

# Philadelphia where now

The savvy traveler's guide to finding fun in Philadelphia

## CHEF TALK

### Culinary Excellence

It's hard to determine whether Philadelphia chefs helped raised the city's national profile or the city's rising national profile put the spotlight on local chefs. But, whichever came first, there's no doubt you're seeing more Philly cooks than ever competing on TV competitions, smiling from the pages of glossy food magazines, hosting culturally rich documentaries or being interviewed by Anthony Bourdain. It's an exciting time for these hometown chefs, who fortunately, are as culinarily talented as they are telegenic.

BY ADAM ERACE



Eggplant Dish from Zahav

→ Philadelphia

(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) COURTESY OF THE VETRI FAMILY; ©MICHAEL SPAIN SMITH; ©STEVE LEGATO; ©CHRISTOPHER GABELLO; ©DANIEL KREIGER (PREVIOUS SPREAD) COURTESY OF COOK N SOLO



Marc Vetri

#### Marc Vetri

When Mario Batali says your restaurant is the best Italian spot on the East Coast, people notice. That's what happened to Marc Vetri, one of Philly's best known and most acclaimed chefs. Since opening his eponymous trattoria in 1998, Vetri and his longtime business partner Jeff Benjamin expanded their company to include Osteria, Amis, Alla Spina, Lo Spiedo and Pizzeria Vetri, which is on a fast expansion track thanks to last year's buy-out of the empire by Urban Outfitters. Vetri (the restaurant) remains the exempt, and it's where you can still find Vetri (the chef) cooking dishes like Swiss chard gnocchi, porchetta with stone fruit and seared scallops with truffled corn crema.



Jose Garces

#### Jose Garces

Jose Garces stormed on the Philly dining scene when he opened Amada in 2005. The chef had a singular vision of sangria and flamenco that resonated with diners and eventually led to a restaurant empire. Food Network projected Garces into the spotlight during a victorious turn on Next Iron Chef. Today, you can get a taste of his talent at local restaurants like Distrito in University City, Village Whiskey in Center City and The Olde Bar in Old City.



Jose Garces

#### Kevin Sbraga

Philly is home to plenty of Top Chef talent, but Kevin Sbraga is the original. Jersey native Sbraga was cooking at Stephen Starr's Rats restaurant in the Garden State while the seventh season of the Bravo hit aired. After becoming the unlikely champ and a household name, the chef opened his self-titled restaurant on Broad Street, followed by Southern smash the Fat Ham (credited with bringing Nashville-style hot chicken to Philly). Sbraga's latest venture is a second Fat Ham at the King of Prussia Mall, which opened this fall.

#### Michael Solomonov

Michael Solomonov came up in the kitchen of Marc Vetri, but now, the chef of Israeli sensation Zahav is often rightly credited for igniting America's new obsession for Middle Eastern cooking, along with his business partner, Steve Cook. Solomonov and Cook now run a bunch of restaurants, including Abe Fisher, hummus hot spot Dizengoff, which just opened a location in New York, and Federal Donuts, the fried chicken-and-donut shop also in expansion mode to Nashville. The duo's cookbook, "Zahav: A World of Israeli Cooking," won 2016 James Beard awards for cookbook of the year and international cookbook, and Solomonov is currently the host of the new documentary "In Search of Israeli Cuisine."



Michael Solomonov

#### Nicholas Elmi

A few years after Kevin Sbraga won Top Chef, Collingswood, New Jersey resident and former Le Bec-Fin chef, Nicholas Elmi gave Philly a repeat victory. A dark horse in the competition, Elmi had opened his intimate restaurant, Laurel, on East Passyunk a few months before the show's finale, leading to rabid speculation that he'd be crowned the victor. Three years later, Laurel has gone tasting menu only and remains one of the most in demand tables in town, and just this past summer Elmi debuted ITV next door. The wine bar, featuring a fantastic selection of offbeat bottles by resident sommelier Heather Thompson, is a joyride of a la carte plates like prawns glossed in yuzu kosho butter, dry-aged beef fat biscuits and hay-stuffed fried poussin.



Nicholas Elmi