

ADVERT

Rampoldi Monte-Carlo

By NICOLE RUSKELL

Respecting tradition and innovating classics



Just off the famed Place du Casino, Rampoldi is a Monaco institution, serving up an elegant selection of Italian and French cuisine since 1946. Stepping into the restaurant is like being transported to Old Hollywood, with red marble walls and a gorgeous gold chandelier. One might expect to see Grace Kelly seated with her glamorous co-stars in one of the corner booths. But despite the elegant décor of a bygone era, there is nothing old-fashioned about Rampoldi.

For a restaurant whose clientele has dined for generations, including the Grimaldis, the classic favourites can't be missed: countryside escargots with truffle puree, foie gras, vitello tonnolato and their house specialty Rampoldi Bouillabaisse. Chef Antonio Salvatore keeps the authentic traditional favourites but breathes fresh new life into them.

At only 31 years old, this young chef has had quite a career. Starting out in Rome and Milan, he moved on to London, Madrid and even Moscow. He was working for his 'culinary hero' Juan Pablo Felipe at the Michelin started El Chaflán before he was hand-picked to run Semifreddo Mulinazzo in Moscow. He's described as an ambitious perfectionist but when Riviera Insider met with him we found a humble Chef who seamlessly blends modern innovation with his traditional Southern Italian upbringing.

The meal began with an amuse bouche of a mini calzone margherita, a warm pillow of lightly fried dough, filled with the freshest buffalo mozzarella, freshly made tomato sauce and fragrant basil.

The first course was the King crab tartar, a light and refreshing mix of sweet crab meat, with freshly mashed avocado speckled with thick chunks of salmon sashimi and topped with caviar and micro-greens. Served with a side of fresh gazpacho, light pink in colour from the heirloom tomatoes and delicately poured by the server. This dish is a fresh, contemporary addition to the menu and the perfect ode to summer.

After the crab came an enormous piece of walnut and pistachio encrusted foie gras: tender, delicately flavoured and perfectly cooked. Served alongside fresh fruit, a nib of chèvre and toasted brioche and walnut bread. The sweet peach, tart berries and candied cedro peel gave a delightfully sweet and tart combination. The next course was of my choosing – seafood, meat, or pasta. Given my hankering for some authentic southern Italian pasta, I opted for the latter, hoping to fulfil the void left since my last visit to Sicily. The chef's surprise: spaghetti with shrimp and courgette, an old favourite. This is a dish reminiscent of ratatouille in the sense that it is a very old, simple recipe known as a 'casalinga' or housewife recipe – certainly not haute cuisine. But like the film Ratatouille, when one bite transported the critic to his childhood, his pasta transported me. And this is where Rampoldi stands out from the pack.

Chef Salvatore is a skilled chef but he isn't afraid to serve simple comfort food. When he joined me at the table, he admitted that such a dish is often frowned up for its simplicity. "It's not a chef's plate - it's tradition," he said. "Tradition is history and food tells a story." Growing up in a small town in southern Italy, food was a major part of life. "The smell of food filled every alleyway. The women preparing the tomatoes, the smell of wine in September..." This is his history, his humble roots that season all of his creations.

"People come to eat together, to get emotions and experience pleasure," he explained. "I want to provide a clean, warm environment to get to know them and give them pleasure." As if to drive home his point, a customer dressed head-to-toe in Chanel took a seat at the next table and refused the menu, asking instead for the chef's shrimp and courgette pasta. Clearly it's a dish that feeds the soul.

Rampoldi is more than a delicious restaurant in an elegant setting. Downstairs they have a private music lounge and a very special Cigar Lounge where you can sit and enjoy a cigar with a glass of scotch or even eat your entire meal within the humid-lined vault. The kit-

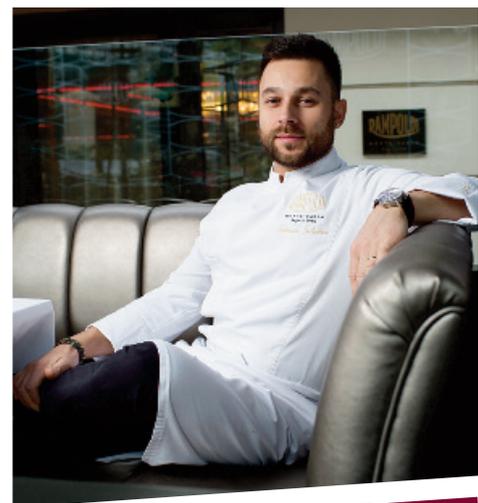


Crab tartar with avocado and salmon

chen is open all day, so if you're working the MYS and need a pick-me-up in the afternoon, stop in for a dessert and coffee – try the molten chocolate cake, the chef's favourite - it's pure decadence served with a scoop of delicate pear and star anise sorbet.

Take home Rampoldi

The Chef has created his own line of fine Italian products from his trusted suppliers, including his own 100% organic olive oil. These can be purchased to bring home or give as gifts. Don't miss his olive oil infused with Menton lemons, a fabulous addition to seafood. ▀



RAMPOLDI

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