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The Traditional Yet Unexpected Cuisine of Michele Mazza

The Chef behind the Il Mulino brand and his second venture with Miami's Acqualina Resort

BY ALEXANDRA WENSLEY

Michele Mazza is a man whose existence is defined by the pursuit of the ultimate in Italian food. Born outside of Naples into a family of bakers and restaurateurs, it was inevitable that he landed in the kitchen from a young age. He has many fond memories of rolling handmade pasta and cutting vegetables in the kitchen with his grandmother. Few of us have the luck of knowing what we want to do in life. However, Mazza was blessed in this case. His "a-ha!" moment struck him at age 15 when he knew, beyond a doubt, that he wanted to dedicate his life to becoming a chef. The fact that he walked through the doors of Il Mulino New York at the tender age of 18, thus, was nearly preordained. The rest, as we say, is history.

Mazza has been at the helm of the Il Mulino brand of restaurants for more than 15 years. Described as a divine and sublime experience, Il Mulino never fails to exceed expectations. Toasted yet fluffy bruschetta under the weight of



Chef Michele Mazza

succulent and slightly spiced fresh tomatoes and zucchini rounds delicately fried in such a light manner that your hand incessantly reaches for more. Let us not forget the crown jewel of Il Mulino - the ravioli porcini gliding in melting, buttery champagne truffle cream sauce. To Italians, food is not just fuel for the body. It is fuel for life.

The original Il Mulino location in New York was naturally such a runaway success that there are now 16 distinguished restaurants located around the world led by the charismatic and jovial Mazza. Mazza spearheads the exciting culinary concepts and has hit it out of the park again with AQ Chop House by Il Mulino in Miami's Sunny Isles Beach at the Five-Star, Five Diamond Acqualina Resort & Spa.

Its partnership with Acqualina Resort began more than a decade ago with the opening of Il Mulino New York in Sunny Isles. "Every day is beautiful in Acqualina, being directly on the water fronting the Atlantic Ocean. I spend a lot of time enjoying the people and culture. I am excited about our second restaurant in Acqualina," he told *International Opulence*.

As the ultra-luxury property attracts a mix of hotel guests from around the world, residents who live at the resort year-round and locals from all over South Florida, Mazza was challenged with creating a menu that complemented the resort's dining offerings and where guests could dine three to four times a week. The result is a menu that highlights the resort's Mediterranean heritage with approachable cuisine. "It's our take on a modern



steakhouse with Italian flavors that everyone loves. The seafood is amazing, the ricotta is unbelievable...it is all good." Think delicious jumbo crab cakes, Branzino crudo with blood orange, beautiful salads, grilled fish and prime dry-age meats. "For spices, we use all fresh herbs. We use a lot of rosemary, a lot of fresh basil, garlic, shallots. We use all the best greens. The tuna is sushi-grade and the octopus is grilled nice and charred - it's delicious."

On Sundays, AQ Chop House offers the perfect brunch where you can sip endless mimosas on the restaurant's outdoor terrace overlooking the cerulean blue sea. From made-to-order omelets, homemade breads

and pasta dishes to a raw bar and action stations, this buffet spread has it all.

The moment guests arrive to AQ Chop House their eyes will be instantly drawn to the colossal 1930s Art Deco style chandelier that hangs from the soaring ceiling. The sweeping ocean views and natural sunlight pouring in through the majestic floor-to-ceiling windows shed light on the handmade walnut dining tables and plush seating. The natural elements of the earth and ocean are drawn into the restaurant with subtle tones of the white and Grey terrazzo floors set against a backdrop of hand painted gold millwork details, gold leaf wall treatments and pops of warm blue chenille fabrics. Inspired by a

throwback to mid-century European design, the space delightfully blends the quieter style of 19th century Italian classicism and the bold, modern designs of the 1970s.

"It's one of the most charming dining rooms in the city and it definitely helped inspire the food. I strongly believe that the food and service are equally important. From the moment customers walk through our doors, we make them feel truly special. I am proud of the team and what we have created here. Sharing unexpected pleasures at a table together can create and deepen bonds and produce moments of profundity. I invite you to come with your family and friends to go on an experience with us that you will not forget." 🍷