

Double down

Iridescence a sure bet at MotorCity Casino

BY ELEANOR HEALD
SPECIAL WRITER

Restaurants with high-profile chefs are the current vying draw at Las Vegas casinos. Detroit's casino scene is not Las Vegas, yet one of its restaurants, Iridescence in the MotorCity Casino, has pizzazz. Don't get hung up on the name. Iridescence just sounded hip and cool to owners of the Detroit Entertainment Group, owners of MotorCity Casino. They are the experienced Las Vegas Mandalay Bay folks that count 21 other properties with restaurants among their holdings. Experience backs all the panache at Iridescence.

Open now for just over four months, with Executive Chef Michael Russell, Certified Master Chef, at the helm, everything at Iridescence, from waitstaff to menu, vibrates to much the same harmonic — your dining pleasure. Chef Russell, a Rochester Hills

resident, may not have Las Vegas celebrity chef priority, but his credentials are the best in the business. In 1966, he graduated with high honors from the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y. In 1988, he became a Certified Master Chef, the highest level of achievement in the American Culinary Federation. He is one of only 64 Certified Master Chefs in the U.S. and one of six in Michigan.

Each year, only 12 chefs qualify to take the 10-day, 16 hours-per-day test to earn Certified Master Chef status. Test failure rate is 80 percent.

Chef Russell was a member of the World Champion 1988 U.S. Culinary Olympic team and team captain for the 1992 Culinary Olympics. He has won 38 gold medals in international culinary competition.

As Executive Chef at some of metro-Detroit's most prestigious

Iridescence
Where: 2001 Grand River (in MotorCity Casino), Detroit (313) 237-7711.
Open: Dinner only from 5 p.m. to midnight daily.
Menu: Stylized, generously-portioned American cuisine with unique Asian twists.
Cost: Main courses \$28-59.
Reservations: Recommended.
Credit cards: All majors.
Parking: Use valet and enter through the casino.
Beverages: Full service bar and stellar wine list.

clubs, including most recently, Bloomfield Open Hunt, he supervised a staff of 17. At MotorCity Casino, he oversees a culinary staff of 368, for not only Iridescence, but the gigantic kitchen serving all six casino eateries.

While Chef Russell won't be pinned down to a food style at Iridescence, he does admit that the Asian influence of his most creative and artistic dishes stems from a Navy tour of duty in Vietnam.

"I've changed the menu since we opened," he said. "We had a number of great dishes on the first menu, but they were not as popular as we expected."

In addition to doing more Asian-inspired, I've added such items as a 22-ounce lobster tail and a 20-ounce Char-grilled aged New York strip steak. We've ordered equipment to start tableside preparation of some menu items in May.

Plate artistry for appetizers such as Trio of Chilled hot Vietnamese spring rolls and Hunan shrimp is spectacular. The Medley of fresh crab meats, napped with sweet pea beurre blanc and

fire-roasted red pepper coulis is exquisite. Flavor of jasmine rice in the piping hot lobster, truffle and sweet corn chowder is exotic.

Braised barbecued short ribs of beef "Bonanza" is the exceptional main course that won the Gold Medal at the Culinary World Cup for the U.S. Culinary Team. Pan seared chicken sea bass is laced with fresh horseradish glaze and finished with a touch of wasabi cream and crispy leak threads. It is accompanied by stone ground polenta with unusual texture.

It's the textural element that makes so many of Chef Russell's dishes a cut above.

Desserts

The Iridescence experience is incomplete without one of Pastry Chef Taris Hanna's desserts. Hanna is an Oakland Community College culinary grad, who professes to be "self-taught" when it comes to desserts.

He must also have an architectural bent to create "Kaboom," a large dark chocolate cone filled with a trio of chocolate mousse standing upright and casting its shadow in cocoa on the plate. Finished with a medley of assorted berries, it is a treat for the eyes as well as the palate.

Key Lime Napoleon beats any key lime pie you've ever had.

Carrying through the subtle Asian theme of some of Chef Russell's dishes is Hanna's "Blintz Box" in which one finds a selection of Hanna's signature desserts (including a mini Kaboom), tastefully arranged in a Japanese bento box.

Iridescence spells posh, yet clubby. Warm wood dividers act as sound barriers between dining sections. Prevailing bronze tones are accented by black. Each table or booth is subtly highlighted by small ceiling spots.



