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Otto by Polpo, the newest restaurant from the Daku family, brings the signature flavors of the Mediterranean to the heart of the Main Line.

page 28



# A Taste *of* Venice

## in Bryn Mawr

**Otto by Polpo,** the newest restaurant from the Daku family, brings the signature flavors of the Mediterranean to the heart of the Main Line.



**O**NE MIGHT SAY THE VIBE ALONG THE WATERY LANES OF VENICE, ITALY, has much in common with the best of the Jersey Shore—the aquatic contentment of ocean breezes, vibrant culture unlike any other, and, in the case of the Otto by Polpo family of restaurants, some of the finest cuisine a diner could hope to discover.

Now, the same flair and air that have made Otto by Polpo a favorite on the New Jersey coast—namely, Avalon, Sea Isle City, and Strathmere—has arrived on the Main Line in the form of Otto By Polpo BYOB in Bryn Mawr.

“We’ve always wanted to open a restaurant in the suburbs of the Main Line,” says Bekim Daku, son of restaurateur and chef Bujar Daku, who helms an empire of seven eateries with his brother Gani Daku. “We

have a lot of customers that visit our locations down the shore who are from this area, and we wanted to see them more often than in the summer.”

Now, area residents can skip the drive across state lines but still enjoy the Venetian cuisine made popular at La Vecchia Fontana, Fratelli’s Wood Fired Pizzeria, and the flagship La Fontana Del Mare.

“Being open all year will allow us the creativity to explore dishes using local ingredients available during the winter and fall,” Bekim says. “Developing new dishes to use the best ingredients available all year will be a challenge but exciting at the same time.”

As a family-run operation, Bekim says new ideas for the restaurants are never in short supply.

“Being in a family business, there is al-



ways something happening and something to talk about at home,” Bekim says. “Everyone has their own opinions, and we all respect each other. When we’re creating a new dish, it’s funny, because somebody will throw out an idea, then a cousin will add this, and another will add that. Everyone pitches in and especially when we work together it’s quicker and easier to create great things.”

The story behind Otto by Polpo dates back nearly 30 years, when Chef Bujar came to this country from Albania in search of the freedom and success promised to those willing to work hard in America. Indeed, Chef Bujar hit the ground running and rose through the ranks in the kitchens of renowned Philadelphia restaurants such as La Veranda and La Buca, before opening La Fontana Del Mare in Strathmere in 1998.

“In all of our restaurants, we always use fresh, local ingredients, because when you eat fresh and local, you can tell,” Bekim says. “There is a special taste when you use things grown locally versus somewhere else.”

Otto by Polpo dishes promise to highlight the flavors of Venice in the form of antipasti, pasta, risotto, and more. Of course, the menu also offers expertly crafted *polpo*, or octopus. Bekim considers the *polpo crudo* is a must-try.

“Our octopus is outstanding,” he says. “The crudo is like a prosciutto of sliced baby octopus topped with arugula, lemon, and capers fried in olive oil.”

The gnocchi, which is made in house daily, is not only a top seller but also a personal favorite of Bekim’s. “We offer versions with gorgonzola and blush sauces, but my favorite is the carbonara, made with pancetta and parmesan,” he adds.

Those looking for the seafood for which Venice is known will not be disappointed. Otto by Polpo’s offerings include a rotating selection of fish, available grilled whole and fileted tableside. Grilled Mediterranean *lan-gostinos* are another favorite from the sea, of-



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fering a kicked-up version of shrimp flavored by lemon and olive oil.

As in Italy, veal and chicken each has a prominent place on the menu. Both proteins are available in innovative and classic preparations such as *Francese*, for example, which stars a cutlet dipped in egg then sauteed with capers and lemon white wine sauce. A familiar parmigiana preparation, centering on meat that is breaded and served topped with mozzarella in a marinara sauce, is sure to warm diners’ hearts as well.

For a house special, diners might try the *vitello alla fontana*—veal medallions and porcini mushrooms that luxuriate alongside prosciutto and mozzarella in a cognac demi-glaze.

“I think people will find the ambiance special,” Bekim says of the Bryn Mawr restaurant. “We really think we have created something people will love. Our full menu is something very special, and we’re looking forward to serving the people of Bryn Mawr and the area.”

And, whereas some restaurants are limited to certain purveyors and brands for libations, as a BYOB establishment, the only limit to a pairing at Otto by Polpo is the diners’ imaginations.

“Since I was a kid in the



restaurant with my father, I can remember us always using the same brands and quality ingredients,” Bekim says. “We work to achieve perfection through consistency. For us, we will always focus on flavors and quality as No. 1, and we will never downgrade or cut corners for cost. We want each diner’s experience to be as good or better than their last meal with us.” ■

## → Otto by Polpo

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