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Secret Ingredient

LOCAL CHEF SCOTT VARRICCHIO IS DRIVEN BY A PASSION FOR COMMUNITY AND CUISINE

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY KELLY ROGERS

“If you get up in the morning and you get to go to work, that’s a good thing. If you have to go to work, change what you do for work.” That’s good advice from Scott Varricchio, executive chef and owner of Citrus, who changed what he does for work several times in a career shaped by creativity in the face of adversity, a constant hunger for learning, and enduring friendships.

When a motorcycle accident ended his dream of becoming a professional golfer, a friend stepped in with a job in his manufacturing and engineering company. When the desire to do something new struck 12 years later, Varricchio called another friend who was making a name for himself as a chef in Manhattan. Tom Valenti invited him to work in his kitchen to see how he liked it, and Varricchio has never looked back. Describing his 15-hour days and seven-day work weeks in some of the country’s most elite restaurants, he says, “I couldn’t think of doing anything else. I really, really love what I do.”

Citrus opened in 2010, and Varricchio credits his success running a restaurant to his experience as executive sous chef at Ouest in Manhattan. When terrorists struck on 9/11, he was instrumental in the formation of Windows of Hope to help the families of the restaurant workers who lost their lives that



Chef Scott Varricchio opened his restaurant, Citrus, near Humiston Park in 2010.

day. As Valenti shifted his attention to running the new foundation, Varricchio took on additional responsibilities managing Ouest.

Today, Varricchio describes himself as an ingredient-driven chef. “When you have great ingredients,” he says, “you don’t have to do a lot to them.” Citrus reflects both the sophistication of his New York City style and the comfortable vibe of a quiet beach town. “It’s a convivial place,” he says, “where you can have a burger or a piece of Japanese beef” and interact with the cooks in the open kitchen as your meal is prepared.

When a fire forced the closing of the restaurant in 2018, Varricchio was determined to reopen, and to make the restaurant even

better. “If I were to put the same menu down, that would be a fail,” he says. To that end, he spent some of his downtime working unpaid internships to learn from great chefs (unheard of for a chef of his stature), including one at the prestigious French Laundry in San Francisco. “It rejuvenated my career,” he says.

Varricchio isn’t sure where his love of cooking came from, but he remembers watching his newly widowed grandmother standing at the stove, nurturing the people who had come to comfort her. “Food is the one thing that everybody that walks this planet has in common,” he says. “And for me as a chef, it’s a way to express my gratitude for coming to support the restaurant.”

Burrata & Peaches

SERVES 2

Summer is the time for stone fruits, and this simple dish lets the fruit shine.

2 oz. almonds, walnuts, or pecans

Olive oil, for drizzling

Sea salt to taste

2 oz. baby arugula

Vanilla balsamic vinegar (Carminé & Lucia’s) for dressing

4 oz. burrata (at room temperature)

2 fresh peaches, cut into wedges

1 tsp. chopped chives

Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.

In a mixing bowl, add nuts, drizzle with olive oil, and sprinkle with sea salt. Lay nuts out on a cookie sheet and place in oven for 8 minutes. Remove, let cool, and crush.

In a mixing bowl, add the arugula and lightly dress with vanilla balsamic and salt. Place half on each serving plate.

Tear burrata into bite-size pieces and place on top of the arugula. Lightly dress with the balsamic and sea salt.

Slice peaches and lay on top of the burrata; again lightly dress.

Add crushed nuts around the plate, drizzle the plate with olive oil and a little more of the vinegar, and sprinkle with fresh chives.



Grilled Spiedie Chicken Caesar Salad

SERVES 4-6

“Spiedie” is a riff on spiedini, Italian for “skewers.” The dish is a summertime picnic staple originating in upstate New York. Typically, the grilled meat is pulled off a skewer with a piece of Italian bread to make a quick sandwich. Varricchio’s version moves the meat to the center of the plate for a grilled Caesar salad.

Chicken

1-2 lbs. chicken breast (boneless, skinless is fine)

Marinade (see opposite)

3 hearts of romaine (grilled or ungrilled) and cut in half

1 dozen cherry or baby heirloom tomatoes, cut in half

1-2 baguettes for croutons (or use premade)

Caesar dressing (see opposite)

Grated Parmesan for garnish

In a covered dish in the refrigerator, marinate the chicken for at least 12 hours.

When ready to prepare, preheat grill using medium heat.

