

BoccaLupo

Chef Bruce Logue finds a unique home for his peerless pastas



Photograph by Greg DuFree

The odd, angular bungalow on the southeastern corner of Edgewood Avenue and Waddell Street, on the fringe of Inman Park, has been a beacon of eccentricity for decades. Minus the back right corner that was carved out for a patio, the building is a near-perfect square. But a jutting addendum to its facade—an exaggerated overhang and a mix of trapezoidal and rectangular windows, slightly tilted—gives the structure a midcentury modern quirkiness, a misfit among the Victorian blue bloods farther down the block. It sits up on its own hill, surrounded by iron gates and wooden railings and shrouded in trees, like an embarrassed adolescent hiding her gawky frame in oversized sweaters.

For years the place was a string of arty boutiques or tearooms with fanciful names: Planet Claire Gallery, Bouji, Ketch a Vibe, LivingZen. In the mid-2000s it became 11:11 Teahouse, where you could sip an herbal brew and watch underground music acts on a small stage. Ria Pell, of Ria's Bluebird in Grant Park, took over in 2009 and turned the building into a restaurant called Sauced. She amplified its retro idiosyncrasies, painting the exterior a

psychedelic 1960s aqua, installing curvy Naugahyde booths, and serving fruity, balanced cocktails alongside kitschy (and not very compelling) takes on beef Wellington and stroganoff.

Continued on next page

Last November, Pell quietly began looking to sell Sauced, catching the attention of Bruce Logue. An Atlanta native, Logue had bewitched food lovers at Midtown's La Pietra Cucina with his housemade pastas draped in bombastic sauces. His spaghetti dyed the color of charcoal from squid ink and then tossed with shrimp, breadcrumbs, and crumbly, spicy Calabrese sausage became a signature. Logue's high-energy cuisine never quite fit with La Pietra's gloomy, overblown atmosphere, which resembles the way I imagine Carmela Soprano would decorate a finished basement. Logue left last year shortly before the restaurant rebranded itself as LPC (under new management by Concentrics Hospitality), and while helping out at Buckhead's STG Trattoria, he was scouting locations for his own venture. He came to Sauced for dinner and knew he'd found his space.

The building may have its most restrained caretaker yet. Logue whitewashed the outside and tinted the trim a fetching shade of chocolate brown. Inside, he tore out the Naugahyde and colored the walls a neutral gray, though he kept the handsomely knotty bar that Pell had built. Considering the funky, geometric layout, which includes tables in two alcoves at opposite ends of the room, the place now feels quite tame—almost overly so. It calls to mind the nondescript back room out of which La Pietra first operated in 2008 while its main area was being remodeled. Early Logue fans initially balked at its blankness but came to appreciate how it directed all the focus toward the plate.

Logue's cooking proves just as commanding at BoccaLupo. (The name is a portmanteau of sorts for the Italian phrase *in bocca al lupo*, or "in the wolf's mouth," an expression of good luck similar to "break a leg.") His menu picks up right where he left off, with a synergy of dishes that reflects his time studying in Italy, working as a sous chef at Mario Batali's kinetic Babbo in New York, and running the show as an executive chef at San Diego's Four Seasons resort. His Cal-Ital alchemy doesn't so much reflect a sense of place as much as a sense of self: This is the food of a cook with confidence to burn.

Many of his previous gems once again delight. Kerchief-thin slices of prosciutto, adorning piadina (a crackery flatbread) with creamy ricotta and pineapple mostarda, remain an ideal first nibble. Cucumber brodo, a refreshing forest-green pool surrounding a pile of neatly chopped tuna crudo and a generous dollop of mashed avocado, quells the summer heat brilliantly. The chewy black spaghetti with sausage and shrimp still delivers its tangle of textures and

Continued on next page

punchy spices. Ribbon-like tagliatelle, golden from egg yolks, cradles the season's latest gifts (in mid-spring it was ramps and wild mushrooms). Bucatini with tomato, smoked bacon, and red onion is a subdued variation on an Amatriciana sauce with barnyardy guanciale (cured pork jowl) that Logue made at La Pietra; I much prefer this subtler harmony of ingredients.

But Logue also sends out some rookie dishes that equally impress. He takes inspiration for bruschetta from banh mi, the Vietnamese sandwich; his piquant combination of slow-roasted pork, earthy chicken liver, and pickled cauliflower, celery, and carrots ricochets off the taste buds in all the right ways. And don't miss the skewer of grilled octopus and mortadella (bologna's pedigreed grandfather), a pyrotechnic display of conception and execution where both are cooked to an uncanny consistency of melting firmness, then poised over shell beans and spinach united by the elusive, nutty scent of Marsala.

Yet he can pull off simple comfort just as skillfully. Strano pasta, a spiral shape that resembles a fiddlehead fern, wallows in a light Parmesan cream sauce punctuated by cubes of mortadella and roasted broccoli. Tube-shaped garganelli, gently al dente, mingles with field peas in a pleasantly coarse white ragu of ground chicken sparked with white pepper. I'd gladly eat either of them once a week, and I'd finish with the quivering huckleberry panna cotta, an occasional dessert special that should be on the permanent menu.

The building worked its magic attracting a nonconformist cast of characters to wait tables. Most are veterans I remember from other restaurants, and they all have distinct and memorable personalities. If you find that you love everything about your meal but the service, come back and try a different waiter: I'll trade the dude with the bushy hair who never smiles for the woman with the wacky glasses who chatters amiably.

And really, you expect a staff with some charms and foibles at a soulful neighborhood haunt like BoccaLupo. The pastas cost between \$13 and \$19, and the bartenders shake and stir elegant cocktails: I'm partial to the Tourist, which includes Knickerbocker gin, an herbal Italian aperitif called Aperol, and prosecco. (I do wish that the wine list showed more breadth and that the reds weren't served at room temperature.) And here's hoping Logue sneaks in a luxury

Continued on next page



EDITORIAL

splurge now and then, like the sigh-inducing risotto with crab and tarragon he made at La Pietra. But his aim to serve affordable, soul-satisfying food is on-point, and the community has already responded: Make reservations early (especially for a spot on the patio) and expect diverse, animated crowds every night of the week. After a year spent looking for his own kitchen, Logue settled into the right home to showcase his singular talents.

BoccaLupo

RATING ** (very good)

753 Edgewood Avenue

404-577-2332

boccalupoatl.com

HOURS Monday–Thursday 5:30–10 p.m.; Friday–Saturday 5:30–11 p.m.

Read it here: <http://bit.ly/13hons4>

Media Contact:

Green Olive Media, LLC / Elizabeth Moore / emoore@greenolivemedia.com

Atlanta: P 404-815-9327 F 404-815-9328 / Nashville: P 615-567-8045 F 615-567-8013

www.greenolivemedia.com