

TABLE TALK

SOGNO...

where dreams come true



story and photos by
LEIGH CORT

In the 1950s, when dining out was a celebration of style, taste and culture, dinner wasn't just a menu of food; it reflected an amalgam of American life.

The story of Italian food in America is fascinating. Spanning over a century influenced by its humble beginnings throughout Italian immigrant communities, it has become a beloved integral part of American culinary culture!

The post WWII era was a turning point when American soldiers from Italy brought back a newfound appreciation of flavors. Its popularity will endure for generations — with current and celebrated restaurateurs paying homage to recipes, ingredients and cooking techniques that are the foundation of Italian-American cuisine.

Many of us can conjure images of red-and-white checkered tablecloths, carafes of chianti and a red sauce card-du-jour of classics like eggplant parmigiana. Sogno in St. Augustine doesn't look anything like this stereotype. While owners Stacy Critelli and Brian Rinehart respect their heritage of families and careers, they have created a contemporary high-end dining room and dazzling speakeasy-inspired bar that would rival any trattoria from New York City to Milan!

"We designed a space where we, and our guests, feel like family," said Critelli. "My mother and grandmother always set a big Sunday table where everyone was welcome. This is the heartbeat of Brian's family, too. St. Augustine is where we love to welcome our guests who know our door is always open."

With a successful design career in Manhattan, Critelli knew that bringing her favorite antiques, chandeliers, fine art and Waterford glassware to open Sogno in December 2023, was exactly



Sogno owners Brian Rinehart and Stacy Critelli

the "dream" she imagined.

For Rinehart, whose illustrious restaurant-and-spirits career was grounded in the "who's who" of international guests and celebrities from his early years at Tavern on the Green, Sogno weaves together all his top-tier experiences in service and training. Within moments of naming their restaurant, what could be more ideal than Sogno (Italian for dream)!

Sogno creates a sense of belonging, as it ranks high with guests who enjoy knowledgeable service and classic food preparations with a unique interpretation, reminding you of eating in mama's dining room. Seeing Critelli and Rinehart throughout dinner caring for guests along with the staff is an important facet of dining out today.

In a world of chain restaurants and absentee owners it's comforting to meet proprietors who enjoy delighting their "family." Note: Don't be shy about tucking the dinner napkin into your collar. Your server will recognize how much you appreciate keeping traditions alive at Sogno.



Mediterranean sea bass

With a robust wine list, Critelli loves to recommend her favorites that are part of the furnishings of the dining room. Warm crusty bread is a treat that pairs well if you begin your evening with Meatballs Al Forno richly dressed in espagnole sauce or Mussels Arrabbiata sautéed with spicy tomato sauce (one can't get enough of the grilled sourdough)! The Vegetarian Flatbread created with seasonal vegetables and house-made pesto is worthy of a weekly visit!

What Italian bistro doesn't prize their Melon & Prosciutto Salad or Caprese Burrata Salad with a parmesan tuile? This healthy course evolves into a beautiful entrée when adding salmon, chicken or shrimp.

With a dozen entrees to consider, it's refreshing to not be overwhelmed with a volume of selections. For hearty appetites, classic Chicken Parmesan served over capellini is unpretentious and savory; the presentation of Osso Bucco pork shank served over pappardelle in a rich tomato sauce is another culinary treasure.

Sogno's Linguine and Clams prepared

CONTINUED ON PAGE 37 ■



Sogno's Linguine and Clams

SOGNO

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 34

with whole and chopped clams swimming in a light seafood broth is a "law" for any visit, and gossip is swirling about Seafood Cioppino, a pescatarian delight with mussels, shrimp, clams and fresh seasonal white fish.

If a whole fish steals your heart, the grilled Mediterranean sea bass stuffed with fresh rosemary and lemon served with tricolor potatoes

and sauteed spinach takes first place!

Classic desserts are offered (cheesecake, tiramisu, cannoli) but it's the dark coffee and popular cappuccino that might be the finale with a vintage cordial.

So, whether it's a romantic Italian dinner for two or a family celebration, Rinehart and Critelli are saving a seat for you at their favorite family table with a story. That's part of the dream; they make guests feel like elite family every night!

PURPLE OLIVE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 36

accents reminiscent of well-oiled ships, mermaid motifs, pearly lights and intricate palm tree wallpaper.

Guests were served delicious small bites as they continued their conversations which included black bean burger sliders, shredded chicken and tofu tacos, house salads in a cup and mini brie tarts. The mango shrimp was a particular hit. As the night wound down, guests explored the nearly renovated restaurant past the bar, which so far contains lovely wood accents and walls painted a serene seafoam-green that is cohesive with the theme.

Chef and owner Peter Kenney and the Purple

Olive staff outdid themselves in creating a lovely dining experience for guests and welcoming in a new era of Purple Olive, which is set to open this fall. Locals and visitors alike have a lot to look forward to.



Coastal Casual AT ITS BEST

Specializing in coastal southern cuisine, *Barbara Jean's On The Water* is a favorite among locals and visitors alike, conveniently located in Ponte Vedra Beach and offering picturesque views of the Intracoastal Waterway.



VOTED PONTE VEDRA'S BEST OF THE BEST 6 YEARS IN A ROW

(904) 280-7522 | 15 South Roscoe Blvd, Ponte Vedra Beach | BarbaraJeansOnTheWater.com