

ENTICING EMILIA-ROMAGNA

Dena Marino: MC Kitchen, Miami
Prosciutto Piadina: Flatbread, With Lambrusco

Visitors to MC Kitchen in Miami's Design District have been known to exclaim, "Wow, this is Italian and it's not heavy," chef-owner Dena Marino recounts. "I love that."

The diners' surprise is a lingering effect of Italian-American food's dominance. "Italian food as they know it is not real

Italian food," Marino says. "The food of my New Jersey childhood was not 'New Jersey Italian'; no red sauce, no ton of melted cheese," she explains.

Her origins are crucial to her. With both parents working, she spent a lot of time with her grandparents, helping them make salumi, wine and pasta, and tending to the

chickens in the yard. This way of cooking "is in me; it's part of my blood," she explains. "This is a passion to me. I could probably open a French restaurant, but probably not do it as well."

Marino's approach today combines that foundation with years in her previous restaurants—including a run in Aspen, Colo., at Ajax Tavern and her D19, and working with Michael Chiarello at Tra Vigne in the Napa Valley. "I learned so much from him," she remembers. "He is definitely one chef who stays true to ingredients. You just take what's around you and turn it into something good."

Marino honors this ethic above rigid adherence to regional authenticity at MC Kitchen, which she owns with Brandy Colletta. "I take a little bit of everything," she says, "but especially the areas my family was from—Calabria and Bari—and where I am, and I put a twist on it."

Bucatini alla carbonara, for example, is topped at MC Kitchen with a barely cooked egg and dehydrated guanciale powder instead of the traditional egg sauce with chunks of the cured meat. Marino quips, "My grandmother never did that," but the variation is just one example of the chef making a dish her own, and a bit more modern, while honoring the simple intent of the original dish.

For the piadina she stays a little closer to the street food original, a Romagnan flatbread stuffed with toppings and folded like a taco. She loads it with Parmigiano cream and a kick of fennel, layers prosciutto on the whole, tops it with a soft-poached egg (a flourish of generosity in some parts of Italy) and serves it open-faced. Marino's major deviation from the original—besides spelling it "piadina" on MC Kitchen's menu, a winking reference to her first name—is in quantity: "Usually in Italy it's just a little stuff on top." In the United States, she has found that diners want a little more sauce, a little more of everything than in Italy.

But the core idea remains clear to her. "Most of my dishes are very simple, even with a twist," she says. "You can identify all the ingredients. It's what you see is what you get."

Marino recommends a Lambrusco with the dish. "It holds its own with the food and even makes the dish seem less rich," she says. "Lambrusco is a wine that should not be forgotten. Not enough people know about it. It's light and refreshing and great with everything. The dish is simple and the wine is fun."



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Prosciutto Piadina

7 cups plus 2 tablespoons 00 flour
2 tablespoons sugar
2 tablespoons salt
¼ cup whole milk
2 ½ teaspoons dry yeast
2 cups room-temperature water
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 cup heavy cream
2 cups grated 24-month Parmigiano-Reggiano
4 medium fennel bulbs
¼ pound arugula
24 to 30 slices prosciutto di Parma
12 eggs
Saba (cooked grape must), for garnish

1. Preheat the oven to 400° F, or as high as the oven will go. Heat a pizza stone in the oven for at least 1 hour.
2. In a large bowl, combine the flour, sugar and salt and set aside. In the bowl of a stand mixer, combine the milk, yeast and water and mix until yeast is well-dissolved. With the mixer running, add the flour mixture and olive oil, and mix for 4 minutes or until an elastic, somewhat sticky dough, is achieved. Add cold water in ¼-cup increments if necessary to allow the dough to come together. Remove dough from the mixer and divide into 6 8-ounce pieces. Let rest for 1 hour.
3. In a small sauce pot, bring the heavy cream to a low boil. Whisk the grated cheese into the cream until it thickens. Remove from the heat and add salt and pepper to taste.
4. Clean the stalks from the fennel. Slice the bulbs into strips about ¼-inch thick, avoiding the root. In a large sauté pan, heat 2 tablespoons olive oil over high heat, then add the fennel. Cook until slightly tender and caramelized, 15 to 20 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper, and reserve.
5. On a floured surface, stretch or roll 1 8-ounce piece of dough into a 12-inch round, flat pizza shape. Spread the cheese-cream mixture atop the dough, then add caramelized fennel slices. Top with 2 eggs. Place flatbread in the oven atop the pizza stone and bake until crisp, about 10 minutes. Remove piadina from the oven and scatter arugula and 4 to 5 slices of prosciutto on top. Repeat for remaining pieces of dough. Drizzle a small amount of saba on top and serve. Serves 6.

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