

# Culinary art

*Chefs use fresh, locally grown ingredients as inspiration for unique dishes that are as healthy and delicious as they are beautiful.*



By Leigh Pressley • Photography by Richard Rudisill

Lake Wylie's early culinary scene may have started with fried fish, hush puppies and sugar-water tea, but these days, restaurants know many folks are focused on health and wellness.

Finding the freshest food available has become as important to a restaurant's success as culinary creativity, attentive customer service and value.

## Passion8 Bistro

At Passion8 Bistro in Fort Mill, utilizing locally grown food is the guiding principle for Chef Luca Annunziata, who grew up on the Mediterranean coast of southern Italy in a large family that operated a beachside restaurant.

Annunziata has traveled the world as a chef aboard a Cunard cruise ship, cooked for celebrities featured in *Good Housekeeping* magazine and worked as a private chef for founders of the Zagat restaurant guides. His resume also includes stints at London's Dorchester Hotel and The Suvretta House in St. Moritz, Switzerland. He and wife Jessica met in the business and later worked in Italy at a restaurant that grew or raised everything it served.

"For us, fresh food is paramount," says Jessica. "We're fortunate that this part of the country is so agriculturally rich and we're lucky to work with folks who are as dedicated as we are. The food we serve is grown and cultivated with love and respect, just as we prepare it with love and respect. And the reason it's so good is that it's as fresh as it can be."

This cozy bistro with international culinary influences is located on Highway 51 off Carowinds Boulevard.

Regulars and special occasion patrons flock to the intimate, 60-seat restaurant with rich, red cabernet walls and fabric draped over the ceiling. Everything about it oozes passion for good food shared by the vibrant couple.

Passion8's menu changes twice a season to reflect the freshest local ingredients and dishes appropriate to the time of year. Every day, Luca heads to the farmer's market to see what's new. Local farmers provide meat and vegetables, and fish is fresh from the Carolinas.

"Our signature salad is from Tega Hills Farm near Tega Cay," says Jessica. "Everything in it is red, from the Lola Rossa curly leaf red lettuce to the candied walnuts. We've been

buying that specific lettuce from Tega Hills Farm ever since we told him the idea behind the salad and that's what we both came up with. I've never seen it in a local grocery store or on another menu."

The folks at New Town Farms in Waxhaw provide Passion8 with a wide range of organic vegetables, including sprouts and rutabaga.

"They're like an organic garden sherpa for us," says Jessica. "They grow things we've never even heard of, and that's great when you're trying to use ingredients that aren't so readily available. We collaborate all the time. We do our best to be innovative, but to the farmer's credit, we're constantly being introduced to unique things we've never seen before."

For beef, Passion8 calls on Proffitt Farm in Kings Mountain. The Scottish Aberdeen angus descends from an original line of pure bred cattle and is completely full-range grass fed.

But sometimes, Passion8's unique offerings

*Above: North Carolina day boat amber jack with local rutabaga puree, new beginnings baby carrots, spinach, beet vinaigrette and basil oil at Passion8 Bistro.*



*From left, Passion8 Bistro owners Luca and Jessica Annunziata with Executive Sous Chef Joshua Kielman.*