

NAPLES

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WINE
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for the New Year*

DINING
AWARDS
*Restaurants are
surviving & thriving*



LISET ZELAYA, Sea
Salt's sommelier

EDITOR'S PICKS



WOOD-GRILLED BRANZINO AND PRAWN TARTINE (BELOW) AT SAILS

VANESSA ROGERS



VICKI BAKER

BEST SEAFOOD

Sails

At this "pescatarian's haven," which is operated by the husband-and-wife team of Veljko Pavicevic and Corinne Ryan, freshness is an understatement. Fish and shellfish are flown in daily from Europe, with options ranging from Mediterranean dorade to tiger prawns and turbot. Chef de cuisine Darren Velleux and his team will cook your selection to perfection on the wood-fired grill. And no dish is complete without a wine pairing from the restaurant's prodigious list. (sailsrestaurants.com)

Runner-Up: Ocean Prime

If you feel like treating yourself, beat a path to Ocean Prime and order a Smoking Shell-

fish Tower, customized according to your favorites (the smoke is a bit of theater provided by dry ice). If you're not a fan of shellfish, indulge with locally sourced grouper or snapper, Alaskan crab legs, sea scallops, or twin lobster tails. (ocean-prime.com)

BEST COMFORT FOOD

Skillet

Across their nine locations, owners Ross and Noreen Edlund have one simple goal: to serve the best breakfast and lunch in Southwest Florida. They're proponents of the popular Blue Zones diet and offer nearly a dozen approved dishes, including the Power Salad and Mediterranean Wrap (along with traditional favorites like eggs Benedict and

BEST DESSERT

ANGELIC DESSERTS

Not only do the offerings from Angelic Desserts look and taste great, but they're good for you too: organic, non-GMO, made without preservatives and with locally sourced ingredients. There's a comprehensive selection of baked goods (breads, bagels, and croissants) and desserts (cookies, pies, cakes, cupcakes, and irresistible fruit tarts), as well as gluten-free and dairy-free options. They're accompanied by organic coffee and served by a knowledgeable and friendly staff. (angelicdesserts.com)

RUNNER-UP: KILWINS

Kilwins opened in Petoskey, Michigan, in 1947 and began serving high-quality ice cream and chocolates in Naples in 2003. Nearly four dozen flavors of ice cream are made on the premises, as well as single-origin chocolates and caramels cooked in a copper kettle. Don't miss the hand-crafted brittles or the signature Nutcracker Sweets (freshly popped corn, pecans, almonds, and caramel). (kilwins.com)

corned beef hash). They're also deeply involved in local charities such as Change for Children. (skilletrestaurants.com)

Runner-Up: Goldies

Ciro Amato started working in his parents' restaurant at age 12, washing dishes and making pizza. In 1999 he purchased Goldies Restaurant and plunged into the world of all-day breakfast and specialty lunch dishes. Consistency is the watchword here. Try the Ultimate Breakfast for two: four eggs, pancakes or French toast, bacon, sausage, potatoes, biscuits, and gravy. (goldiesrestaurant.com)

BEST RESTAURANT MAKEOVER

Pazzo!

The owner of the Culinary Concepts group, Skip Quillen, presides over two venerable restaurants on Fifth Avenue, Pazzo! and Chops City Grill. In the span of one year, Quillen spent in excess of \$1 million to completely renovate both. "Pazzo! came first," he recalls. "The name



VEGAN CROISSANT, GLUTEN-FREE AND VEGAN DOUGHNUTS, AND THE "ALMOST CROISSANT" AT ANGELIC DESSERTS

means 'crazy' in Italian. I wanted the concept to match the spirit of the place. We now have an atmosphere that is playful, exciting, and fun." (gr8food.net)

Runner-Up: Bistro 821

Chef/owner Jesse Housman bought out his partners last year and embarked on a restaurant overhaul with Catherine Baker of Clive Daniel Home interior design. "I wanted a lighter and brighter color scheme throughout," says Housman. The new decor fits neatly into Housman's cooking philosophy of "Natural Fusion," in which basic French techniques are applied to other cuisines. (bistro821.com)

