

Nel Centro wins with local farm food and lower prices

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By **Deston Nokes**

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Portland's godfather of restaurants, David Machado, has racked up another culinary winner at the helm of his newest venture, Nel Centro. Plus, he's done it in less than a year in the face of a withering local economy.

Machado, who also owns the Lauro Kitchen and Vindalho, saw an opportunity to offer classic dishes of the Riviera using locally sourced, seasonal food – all at a lower price point. Nel Centro's dinner prices range between \$15 and \$24, with its breakfasts and lunches priced lower.



Nel Centro's Chef David Machado stands by his "living wall" in the restaurant patio. Photo by Deston Nokes

“The response has been much better than I had hoped for,” Machado said. “We’ve had a very positive response to the food, location and prices. With 28 years of experience managing food and its cost, we know how to support our local farms and waste nothing.”

First, Nel Centro starts with the food. The herb-marinated rotisserie chicken is a huge hit, and I enjoyed the tang of the provençal roasted pork with fennel gratin and mostarda di frutta

In keeping with its quest to offer seasonal cuisine, Nel Centro announced that it is adding some interesting new dishes to its winter menu: a duck confit with braised red cabbage and apples; and an arancini, which is a cheese stuffed saffron risotto with tomato fondue. Its new salads include winter chicories with gorgonzola, apples and walnuts; and a roasted beet salad with warm ricotta, grapefruit and hazelnuts.

Nel Centro also announced its new Four to Six Happy Hour, starting today. It will be offered daily in the bar, from 4 - 6 p.m. Local microbrews are \$4, well drinks are \$5, house red, white and sparkling are \$5. It also will serve a selection of dishes, such as mussels, pizza and burgers for \$6.

Located adjacent to the Hotel Modera, Nel Centro is close to the Performing Arts Center and Portland State University in Southwest Portland.

“This is a downtown location that has been underserved in fine dining choices,” Machado said. “We’re in an area that serves nearby banks and offices, retail, the performing arts, and we’re easy to get to because we have 100 parking slots in the Hotel Modera.”



The décor is certainly high end. Its ambiance is open, warm and its seasonal patio features fire pits and a living wall of green. “I love the patio’s layout with the glass on three sides,” Machado said. “The depth of field is really spectacular.”

Machado, who has enjoyed a long string of restaurant successes with Pazzo and Southpark, knows that he has to stay on his toes to remain a success.

“Without continuous improvement, we’ll perish,” Machado said.

“Everyone in Portland is becoming far more educated in food by reading and blogging about it,” he said. “This is a city in its heyday of dining – we have a wealth of local produce, a strong motivated workforce, and our urban growth boundary helps preserve local farms. Plus we have our fine wines, beers and coffee.”

Nel Centro

1408 SW Sixth Ave., Portland, OR
503-484-1099

Dinner: Sun - Thurs: 5:00-9:00 p.m.; Fri & Sat: 5:00-10:00 p.m.

Lunch: Mon - Fri: 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m.

Sunday Brunch: 8:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

Breakfast: Mon - Fri: 6:30-10:30 a.m., Sat: 7:30-11:30 a.m.