Culinary mastery: Certified Master Chef Michael Russell presents his Medley of Fresh Crabmeats napped with sweet pea beurre blanc and fire-roasted red pepper coulis.

Diners, comfortable in tuxedo, business suit, or upscale casual dress enjoy new-age downtown Detroit dining. Slots and gaming tables are not the only reason to make MotorCity Casino a destination.

Eleanor Heald is a Troy resident who writes about dining, food and wine for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. To leave her a voice mail message, dial (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1864.



Winning dessert: Key Lime Napoleon beats the best Key Lime Pie.

Tribute chef earns tribute

BY ELEANOR HEALD
SPECIAL WRITER

This month, *Food & Wine* announced the winners of the magazine's 13th annual Best New Chefs Awards.

Those who've dined at Tribute in Farmington Hills will not be surprised to learn that Executive Chef Takashi Yagihashi was on the list of 10.

What is surprising is that Takashi, as he's affectionately called, joined an elite group of chefs from such food meccas as New York, Chicago, Miami Beach, Providence and Newport Beach. Always crediting his kitchen staff for his success, Takashi's French-inspired dishes with an Asian twist have brought recognition to the fine dining scene in metro-Detroit.

'Food & Wine' magazine's annual selection spotlights the most exciting young culinary talents in the country today.

Food & Wine magazine's annual selection spotlights the most exciting young culinary talents in the country today. Winners are chosen by the magazine's editors through an exhaustive nationwide research process.

Takashi's culinary journey from a small town 100 miles from Tokyo, where he had his first experience as a dishwasher in a French restaurant at age 16, is an inspiration in determination.

After graduating from the Tokyo Design School in 1981, he

came to America to assist with the opening of a Japanese restaurant outside Chicago. Believing the opportunity to combine various styles and cooking techniques, impossible in Japan where tradition rules, he spent the next 17 years working under some of the finest European and Asian chefs in the U.S.

Having risen to Chef de Cuisine at Chicago's famed restaurant Ambría, he came to launch Tribute in 1990 as its executive chef.

The Best New Chefs of 2000 will cook together for the first time in June when they prepare a meal for 800 guests at the Food & Wine Magazine Classic in Aspen, Colo. They will be featured in the magazine's July issue.

RESTAURANT SPECIALS

Send dinner specials, menu changes, restaurant renovations, and other items to *Kesly Wygonik*, Assistant Food & Wine Editor, *Features* group, *Observer Newspapers*, 36261 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48160. To fax, (734) 591-7270 or e-mail kwygonik@home.com.net.

Students — what restaurants do you recommend for your night? If you're a restaurant owner, and are planning a special menu for Mother's Day, let us know. Send, fax or e-mail your dining suggestions and menus to *Wygonik* for consideration in an upcoming dining feature.

La Bistrotta Italian Grille — offers live jazz featuring Larry Nozoro and Friends, starting at 7:30 p.m. on the first Monday of every month. Piano bar 7-11 p.m. Wednesday, Thursday, and 8 p.m. to midnight Friday, Saturday. Enjoy your favorite

tunes performed by Michael James and Deborah Jimmerson. The restaurant, which specializes in Piedmontese Beef, is at 39405 Plymouth Road, Plymouth. Call (734) 254-0400 for reservations/information.

Share our Strength — You can satisfy your appetite and help fill up the wallets of needy organizations at the same time. The Somerset Collection South in Troy presents the Share Our Strength's 2000 Taste of the Nation Dinner at 6 p.m. Sunday, May 7.

Tickets are \$75 and 100 percent of all ticket sales go to the fight against hunger.

Money raised will also "seed" a fresh produce rescue program.

It's hard to imagine a child's lunch without a piece of fruit or dinner without vegetables, yet in Michigan nearly 30 percent of

children under age 12 are hungry or at risk. In Oakland County, a county which boasts one of the country's highest per capita incomes, 6.2 percent of the population live below the poverty line.

Detroit's Taste of the Nation culinary chair Jim Barnett will bring together more than 35 of the metro area's top chefs to participate in the nation's largest culinary benefit.

Wine chair and master sommelier Madeline Triffon has procured some exquisite wines. Live music entertainment also will be provided. Participating restaurants and colleges include Diamond Jim Brady's, Duet, Schoolcraft College, and Sweet Lorraine's.

Tickets can be purchased by calling Cleaners Food Bank at (313) 923-3935.

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