

Nutrition meets fine dining

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Michelin-rated restaurant “Rouge Tomate” in New York City brings diners a modern twist on American cuisine.

Using SPE guidelines – sourcing, preparation and enhancement – the restaurant relies primarily on local ingredients to prepare its food. Executive Chef Jeremy Bearman and Executive Pastry Chef James Distefano works directly with culinary nutritionist, Kristy Lambrou, to provide a combination of fine dining and nutritious food at their restaurant.

“The first Rouge Tomate opened in Brussels in 2001,” explained Lambrou. “The owner, Emmanuel Verstraeten, really wanted to show that nutrition and gastronomy could be combined and do not need to be mutually exclusive.”

The philosophy of the restaurant follows the SPE charter, which Lambrou explains in Latin, “sanitas per escam” – health through food. To ensure this philosophy flows throughout the menu, the chefs at “Rouge Tomate” do not add any butter or cream to appetizers or entrees and do not fry or grill any of the food.

“We want the guest to have about three servings of fruits and vegetables,” Lambrou said “So in order to do that we have criteria for each course; appetizers have to have a certain amount, entrees, and desserts.” Together Bearman, Distefano and Lambrou confer about combinations of ingredients, nutritional values and textures to ensure complete customer satisfaction. The chefs work with Lambrou to learn about the nutritional values of their dishes.

The first step of SPE is the ‘S’ which stands for sourcing – or where the products come from. The chefs first look for ingredients they want to use in their dishes that have beneficial nutrients, from local farmers and producers. Once the specific ingredients are chosen, they decide how to prepare the food.

“SPE is really taking these wonderful ingredients that we have and preparing them in a way that not only makes it taste really wonderful, but also keeps the nutritional integrity of the food,” Bearman said. “It is really important to us and really makes us different from a lot of other restaurants.”

Finally, the restaurant pulls the different elements of the meal together before presenting it to the diner.

“The E part is the enhancement...refers to the combination of ingredients,” Lambrou said. “So we look at what ingredients, which maybe will be healthy for you on their own, but are even better for you when combined.”

After cooking the dish, Bearman weighs each food and Lambrou analyzes the dish in terms of calories, fats and nutrition.

The trio work side-by-side to create not only food, but even drinks that follow the SPE charter.

“Rouge Tomate” puts a healthy twist on the piña colada, which is normally high in calories. Instead of using cream of coconut, they use fresh coconut, which is made into coconut water. The restaurant’s version of the beverage automatically lowers the amount of saturated fats and has no sugar.

“A lot of people come in and really don’t know about the nutrition part of the restaurant,” Lambrou said. “I think it’s changing a little bit now. People are more aware.”

A popular entrée choice for customers is the squid ink fettuccine. Rouge Tomate uses less salt and squid ink to balance out the dish, adds local seafood with the pasta for flavor and even adds vegetables.

“Here, a lot of our inspiration starts with vegetables,” Bearman said. “Fruits, vegetables – it’s really what we have to think about in terms of what we really want to exploit.”

Even the desserts at “Rouge Tomate” are healthy. Distefano uses fruit and walnut oil in many of his delicious treats. Regardless of whether patrons of the restaurant are health conscious or not, Lambrou said they’re bound to enjoy their food.

“I want people to feel that they had a great meal,” she said. “To feel full and satisfied, but not have a food hangover.”