

Pascolo Ristorante: The Road to Italy Runs Through Burlington

Step through the door just off Church Street, head down a few steps, walk past the L-shaped bar below the cork ceiling and past exposed brick walls into Pascolo Ristorante, and the virtual transition from Burlington to Italy becomes complete.

A rustic destination specializing in Italian cuisine, wood-fired pizza and house-prepared cold cuts, Pascolo is an authentic dining experience right in downtown Burlington.

"We focus on seasonal, locally sourced, good food," Bar Manager Zach Fernandez says. "That's what makes us stand out."

With a wide-ranging, diverse menu that offers everything from dried, imported rigatoni with Bolognese or verdure, hand-rolled

gnocchi, pan-seared cod loin and an array of wood-fired pizzas (Pane Frattau, with tomato basil sauce, pecorino, mozzarella, pancetta and sunny-side up eggs; and Gamberetto, with wood-fired shrimp, mozzarella and olives), Pascolo's offerings are about as far from the typical as you're likely to find.

"We have a meat slicer behind the bar that we use to slice all of our house-cured antipasti meats, like soppressata and cacciatolini," Fernandez says.

The open-concept dining destination has been open for nearly five years, and provides a steady stream of locals and visitors alike with a tangible connection to the old country.

"As far as the bar program, the whole wine

list focused on family-run, and at the very least sustainable, biodynamic or sustainable vineyards from Italy. And it's all based on availability. Some wines we can only get during certain times of the year, but most of it we're lucky enough to have built relationships with our suppliers, so we have backups."

Fernandez's favorite menu item: the fennel sausage pappardelle — a pasta dish in a light cream sauce infused with fennel, sautéed spinach and house-made fennel sausage — which is on the sweeter side — and parmesan cheese. But that indulgence comes only after a full night behind the bar, a destination he fell in love with three years ago.

What was your first night behind the bar like?

"It was pretty crazy. It was here at Pascolo. I feel like that's the best way to learn. You can get trained up and watch people do it, but once you start actually working you can find your flow. You'll find out how you work best and figure it all out. It was totally overwhelming — we had a full bar with 15 people staring the whole time, tickets were rolling in from the restaurant. At times like that you have to turn around and compose yourself. It all falls into place."

What's your favorite part of the job?

"Interacting with my bar customers and being able to help them find something that's going to make their experience stand out. Whether I can recommend an amazing glass of wine or something on the menu they've never tried before and they find out they absolutely love it — that's my favorite part."

Share a behind-the-bar secret.

"Confidence. That would be my secret. When you're not sure about what you're doing in the moment, just do it confidently and it will seem as though you know what you're doing. If you're not sure, like if you don't want to serve someone who has been drinking, confidently make your decision and don't look back. You've got to stick to your guns."

Any advice to aspiring bartenders?

"Just do it. You can learn and you can think and prepare as much as you want, but until you're



Bar Manager
Zach Fernandez

Written by Bill Burke | Photography by Oliver Parini



Toe of the Boot

courtesy Pascolo Ristorante

- 1½ ounces tequila
- 1 bar spoon strawberry preserves
- ¾ ounce lime juice
- ½ ounce Aperol
- ½ ounce Gran Gala orange liqueur
- Chinotto
- Lime for garnish

Combine the lime juice, Aperol, preserves and tequila in a shaker. Shake and then double strain into a Collins glass, top with Chinotto and serve with a lime garnish.

back behind the bar and learning your bar and the quirks to it — that's the most important part."

At the end of a shift, I...

"I always sit down with the staff and reminisce and talk through the night so we can move on and work through it. Sometimes, especially on busier nights, everyone gets a little crazy. It's important to sit down and talk through it so you can let it roll off and start the next day fresh and new."

If I wasn't a bartender, I would be...

"I think I would go back to school to study to be a marine biologist. I was interested in that during high school and came up here to go to school to study marketing and economics. If I could totally change my career path, I'd study the ocean and do something with that."

Is there a signature cocktail at Pascolo Ristorante?

"I would say it's the Toe of the Boot. It's a mainstay that's been on our drink list for years." 🍸

Pascolo Ristorante
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Always drink in moderation.