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Tuna Crudo from Paul Arias, Executive Chef at The Fishery

Then and NOW

Inspired by the recent social media "10-Year Challenge," local chefs discuss how dishes long in their repertoires have evolved

BY WENDY LEHLIN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY NOUSHIN NOURIZADEH

A few months back, the "10-Year Challenge" was a social media thing, with people on Facebook or Instagram posting throwback photos of themselves from 10+ years ago, comparing "then" and "now." That got me thinking about dishes that chefs have had in their repertoires in one iteration or another for many years, and how those dishes differ now from when they were first created.

In speaking with several chefs, I found that changes were often either in the aesthetics of presentation or in updating ingredients to healthier or trendier options. Sometimes it was a little of both, and sometimes the "then" vs. "now" were reflections of how the chefs had grown in their craft through experience and creative freedom.

Paul Arias, Executive Chef at The Fishery—a talented painter whose culinary artistry is always visually exciting and colorful—cites his Tuna Crudo, with the bright hues of citrus, avocado, pickled Fresno chile and sesame, as an example of how he has modernized his approach to presentation. "In the late 1990s, early 2000s," he explains, "dishes seemed more contrived, often presented in a ring, mold or something similar. I would have done this dish in a layered tower back then, with all the ingredients stacked together. Now, I take a much more simplified approach, so that each component makes its own statement, each ingredient is its own art form."



Jamaican Jerk Pork Belly from Executive Chef Jason Knibb at NINE-TEN Restaurant & Bar



Seabass in White Wine Sauce and Spinach from Fabio Speziati, owner of Osteria Romantica

Jamaican by birth, NINE-TEN Restaurant & Bar's Executive Chef, Jason Knibb, has long had his Jamaican Jerk Pork Belly in his repertoire, but like Arias, his style of plating has also been influenced by changing culinary trends. "These days, I think the whole visual presentation is more straightforward. For a while, everyone was using square plates and arranging the components as duos and trios, and the pork belly would have been cut into little bites and scattered around the plate," Knibb remembers. "But now I'm much more likely to design from the center of the plate, and I leave the meat intact, in one piece. I've also updated the other ingredients, adding habanero pepper jelly, baby carrots, black eyed peas, plantains and yam puree."

For Fabio Speziati, owner of Osteria Romantica, the changes have reflected an increased desire to expand diners' appreciation of the many nuances of Italian flavors. In talking about his Seabass in White Wine Sauce and Spinach, he points out, "Years ago, most of the dishes we served—and what people thought of as 'Italian food'—were made with heavier tomato sauces. But these days, along with those traditional favorites, there's an emphasis on lighter eating, and we want to showcase the wide variety of authentic Italian cuisine. So we have introduced many dishes that emphasize a more modern, ingredient-focused approach to the cuisine, such as this dish made with local seabass, where the



Duck Confit Bread Pudding from Alex Emery, Executive Chef at The MED Oceanview Restaurant

subtler white wine sauce shows off the delicate fish, rather than covering it up.”

In the old-school standard—given a fresh new-life department, Alex Emery, Executive Chef at The MED Oceanview Restaurant, says of his savory Duck Confit Bread Pudding, “I wanted to update the classic duck confit, which I learned back in culinary school and have served on many menus over the years. With this current dish, I created a much more modern interpretation for our spring menu, one which still pays homage to a long-time favorite flavor, but gives it an updated makeover in texture and presentation. The tender pieces of shredded confit duck are mixed into the sourdough and brioche bread pudding, highlighted with a tarragon sauce, and the plate is made festive with bright accents of apple geleé, apple butter dots and tangerine segments.”

At The Marine Room, Executive Chef Bernard Guillas has also taken a popular standby—in this case, rack of lamb—and modernized it as Red Walnut Rack of Lamb accompanied by boucheron spoonbread, violet mustard, pickled local vegetables and red Lillet thyme jus. “This is totally different from how I prepared rack of lamb in the past,” Chef Bernard says. “The meat is plated as three beautiful chops roasted with local red walnuts, and I’ve focused on vegetables that are seasonally available locally. As I’ve evolved as a chef, I’ve learned more over the years about flavor profiles and how to use ingredients available in our own region for optimum flavor and freshness, and this dish exemplifies that.”



Red Walnut Rack of Lamb from Executive Chef Bernard Guillas at The Marine Room