BEST FOOD TRUCK

Dilly's Seafood

Some seafood is fresh, while other fish and shellfish is literally right off the boat. Dilly is Tim Dillingham, a fisherman's fisherman who is totally committed to a "true, authentic, locally caught product." To maintain quality, he goes out for 14 to 30 hours at a time, in contrast to the five- to six-day runs of most commercial fleets. His catch is featured on the rotating menu at 360 Market and



PAZZO! DINING ROOM AND TAGLIATELLE PISANE (ABOVE)





BAYSIDE SEAFOOD BAR & GRILL OPEN-AIR DINING AREA (LEFT) AND GRILLED SEA SCALLOPS (ABOVE)

MICHAEL CARONCH

Mattson and Marsha Gibbs; Bob's daughter and son-in-law manage the restaurant today. The menu features smoked sausage, pork, beef, and barbecue chicken, any of which can be combined with a half-rack of ribs to make a platter. In the off-season, winter residents can have ribs shipped to them by next-day air. (*michelbobs.com*)

BEST WATERFRONT DINING

Bayside Seafood Grill & Bar

For three decades, Bayside has been serving impeccable seafood, beef, and poultry with a view of Venetian Bay. Executive chef Abel Gonzalez works with the legendary Tony Ridgway to keep the menu fresh and exciting. There's an option for every taste and mood, from the casual downstairs café to the elegant second-floor grill, topped by the upper deck offering cocktails, live music, and quick bites. (*baysideseafoodgrillandbar.com*)

Runner-Up: The Dock at Crayton Cove

Restaurants come and go, but The Dock has thrived since 1976. The menu is an encyclopedia of seafood: everything from fish tacos, Alaskan crab legs, and elaborate seafood towers to the freshest grilled fish and shellfish. You can arrive by boat, but just don't get in the way of the Great Dock Canoe Race, held every year at the end of the season. (*dockcraytoncove.com*)

BEST INTERNATIONAL CUISINE

Bha! Bha! Persian Bistro

When Michael Mir brought his "innovative Persian" cuisine to Naples in 1997, the local dining scene was very different. Mir can be credited with broadening our horizons, and he has maintained his creativity ever since. The menu is an endless series of delights, starting with mango garlic shrimp or flash-fried eggplant in a zesty tomato sauce, and culminating in turmeric-dusted red snapper, exotic treatments of quail and duck, and a series of classic dishes grilled over an open fire. (*bhabhabistro.com*)

Runner-Up: 21 Spices

Chef Asif Syed has introduced the cooking of the Indian subcontinent to our area. A meal at 21 Spices might begin with lobster mulligatawny or crisp samosas, and progress to one of the standout dishes cooked on the tandoori grill. There's a complete selection of vegan and vegetarian items, and no dinner is complete without one of the five varieties of fluffy naan bread. (*21spicesdining.com*)

BEST FOR BLUE ZONES CHOICES

The Local

Chef Jeff Mitchell has been a Naples trailblazer in the quest to use local and sustainable ingredients. Over the years, he has built close relationships with purveyors such as Inyoni Organic Farm, Palmetto Creek, Circle C Farms,

BEST COCKTAIL PROGRAM

SIDEBAR 505

SIDEBAR PAYS HOMAGE TO PROHIBITION-ERA SPEAKEASIES. NO FOOD IS SERVED, AND THE EMPHASIS IS ON UPSCALE SPIRITS AND HARD-TO-FIND WINES (AVAILABLE BY THE GLASS, COURTESY OF THE CORAVIN SYSTEM). SETTLE IN AT THE BAR BEFORE OR AFTER DINNER AND ENJOY A CRAFT COCKTAIL FROM THE SEASONALLY CHANGING MENU, OR LET THE BARTENDERS CUSTOMIZE ONE FOR YOU BASED ON YOUR FAVORITE FLAVORS. THE DECOR IS SLEEK AND COMFORTABLE, AND—TRUE TO ITS SPEAKEASY ROOTS—SIDEBAR IS HARD TO FIND. (THERE'S NO WEBSITE, BUT LOOK FOR IT AT 475 FIFTH STREET SOUTH.)



