

AN EVENING OF PASSION

FALL IN LOVE WITH CHESAPEAKE'S NEWEST UPSCALE-CASUAL DINING EXPERIENCE

PASSION THE RESTAURANT



In life, there are but a few things that stir the soul and ignites burning passion; food – excellent food – is one of them.

It is fitting, then, that Hampton Roads' newest restaurant is named Passion. Born from the love of creating and crafting meals with intensity and fire, the restaurant showcases the fervor-filled enthusiasm of restaurant owner Michael Gomori and Executive Chef Frank Copestick.

"I've always had a love of cooking," Gomori says. "[I love to] cook [at home] ... things that challenge me and take a lot of time to prepare. When you do something like that and you get rants and raves from your dinner guests, it means the world to me."

It is that desire to please beyond satisfaction dinner guests at his restaurant that Gomori instills in his staff at Passion. He stresses that having a top-quality, attentive wait staff is an important facet in making a patron's dining adventure pleasurable.

"For a true restaurant experience, you need a very comfortable and relaxing environment where you can come in, kind of lay back, enjoy yourself and feel like you're at home," says Gomori.

But there's more than just great food and excellent service at Passion. It's also a matter of the total ambiance created by everything from the décor displayed on the walls to the music playing in the background.

"Putting the restaurant together was like creating a symphony that masterfully combines sight, sound and taste," says Gomori. "So when somebody comes to dine with us, their eyes are tickled by what they see, their ears are intrigued by the music they hear, and their tongues dance with the light of the food that is expertly prepared in the kitchen."

The name Passion came out of a working dinner between the key players involved in the development of the restaurant's plan: Michael, his executive chef Frank Copestick and their wives.

"We were discussing everything from the



layout of the kitchen to names for the restaurant," says Gomori. That's when Frank's wife Amy suggested Passion – commenting that everyone around the table was indeed passionate about having the restaurant vision fulfilled.

"It took about a nanosecond for everyone

to decide that was it," Gomori says. The rest of the Passion theme stems from the romance people can share when they go out for a fine meal to celebrate their lives together.

As for the food, Copestick, a graduate of the world famous Le Bec Fin, brings more than 20 years experience with him to the table. After tours as executive chef at Red Square in both Miami Beach and in Las Vegas, Copestick was drawn to Hampton Roads by the availability of great seafood, great surfing and superb local produce.

"We have so much around us ... I want to take advantage of what Virginia and the surrounding areas have to offer," says Copestick. "... We're doing a contemporary regional menu. My menu is about 85 percent Virginia at this point and that'll just keep getting stronger."

Augmenting the locovore selection is Harris Ranch Beef. Harris Ranch cows never leave the ranch and are exclusively corn fed—raised without hormones or exposure to pesticides—to produce some of the most flavorful, tender and juicy beef available in the world, Copestick says.

Another of the chef's passionate menu offerings is Seduction, a Bordeaux-blend based on Cabernet from the O'Brien wine family in Napa. This vintage compliments the restaurant's 50-label wine list, of which 24 are available by the glass.

"We are always looking for smaller suppliers who have a passion for what they do and it reflects in the product they put out. That's definitely what we're all about," Gomori says.

For those whose passion for cooking is as great as their desire for a great dining experience, chef Copestick is now offering hands-on cooking classes once a month where participants get expert advice on how to prepare a four-course meal. Class sizes are limited to 15 people, so early registration is advised. Visit the Passion website for times, dates, costs and class themes.

Passion is a non-smoking facility. The restaurant is open Monday–Thursday, 5 to 10 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 5 p.m. to midnight.

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