin [see sidebar].

For another side of casual dining, the Chelsea has just opened Teplitzky's. As the name implies, this coffee shop hearkens back to the golden age of the Rat Pack, but the menu is anything but kitsch. It takes the diner concept way haute, with items like a Middle

Eastern appetizer with quinoa tabouli and roasted peppers; a chicken club on a brioche; and organic chicken. But you can also get Jewish comfort food like beef brisket with kugel or a kosher hot dog—all washed down with a fine wine. And like Zakarian's fare, it's all available via room service.

It's all part of a dining revolution that has transformed Atlantic City. "One of the biggest leaps Atlantic City has made is in culinary options," boasts Jeffrey Vassar, of the city's Convention & Visitor's Authority. "There wasn't that much when I moved down here. Now it's become a culinary destination. People travel here to eat, rather than people just happening to be here and needing to eat something."

The city has added so many fine dining establishments that is borrowing something else from New York City's foodies. The first week in March will inaugurate a Restaurant Week, with a prix-fixe three-course tasting menu at the city's may fine-dining establishments for only \$30. ●

P

HILLY CHEESESTEAK

Master chef Geoffrey Zakarian's upscale take on the classic Philadelphia cheesesteak, exclusively for the Water Club

INGREDIENTS FOR 4

- 4 ficelle or small baguette breads split lengthwise
- 1 white onion (thinly sliced)
- 4-5 slices provolone cheese
- 10 slices of cheesesteak cut steak meat
- 1 C. baby arugula leaves
- A little oil for frying

FOR THE VINAIGRETTE:

- 1 Tbsp. red wine vinegar
- 1 Tbsp. blended vegetable oil
- 1 tsp. dried oregano
- 1 tsp. minced fresh oregano
- Salt and ground black pepper

FOR THE CRISPY SHALLOTS:

- 3-4 shallots (thinly sliced on a mandoline)
- Canola oil for frying

FOR THE VINAIGRETTE:
In a stainless steel mixing bowl, combine the oreganos, vinegar, oil, salt, and ground black pepper. Reserve chilled until serving.

FOR THE ONIONS:
Bring to 260 degrees a deep pan with about 1.5 inches of pure canola oil. Carefully lower the shallots into the oil and fry until golden brown. Carefully remove from oil onto a papered tray and season with salt and pepper. Allow to crisp.

FOR THE CHEESE STEAK:
Split the bread lengthwise, transfer to sheet pan and bake in preheated 350-degree oven to toast lightly. Next in a large heavy skillet, heat a little oil, and caramelize the sliced onion until soft and lightly brown. Next, add in the steak meat and sauté on high heat to desired doneness. Place the slices of provolone cheese on top of this mixture, allow to melt lightly, then vigorously chop this mixture with the edge of a metal spatula. Next stuff the arugula leaves, into the toasted baguette, then top with the steak mixture. Sprinkle the crisped onions down the length of the cheesesteak, then cut at sharp angles to finish the sandwich, then drizzle the vinaigrette generously all over the sandwich before serving.