SIDEBAR COCKTAIL AT SIDEBAR 505

SAMANTHA BLOOM

RUNNER-UP: SAILS

IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT SAILS PUTS AS MUCH EFFORT AND ATTENTION TO DETAIL INTO ITS BAR PROGRAM AS IT DOES WITH EVERYTHING ELSE. CO-OWNER VELJKO PAVICEVIC IS AN AVID COLLECTOR OF DISTINCTIVE WINES AND SPIRITS, AND THE COCKTAIL LIST CONTAINS 14 ORIGINAL CREATIONS THAT WILL FIRE THE IMAGINATION EVEN BEFORE THEY INTRIGUE YOUR PALATE. (*SAILSRESTAURANTS.COM*)

BEST CHEF

Vincenzo Betulia

Like most of us, chefs tend to be defined by—and frequently limited to—their roots. Not so with Vincenzo Betulia. As the proprietor of Osteria Tulia, Bar Tulia, and The French, he is just as comfortable with the butter-based classics of Gallic cuisine as he is with the tomato-inspired dishes of Italy to the south.

Betulia was born in Sicily and immigrated to Wisconsin with his parents at age 2, growing up in a suburb of Milwaukee. He spent his childhood watching his grandmother whip up traditional Sicilian recipes and began working in restaurants at 13. His introduction to fine dining came at Milwaukee's celebrated *Ristorante Bartolotta*, where he worked his way up from prep cook to chef. He also did a stint at *Spiggio* in Chicago and spent nine years as head chef at *Campiello* when he came to Naples.

He has told the story enough times to enshrine it as one of the legends of his career: After work one day at *Campiello*, he found himself across the street from 365 Fifth Avenue South. Betulia took a picture of the building, dreaming of what a perfect location it would be for a restaurant, and indeed it was. Many years later *The French* opened on the same spot, after *Osteria Tulia* and *Bar Tulia* had already established him as one of

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:
CHEF VINCENZO BETULIA
PACKS TO-GO ORDERS
DURING THE PANDEMIC;
BETULIA'S PASTA CON LE
SARDE AND ARANCINE
SICILIANI.



MICHAEL CARONCHI

the area's most authentic craftsmen.

What Betulia has accomplished at *The French* is remarkable. He has recreated a Parisian brasserie down to the smallest detail; it not only looks the same, but the food also tastes the same—if not better, in many cases. There is a lightness of touch in his dishes that is frequently lacking in France, and he applies the classic Italian sensibility of choosing the best ingredients and allowing them to shine through in the execution. While you can find duck leg confit and rotating specials such as cassoulet, there are also feather-light fried squash blossoms, scallop crudo, and one of the most flavorful roast chickens you'll ever encounter.

Chef Betulia was also been committed to the welfare of the community during the COVID-19 pandemic (see "Above and Beyond"). For his creativity, culinary wingspan, and devotion to Naples, Vincenzo Betulia is this year's Best Chef.



MICHAEL CARONCHI

and *Blue Star Seafood*, transforming those materials into dishes that are as healthy as they are delicious. His commitment to sustainability extends from the kitchen to the bar program and wine list, and he has inspired a new generation of local chefs. (thelocalnaples.com)

Runner-Up: Cosmos Ristorante and Pizzeria

Owner Gianluca Corso hails from Sardinia, a certified Blue Zones community, so healthy eating is just part of his quest to bring the Sardinian lifestyle to Naples. He offers a separate Blue Zones menu for both adults and children, which includes several pasta dishes, traditional Italian wedding soup, and a fresh vegetable platter with organic ranch dressing for dipping—although getting your kids to eat their veggies is up to you. (cosmospizzanaples.com)

BEST BREWPUB

Riptide Brewing Company

Stainless-steel tanks flank the communal tables at Riptide, leading to a long wooden bar. Indulge in one of a dozen handcrafted brews such as Polly Wants a Pilsner, Anklebuster Amber Ale, and Kraken DIPA (a double IPA), or sample four beers in a flight. There's no kitchen, but Riptide hosts a rotating schedule of food trucks, and *Bill's Café* will be happy to deliver your order from their guest menu. (riptidebrewingcompany.com)

Runner-Up: Bone Hook Brewing Company

Bone Hook went through a dramatic expan-



ABOVE: RIPTIDE BREWING COMPANY