

# Wynn Injects New Life Into Its Dining Scene

Taking roll call following major changes to the resorts' chef roster.

[Dining](#) Wednesday, January 6 2:01pm By [Al Mancini](#)

The restaurant scene at **Wynn Resorts** saw a great deal of change as 2015 wound to a close, with a buffet reboot, concept changes, chefs trading posts, the exit of a longtime favorite chef and the return of some prodigal sons. I recently spent a day touring the scenes of the biggest changes and found some much-needed new life injected into what has long been a popular, but sometimes predictable, restaurant program.

The most obvious change is the **closure of Botero Steakhouse**. The space adjacent to the Encore pools and next to **XS nightclub** has been converted to the three-meal-a-day restaurant Jardin. French for "garden," Jardin features two outdoor patios, one of which will have a nice view of the European-style (read: top optional) pool. And when guests at XS want to move the party outdoors, they can do so on the other of Jardin's patios.

Jardin's kitchen is helmed by Joseph Zanelli, who has worked at Manhattan's Café Boulud, as well as Aqua, Lutèce, The Mansion at **MGM Grand** and **Andiron Steak & Sea**. Zanelli says he's working closely with the XS crew to build synergy between the two venues, especially with regard to his late-night menu, which will be available till 1 or 2 a.m. Menu highlights so far include "Bacon & Eggs," made with house-cured pork belly, kimchi and quail eggs; a lunchtime lobster roll; and a rolled wagyu rib cap. But the real stunner here is a chocolate cake designed in the shape of a flowerpot.

With the closure of Botero, its head chef Mark LoRusso has moved across the property to the seafood spot **Costa di Mare**, formerly Bartolotta Ristorante di Mare. Before his time at Wynn, LoRusso spent 10 years at Michael Mina's seafood restaurant Aqua. "So I was excited to get back to the fish," he says. "It's definitely my passion, and I find it more challenging."

*Costa Di Mare introduces crudo. | Photo by Krystal Ramirez*

“The goal,” LoRusso continues, “was to keep the concept the same: Italian, imported fish.” But he’s also adding his personal touches to the menu. Many of the pastas have changed. He’s paying more attention to the meat program, with cuts including a short rib from famed butcher Pat Lafrieda added to the selection he’s preparing over the restaurant’s charcoal grill. And for the first time ever, the restaurant is offering crudo, Italy’s spin on sashimi. “I saw a lot of it in Rome,” LoRusso says, “and I figured we have such a nice product, why not feature something like that?”

Over at **the Country Club**, Carlos Guia’s departure last year prompted Rene Lenger to leave Wynn’s second seafood restaurant to take the reins there. The restaurant is certainly familiar to Lenger, who opened it and operated it for the first three years. While the restaurant had taken a Cajun/Creole direction during Guia’s time in the kitchen, Lenger says he’s determined to return it to its roots as a “new American steakhouse.” That means beloved dishes such as gumbo and shrimp ’n’ grits will be removed in favor of a more extensive meat program.

“I’m going to play a game a little bit between bison and beef,” Lenger says. Expect four or five cuts of bison, and even more beef selections. And the centerpiece will be the return of a prime-rib cart to the restaurant that will include both bison and beef, allowing diners to opt for a tasting.

Lenger’s departure allowed Tableau chef Paul Zlatos to take the helm of Lakeside’s ocean-to-table program. Filling his shoes at Tableau is David Middleton, who worked at Wynn’s Michelin-starred Alex before moving on to Scarpetta, Marché Bacchus and DB Brasserie in **the Venetian**. “I’ve never done a strictly breakfast, lunch and brunch restaurant before,” he says. “So that was a challenge for me.”

Because Tableau is tucked into Wynn’s Tower Suites, far from the casino floor, its clientele tends to consist primarily of VIP guests. To cater to them, Middleton says he’s trying for “a balance of a very healthy and an organic feel, yet at the same time, [to] stick to the roots of being a new American restaurant.” And he wants to encourage locals to explore the space, particularly for brunch. “This city is a late city, so our brunch goes all the way until 3 p.m.”

Finally, if you can't decide on just one menu that will suit everyone in your party, look to **The Buffet**, which underwent extensive renovations in November. It now includes 120 new items from around the world. Recently added features include semi-enclosed cooking stations that dampen the kitchen noise, a state-of-the-art show grill, custom sausages, organic products, a completely nut-free kitchen, a chocolate fountain, an interactive rotating ice cream machine and a dessert cold rail that keeps sweets at the right temperature. If you have a food allergy, a chef will happily walk you down the line and tell you which items are safe for you. As Wynn executive sous-chef Brian Kenny puts it, "These types of products [and services], you're not finding [them] in every run-of-the-mill buffet at other places, and I think that's what sets us apart."

If you've been looking for a reason to revisit Wynn Resorts' restaurant offerings in the New Year, perhaps you just found five.