

The Joie de Vivre of Modern French Cuisine

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Chef Mark Nagelberg, Chef Tom Condrón and Chef Thomas Bordsen

In a time and place when the classics have made way for the more eclectic American cuisine, Chef Tom Condrón continues to bring the joie de vivre of modern French cooking in the Queen City at the fabulously French restaurant Lumiere.

Condrón cut his culinary teeth on the classics starting his career at the age of 14 at the Dorchester Hotel in England. Since, he has worked in the kitchen for eight Michelin starred chefs.

He joined the Harper's Restaurant Group as Executive Chef of fine dining operations in 1997. Basing out of Mimosa Grill, he designed menus and opened the likes of Arpa, Zink, Upstream and M5, making his mark as the city of Charlotte was coming into its culinary awakening.

Condrón has watched the Charlotte culinary skyline morph from its local Mom & Pop, "meat and threes" beginnings, through the big steakhouse era to more independently owned chef driven establishments, and through it all he has been a pioneer in keeping Charlotte eating on the culinary edge.

In 2008 he left the Harper's and partnered with Charlottean Matt Pera to open The Liberty, Charlotte's first true gastropub. It was an era when white table cloth dining didn't fit the economic times, and the savvy partners were correct in thinking Charlotte needed something a bit more relaxed.

Lumiere shows Charlotte how it's done

But, it has always been in the back of Condrón's head to open a white table cloth restaurant of his own and bring back the classics – mission accomplished at Lumiere. With the success of The Liberty, the partners opened Lumiere on February 15, 2014. Open for dinner only, the one meal a day concept gives Condrón and his talented culinary team of Chef de Cuisine Mark Nagelberg – a chef Condrón describes as

the backbone of his kitchen – and line cooks Chefs Thomas Bordsen and Rick Johl, a chance to fine tune technique, concept and presentation.

"We can do more with the day serving just one meal," explained Condrón. "So we are sure to really get it right."

And that they do – in spades. The Lumiere dining room seats 55, and while the atmosphere is intimate, it is far from stuffy – the kitchen is enclosed in glass so guests can watch the action as they dine, and the trio of chefs work together as a well crafted machine.

"We're a family here. It's close quarters, so we have to get along," Condrón continued. The synergy in the kitchen spills over to dining room management and waitstaff. Lumiere is fine dining at its best.

The menu at Lumiere is dictated by the availability of ingredients. Condrón is a long time supporter of shopping with local farms and producers, supporting local farmers before "Farm to Fork" became the industry buzzword.

"No questions but that it's good karma for chefs to support local farming artisans. The quality of local ingredients and attention the farmer pays to detail shines on the plate. Farming is the hardest job in the world – they make what I do easier," said Condrón.

But at Lumiere it's not just farm to fork, it's about

staying true to French culinary roots and keeping the quality at a very high standard.

While Condrón doesn't list local farmers' names on the menu, he and the Lumiere team buy local product daily from dozens of area farms sourcing what they can, but also bring in product that stays true to the concept.

To that end the Lumiere menu offers an incredible depth and breadth of flavor, color and texture on each and every plate. There is not a wrong choice. Each dish is comprised with painstaking detail – veritable works of art; each every bit as good as they look.

For Condrón, a successful restaurateur is one that knows success is about the little things. Fresh baked gougere at every table, complimentary amuse to start; a dessert amuse at the end of the meal. Condrón purposefully does not list all of the ingredients in each dish on the menu – feeling that there needs to be some element of surprise, to keep the meal exciting. He wants guests at Lumiere to have a real French dining experience.

"French food is not just about butter and cream," he told me. "No one does the fundamentals better than the French – it is the cuisine that sets the standard for everything else. The French have mastered the world of hospitality; we want to offer our guests a taste of something that seems to be fading in America."

Let's talk history for just a bit. In the industry, years ago up and coming young American chefs got their skills and training from more experienced French chefs. When those young chefs set out to open restaurants, they all were French restaurants because that is what the young chefs knew.

Charlotte was no different. The 1970s dining public was mad for restaurants like Marais, Chez Daniel, Patou and Bijou who took the headlines and made the big reviews. But then, in the 1980s New American Cuisine was born. and those young American chefs started coming into their own, taking risks and putting their own spin on things.

"When something new comes along, something

Escargot in puff pastry sautéed with button mushrooms, sundried tomatoes and herbs



old goes away,” Condron reminded me. “It’s never a bad thing. Charlotte has lots of up and coming chefs doing great and exciting things; but with Lumiere we wanted to go back to the classics and give this nod to the French.”

Condron’s culinary philosophy is to work with really good ingredients and let them be the most important thing on the plate – “It’s not about me,” he says modestly. “My goal is to do justice to the product.” He teaches his staff to utilize everything, and the team at Lumiere prides themselves on the fact that their dumpster is never full.

“We don’t waste anything – utilizing the product correctly is how we pay respect for the artisans who grow or produce it.”

You can see more of what Chef Tom Condron and the team at Lumiere are doing on the menu, at cooking classes and special dinners and at guest appearances at events around town, by getting on Lumiere’s email list and by following the social media: Tom Condron and Lumiere Restaurant on Facebook, @LumiereCLT on Twitter and @Lumiere_French_Kitchen on Instagram.

Get up very early on a Saturday morning, and you’ll spot Chef Condron at a trio of local farmers’ markets: The Matthews Community Farmers Market first thing, then at the Yorkmont Road Regional Market and then at Atherton Mill and Market. After you see what he bought, you’ll want to make reservations to eat and enjoy...

Lumiere is located at 1039 Providence Rd., Charlotte, NC 28207 and is open for dinner from 5-10 pm Monday – Saturday. Call 704.372.3335 for reservations or visit lumieremyerspark.com.



Modern Duck a l’Orange with Hudson Valley Duck, orange compote, braised fennel, pearl onions and a grand Marnier duck reduction



Classic Bouillabaisse with halibut, clams, mussels, sea scallops and lobster. Tomato saffron broth, croutons with rouille and roasted root vegetables.

