



## Meet the Executive Chef of Eataly Las Vegas

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Meet Nicole Brisson, Executive Chef of the soon-to-open Eataly Las Vegas!

### **When did you know you wanted to be a chef?**

I knew from a very young age that I would be in the food industry in some way. My mom grew up working in my grandfather's restaurant and was an amazing home cook. I would help her in the garden, and we would can and preserve our harvest as we prepared for the long upstate New York winters. When she returned to the workforce, I took over cooking for our family until I moved out with my sister at age 15.

### **How long have you been working in the industry?**

I started in restaurants when I was 14 years old, following in my sister's footsteps. We worked at country clubs, corporate retreat centers, and small restaurants. I did everything from dishwashing,



prepping, serving, and bartending to support myself and pay for college. I also enrolled in a Culinary Arts program my junior and senior year of high school. I became the president of VICA (Vocational Industrial Clubs of America) and competed in a number of competitions. Through these competitions I was able to win a good amount of scholarship money to Johnson and Wales University.

### **Tell us a little bit about your past professional experience.**

My goal when I started to cook professionally was to be the youngest female Executive Chef of a reputable restaurant on the strip. I packed my car and moved to Vegas over 15 years ago. I opened the Wynn Las Vegas and worked with chefs Paul Bartalotta, Steven Kalt, and Mark Poidevan. I met Zach Allen the Culinary Director for B&BHG group and eventually opened B&B Ristorante. Shortly after opening I got promoted to Chef de Cuisine of Enoteca San Marco their fast-casual concept at the Venetian. A little over a year later the Executive Chef position opened up at CarneVino in the Palazzo. Zach promoted me and I spent over seven years as the Executive Chef and also managed the 5,000 square foot dry-aging facility. I was 26 years old when I got the promotion.

With a lot of coaching from my mentors, I also got into the reality TV world doing Chopped, two seasons Late Night Chef Fight, Munchies, and Beat Bobby Flay. After years of running CarneVino I groomed my replacement Arnold Corpuz. I got promoted to Culinary Director of all four Vegas properties. After 12 years with the group, I decided to join the Eataly team.

### **You've spent some time working in Italy. What was that like?**

With the help of Molly O'Neil and Faith Willinger I moved to Italy when I was just 21 years old. This was not only my first time in Europe but my first time flying anywhere! Faith had organized a number of stages for me with reputable chefs she knew well. I started at Cibreo in Florence working under Fabio Picchi. I immediately fell in love with the Italian culture and food. I also realized pretty quickly no matter where you are or the language spoken, the restaurant industry is pretty similar everywhere. This was a very serious fast-paced kitchen. I learned so much from Fabio that helped pave my future success.

During the month of August I worked at Castella dei Ama taking care of their children and working with their chef. From there I ended up in Dario Cecchini's butcher shop in Panzano. Dario's shop felt like home almost instantly. He has been like a father to me ever since. I then traveled to the South for a short stint and ended up coming back to Tuscany because I loved it so much. I would have never been able to tell anyone at 21 years old how influential these people would be to my future.

### **What is your favorite Italian dish?**

Hands down inzimino! I first tasted it at Cibreo. Since I have made a number of variations at other kitchens I have worked. (Inzimino is a Tuscan cooking style that uses greens and tomatoes usually used on fish or chickpeas.)

### **Las Vegas is full of amazing restaurants and high-quality food. What is it like being a chef there?**

Vegas is everchanging and I think that's what I love about it the most. But just in the last few years I have really felt more chef comradery and community. It really is a 24/7 mentality that always keeps you excited and competitive. I enjoy eating in Chinatown after a long shift at 3 a.m.!

### **What is your specialty dish or favorite kind of food to cook?**

I think every chef craves their mother's cooking from their childhood. I dream of my mom's perogies and kielbasa with horseradish on potato babka. I make a guanciale cabbage perogies now whenever I have a craving. I still eat them, despite having developed an unfortunate allergy to gluten!

### **If you weren't a chef, what profession would you have?**

For a second when I was younger I wanted to be an interior designer. I just bought a house and really



enjoy decorating it between jobs.

**You also serve on the board of directors for the Southern Nevada Health District (SNHD). What is your role in this project and why did you choose to be a part of it?**

Vegas is growing at such a rapid rate right now. The more I got involved writing our SOPs and HACCP program I wanted to be more involved as a whole. My in-house inspector Cara Evangelista encouraged me to apply when the industry professional spot opened on the SNHD board. It is still very early into my 2-year term but I am already learning a great deal. I really feel like a Vegas resident now and part of the local community.

**Why have you chosen to work with Eataly?**

I've known the company well from my past work experience. When I heard they were opening in Las Vegas I was so excited to be part of it. It is such an incredible location on the strip. I think it will be a great thing for Vegas locals and tourists.

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