

Chef Bruce Logue Previews BoccaLupo



Bruce Logue in the La Pietra kitchen/ AJC

At Atlanta's **La Pietra Cucina**, chef **Bruce Logue** focused on what he calls the "handmade aspects" of Italian cuisine, building a reputation for some of the best Italian cooking in the city — a surprising achievement for an Atlanta native of Scots-Irish descent.

Logue's background includes stints at several well-regarded contemporary Italian and modern French restaurants in Boston, and a recent turn at STG in Atlanta. But his experiences in the kitchen at **Mario Batali's Babbo** in New York City still define his style.

On Monday, Logue is set to open his much-anticipated new Italian-American neighborhood restaurant, **BoccaLupo**, in the former Sauced space in Inman Park. Here's what he had to say about that today.

Q. So what's BoccaLupo about?

A. Originally, I wanted to open a no-frills pasta bar, a lot like a noodle bar or ramen shop, where it was just about the noodles and the sauce. I wanted an open kitchen with the bar right in front of it. I couldn't find a space like that, where I could just slide in and make that happen. And I didn't have the money to build a restaurant like that.

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Q. What attracted you to the former Sauced space in Inman Park?

A. The size and the shape and the kind of weirdness of it. It just kind of worked for me. If you don't have the money to build an Empire State or an Optimist or any of these really pretty, awesome restaurants, it sucks when you have to come up short. So I decided to go in a totally different direction in a building that's not trying to be that, and couldn't be that, and work around that.

Q. And what did that mean?

A. We want to be neighborhood and small and really able to focus on the food and the guests and the beverage pairings. And we hope it will be a neighborhood restaurant that's worth traveling to, even if you're not from the neighborhood.

Q. What's the menu like?

A. For the opening, we've taken our rough sketch menu and pared it down a bit. Last count, I think I had nine pastas. Half of them are extruded and half of them are fresh egg noodles. One of them is baked. Then we have a couple of pasta-based entree things. There are nine antipasti. And three or four desserts — sort of simple things, like zeppoli, semifreddo, and a cookie and gelato plate.

Q. What's the influence from La Pietra?

A. Literally, what I've done is take some of the favorites from the old La Pietra menu, like the black spaghetti, the pappardelle bolognese, the penne pomodoro ricotta, the prosciutto, the calamari. I've taken things we've done in the past, and that people liked, and that will be our starting menu. There will be some more seasonal things, too, like asparagus with green garlic. But that made it a really comfortable place to start. I know we can execute those dishes really well and then we can grow from there and push the boundaries a little.

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Q. And what about ingredients?

A. We've kind of taken the pasta part of an Italian menu, and ingredient-wise, we've said, OK, what things can we use that are made in America, instead of importing them? So we have a killer Parmigiano-Reggiano-style cheese made in Wisconsin, that's perfect for grating on pasta. We have good California olive oil that's well-balanced and has the right kind of flavor profile. We have some wonderful California tomatoes. Instead of importing everything from Italy, we're cooking Italian-American food. Doing that is really more Italian, in a way — cooking from your region and country.

Q. How about the beverage program?

A. I have Questa Olsem, who ran the bar at La Pietra and worked at STG. She knows my food really well, because she worked with me for over three years, and she has tried to build a wine list that supports my cooking. But our big thing was to be really affordable, especially on the by-the-glass side of things. I think our range will be from \$6 to \$12. She has quite a few Italian wines but there's also a lot of American stuff that's Italian varietals. We want to play with the boundaries and expectations and make it interesting. She'll start with four signature cocktails and then some of the classics tweaked a little bit. And we'll have beers in the bottle.

Q. Are you ready to open on Monday?

A. I just didn't really want to do a big opening. I wanted to just open the doors, and people who knew about it would show up, and people who didn't would show up later. I'm still keeping that same m.o. We're going to open it up, pull it together as quick as possible, and really start doing what we do.

— Bob Townsend, AJC Food and More blog.

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