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LUCCA & Piano  
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provides an oasis  
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by Leigh Stuart  
photos by Alison Dunlap



Ristorante LUCCA exudes Old World elegance. "I don't think there is anything in the market like it," says William Burris, the restaurant's managing partner.

# TIMELESS ELEGANCE

**RISTORANTE LUCCA & PIANO LOUNGE**  
IN BORDENTOWN PROVIDES AN OASIS OF  
CLASSIC ITALIAN FLAIR AND FARE.

**S**ome say those in the restaurant industry are born with hospitality running through their veins. William Burris, a restaurateur since 1982, is among them. Along with David Navazio, Burris serves as managing partner of Ristorante LUCCA & Piano Lounge in Bordentown, New Jersey.

The restaurant was acquired in June 2021 and re-opened as Ristorante LUCCA in December 2022. It has since become a gleaming jewel in Burris's hospitality empire, which also includes the likes of Beach Haven favorites Bird & Betty's, Black Whale Bar & Fish House, and Parker's Garage. While each establishment has a commitment to superior hospitality, Ristorante LUCCA

offers a wholly unique experience compared with the beach-casual vibes of his Beach Haven properties.

The restaurant itself had been in the neighborhood for about 70 years, though locals knew it by another name—Mastoris Diner. When the popular eatery shuttered its doors, Navazio bought it from the Mastori family, and Burris joined him in the project shortly after.

"We spent close to two years renovating things," Burris says. "It was pretty significant—we included a piano lounge, and now we're under construction on an outside seating and event center that we expect will be completed in the next 90 days."

This new outdoor space will accommodate 150 guests, while another new venture—an event space dubbed Eventi Lucca—will feature room for about 350 people. This project, too, is slated for completion within the next three months.

"There has always been an event center here, but it was very small from a headroom standpoint," Burris adds. "Ultimately, what we designed is a two-story event center, where people can have drinks and hors d'oeuvres and pre-wedding activities. We'll also have a two-story cigar lounge. If certain clientele want a weekend wedding on site, it will all work out pretty well."



## Unbeatable Ambiance

As for Ristorante LUCCA itself, Burris characterizes the restaurant as “very high end.” He adds, “I don’t think there is anything in the market like it.”

The main dining room at Ristorante LUCCA features champagne hues and luxurious seating around linen-clad tables. Warmly lit and featuring a honeycomb-patterned ceiling, the lounge exudes lively Old World elegance, with plush seats around low tables for intimate conversations, as well as Mediterranean blue hues featured in booths around the edge of the room. Other standout features guests have come to love include chandeliers, a statement mural of the Italian city of Lucca, and an illuminated onyx bar.

A seat next to the stage, lit in cool blue, allows visitors to take in some of New Jersey’s finest music Monday through Saturday. Curated in large part by General Manager Giuseppe “Pino” Algeri, the rotation of regular performers includes locally renowned entertainers such as Lew Leabman, Paula Johns, and Eddie Bruce; Maestro Dean Schneider dazzles guests on Mondays and Tuesdays, while the full ensemble, including bass, drums, and vocals, plays Wednesday through Saturday.

“The lounge is the place to be,” Burris says. “It’s my favorite spot at LUCCA. It’s a very active environment that stays open until the last person leaves, or at 2 a.m. Music goes until 11 or 11:30 p.m.”

## Carefully Crafted Cuisine

No restaurant can succeed on ambiance alone, of course; it must have a backbone of quality dishes to keep guests satisfied. Ristorante LUCCA never disappoints in this regard.

“Our restaurant is formal Italian,” Burris explains. “When we say that, we mean the dishes that we have are fundamentally what you see in Italy.”

The menu abounds with selections guests might find on any menu from Milan to Florence. That said, Burris acknowledges some acquiescence to the Italian-American tradition, with familiar favorites such as veal and chicken Parmesan and Milanese.

One particular point of pride: Executive

Chef Maurizio Peccolo, whose culinary excellence has been recognized by his appointment as a judge in the Tiramisu World Cup in Treviso, Italy.

“Our chef produces all of our pasta in house,” Burris boasts. “He takes a lot of pride in that. We’ve got some pasta shapes that are a little foreign to people who are doing the normal thing with Italian food in the U.S. We’ve got seven or eight pastas that are just a little different. Think strozzapreti and gramigna.”

Burris’s favorite part of the menu: Ristorante LUCCA’s selections from the sea.

“We only use wild fresh fish, nothing frozen or farm raised,” he says. “Our fish are charcoal grilled for the most part,

except our Dover sole—that is pan seared, then finished in the oven—and filleted tableside. We actually thrive on tableside service.”

Guest tableside favorites include a hand-blended Caesar salad and Cacio e Pepe, which is prepared for one, two, or four guests in a Locatelli Romano wheel for each guest to see and enjoy.

Meat lovers will adore Ristorante LUCCA’s steak program, featuring prime cuts of black Angus—“the best meat you can buy,” Burris assures. The steaks, too, are charcoal grilled.



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“We like tableside service because you get to have some fun and talk with your servers, instead of just ordering and someone showing up with a plate,” Burris adds. “It creates a comfort level that not a lot of restaurants do anymore. It’s a big deal.”

With its luxurious ambiance and well-orchestrated dining experience, as well as the forthcoming additions of the outdoor dining area and the event center, one thing is abundantly clear: Ristorante LUCCA delivers an experience unlike any other. ■

## Ristorante LUCCA & Piano Lounge

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Guests enjoy handcrafted cocktails at Ristorante LUCCA’s illuminated onyx bar.

