

TABLE HOPPING

By Michelle Payer | Photographs by Ricardo Mejia



CLOCKWISE:
14 oz. New
York strip with
rosemary potatoes,
cherry tomatoes and
elephant garlic; burrata,
watermelon and mint; Chef
Hugo Martinez; the beautiful
dining room at AQ Chop House.



Raising **THE** Steaks

For more than a decade, locals have stepped into another world at the Sunny Isles outpost of famed Il Mulino New York, a Greenwich Village mainstay known for its authentic Italian cuisine. Its rich furnishings, opulent surroundings and attentive, tuxedoed waiters hearken back to another era of gentility and relaxed elegance to create a clubby atmosphere for the world's well-traveled.

Now, in a fresh interpretation of its Italian roots, Il Mulino owner and executive chef Michele Mazza and Acqualina Resort and Spa have opened AQ Chop House as a modern steakhouse with an Italian flavor. Enter through the hotel's front doors, beneath chandeliers and carved sconces, into a glamorous, glass-enclosed rotunda reminiscent of Versailles's Petite Trianon interior.

Il Mulino opens
AQ Chop House
inside the glamorous
Acqualina Resort & Spa.





ABOVE: Grilled octopus, orange and fennel. RIGHT: Tuna tartare with wasabi and capers.

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Though far less formal than Marie Antoinette's retreat, it's the floor-to-ceiling windows, muted French-blue curtains, gilded millwork details and gold leaf wall treatments that lend an air of grandeur, though the atmosphere within is decidedly relaxed.

Settle into the warm blue chenille seating and peruse the dinner menu for what are some arguably unforgettable selections, including a spectacular Steak Filet Tartare with egg and truffle that is as good as any you'll find in Paris. Appetizer highlights include AQ Sheeps milk Ricotta with sea salt and extra-virgin olive oil, Branzino Crudo with blood orange and frisée, Grilled Octopus with orange and fennel, and Tuna Tartare with wasabi and capers. Main courses stay true to a traditional chop house with a variety of steaks (filet mignon, bone-in ribeye and New York Strip—all grilled to perfection), lamb chops and, for anyone craving a burger, a 10-ounce Chop House burger. Try the selection of sauces, including horseradish cream or the fan favorite Barolo, made with the flavorful red wine. Pastas include a rich (but not-to-be-missed) Short Rib Ravioli with sage and butter and Taglierini Cacio e Pepe prepared with Romano cheese. Make a night of it and enjoy a cocktail in the AQ Chop House lounge, which sits a few steps above the restaurant and is the ideal vantage point from which to enjoy its sleek design, soaring porthole windows and an exquisitely refurbished 1930s Deco-style chandelier.

If you're a Sunday brunch person, this is where you should head to indulge in its lavish spread. (Even if you're not a brunch person, you'll be a convert after



tasting the exquisite variety of meats, seafood and the richest gelato outside of Rome.) As our delightful server, Simone, advised, "Brace yourselves and pace yourselves," and her suggestion was spot-on. For \$65 per person, guests are privy to unlimited Bloody Marys, Mimosas, Prosecco and Mojitos, grilled filet mignon and salmon carving stations, a seafood station with massive lobster tails, shrimp cocktail, raw oysters and smoked salmon, a selection of European and American cheeses, Zak the Baker breads, pasta stations and so much more. Simone cheerfully guided us through the cornucopia of riches, brought fresh cocktails before we knew we wanted them, and tended to guests as though they were family. Complete with live music, and outdoor dining should one wish to overlook the ocean, Sunday brunch is available from noon to 4 p.m. 🍷

AQ Chop House serves dinner every evening from 5:30 to 10 p.m. and is located inside Acqualina Resort & Spa, 17875 Collins Ave., Sunny Isles Beach. For reservations, call 305.466.9191.