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CHEF'S SPECIAL



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EXECUTIVE CHEF

DIMITRI VOUTSINAS

EMMALINE

Culinary veteran Dimitri Voutsinas is Executive Chef of the highly anticipated Emmaline. In this capacity, he oversees day-to-day kitchen operations and the core menu for the brand-new neighborhood bar and kitchen, which is located in the former Teala's space on West Dallas. Voutsinas made the move from New York City, along with his wife who is originally from Houston, because he saw a great restaurant scene emerging and was eager to be a part of it. Before joining the Emmaline team, Voutsinas spent the last two years as an Executive Chef with the acclaimed La Gamelle restaurant, part of the successful Motorino Restaurant Group in New York City.

How'd you learn to cook?

I started learning from my mother and father when I was a young boy. I would watch and help them in the kitchen regularly. My first job at 12 years old was working in a deli near my house serving feta cheese, olives and sandwiches. Every day, I would fill containers with all the spice from the Mediterranean, learning to roast beef, cure meats and learning about all the cheese. Throughout high school, I always enjoyed working with food and finally decided to go to The French Culinary Institute in NYC. And now here we are.

What's the first recipe you ever mastered?

A Greek dish called the Pastichio that I learned from mother at early age. She would make the most amazing version. It's a cinnamon and clove laden meat sauce, these hollow long noodles and topped with a cheesy nutmeg scented béchamel. You then bake it until nice and golden brown.

What ingredient can you not live without in the kitchen and why?

Good unsalted butter. Toasted bread, potatoes, fish, meat, sauces, baked goods – butter is invaluable and used in almost all my food.

What utensil can you not live without?

My spoons. I have a collection of spoons from over the years that are used for everything. They aren't expensive, usually leftover pieces from restaurant supply houses that cost \$1–\$2. A good, solid spoon with a nice balanced weight can do so much in the kitchen.

Favorite affordable wine?

I have an affinity to French wines, specifically from Alsace. Almost anything under \$30 from that region in France, you can't go wrong.

Favorite place for dessert?

Fluff Bake Bar. Not just for dessert, but anytime. Becky Masson is an amazing Pastry Chef. Everything from there is wonderful.

What is your comfort food?

Any really delicious soup (beef barley, chicken and rice, pork and vegetable, etc., not pureed soup) served with some warm sourdough rye bread and butter.

What would be your last meal?

A classic steak tartare with salad and fries, some warm crusty baguette and a hunk of Reblochon cheese. Throw in a nice glass of Gewurztraminer, and I literally would die a happy man.

What do you see as the next food trend?

I'm not big on trends in the way of poke, or "street food" that is served from a brick and mortar (kind of negates the street aspect). Trends come and go, real cooking and technique is timeless.

Who are your favorite chef, restaurant and dish?

Chef Fortunato Nicotra from Felidia in NYC. Every dish he makes is amazing. Other than his impeccable pastas, the tripa is perfection – braised tripe in tomato with polenta. It's not rubbery and really clean. It's one dish I always think about when I think of NYC.

At home, what do you keep on hand to serve drop-in guests?

I almost always have some kind of charcuterie and good cheeses to put on a plate for surprise guests.

Is there a food you won't eat?

Japanese-style Fermented Squid. I ordered it, everyone said I wouldn't like it, I tried it, I did not like it one bit.

Is there a particular food that is underappreciated? And what would you do to help its reputation?

I have always loved mollusks, specifically the gastropods, and I think people aren't familiar enough with them. Animals like periwinkles, whelks, conch, abalone, etc., are all underappreciated and pretty popular in Asia and Europe already. The only way for the reputation to be helped would be to start serving them. The more chefs and restaurants that start serving these items and in essence "educate" people that they taste amazing, the better the reputation and popularity would become.

What would people be surprised to find in your home refrigerator?

I guess it would be the 50 pounds of cured meat from Cake and Bacon (a baker and cured meat producer in Houston) or Bagoong Alamang, which is a fermented shrimp paste from the Philippines. Usually eaten with Philippine dishes like kare kare, rice with eggs and even green mango.

Photography by Anthony Rathbun