Remove chicken from refrigerator, let sit for 5 minutes, season with salt, and grill until done.

Alternatively, bake at 350 degrees Fahrenheit for 15 minutes or until cooked through.

Marinade

1 cup canola oil

1 cup red wine vinegar

Zest & juice of 1 lemon

4 garlic cloves, smashed

1 tbsp. dry thyme

1 tbsp. dry oregano

1 tbsp. dry basil

1 tbsp. sugar

1 tbsp. salt

1 tbsp. crushed peppercorns

1 tbsp. red pepper flakes

Combine all ingredients and stir well.

Herbed Croutons

Olive oil for drizzling

Salt to taste

Dried thyme to taste

Oregano to taste

Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.

Dice baguette into bite-size pieces, place in a mixing bowl, and drizzle with olive oil, salt, and some dried thyme and oregano.

Spread onto a cookie sheet, bake until golden, and reserve.

Caesar Dressing

1/2 cup grated Parmesan

1/4 cup lemon juice

2 garlic cloves

1 tsp. Worcestershire

1/2 cup olive oil (basic)

Salt & pepper to taste

Put all ingredients in a blender except the oil. Slowly drizzle in the oil on medium speed to emulsify. Keep cold.

To plate:

Dress the romaine with the Parmesan dressing and plate, cut-side up. Lightly salt a few of the tomatoes and add to plate.

Slice the grilled chicken, fan out, and place on top of the romaine. Garnish with the grated Parmesan, and serve.



Roasted Tomato Tart with Herbed Goat Cheese & Sambal Aioli

SERVES 6-8

Varricchio makes this tomato tart only when tomatoes are available from Birdie Hogan Farm, a local fourth-generation family farm. “Best tomatoes I ever had in my life,” he says. This involved recipe is not for the faint of heart!

Tomatoes

- 3 oz. extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- 8-10 hothouse tomatoes, washed
- 2 oz. sherry vinegar
- 1 small onion, sliced thin
- 1 garlic clove, sliced thin

- Sherry caramel (see below)
- Puff pastry sheet, frozen
- Sambal vinaigrette (see below)
- Herbed goat cheese (see below)
- Pam nonstick spray

Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.
 Pour 1 oz. of the olive oil onto a cookie sheet and spread by hand. Sprinkle pan with salt and pepper.
 Slice the tomatoes into about 1/2-inch slices and lay on the sheet. Season with salt, pepper, olive oil, and 1 oz. sherry vinegar.
 Spread sliced onion and garlic over tomato slices.
 Bake 20 minutes until everything just begins to color. Remove and let cool.

Sherry Caramel

- 1 cup sugar
 - 1/2 cup water
 - 1 oz. sherry vinegar
 - 1 cup heavy cream at room temperature
- In a saucepan over high heat, add sugar and water and bring to a boil. When it starts to turn color, whisk in the cream and sherry vinegar very slowly. This process will take 20-40 minutes, depending on the heat of the stove. **Caution:** Adding the cream can be dangerous, as it involves steam and possible hot caramel spatter that can cause burns.
 Set aside to cool, at least 1 hour.

Sambal Vinaigrette

- 2 oz. sambal oelek (chili paste)
 - 6 oz. olive oil
 - Juice and zest of 4 lemons
- Combine all ingredients in a bowl and whisk together.
 Keep cold.

Herbed Goat Cheese

- 6 oz. goat cheese at room temperature
 - 2 oz. cream cheese at room temperature
 - 2 oz. heavy cream
 - 1 tbsp. chopped chives
 - 5-6 sprigs fresh thyme, leaves picked
- Place all ingredients in an electric mixing bowl with a paddle attachment and combine.
 Put the cheese mixture into a pastry bag and refrigerate immediately. Remove from refrigerator 30 minutes prior to use.

Equipment needed:

- 4 oz. aluminum cupcake tins
- Ring mold the same diameter as the tins
- Plastic or cloth pastry piping bag

Assemble the tarts:

With ring mold, cut puff pastry rounds and bake according to package instructions.
 Spray the cupcake tins with Pam. Add a teaspoon of the sherry caramel.
 Layer tomato slices to the top of the tin.
 Bake tomatoes in tins for 20-25 minutes at 350 degrees Fahrenheit.
 Drizzle serving plate with sambal vinaigrette. Invert the tarts on the plate and top with puff pastry.
 Pipe goat cheese on top of the tart and serve warm. 🌿

