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Brix Restaurant and Wine Bar

New Flag restaurant serves up wine, regional cuisine
Scott Heinonen
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Every so often a new restaurant comes along that ups the ante in the game of fine dining in Flagstaff. The recently opened Brix Restaurant and Wine Bar on north San Francisco is the new player this time around and the buzz on the street is, in one word ... fantastic. I sat down for coffee recently with the restaurant's chef/proprietor Laura Chamberlin to talk a bit about her and her partners, Paul and Laura Moir's first restaurant venture and their vision for Brix. The name Brix refers to sugar content of grapes at harvest in the winemaking process.

SH: Let me get this straight, you and Paul met at culinary school in Denver and since graduating have been working toward opening a place of your own?

LC: Correct, Johnson and Wales. We worked so well together at school and thought we could someday make a go of it. When we found ourselves both working in Flagstaff, we considered it to be an opportune time. Things have just clicked since.

SH: How long have you been cooking professionally and what was your first restaurant job?

LC: It's been almost fourteen years. I started out as a line cook at a place called Grandy's.

SH: You were lucky, I started out washing dishes! (laughing) After all these years, what keeps you motivated day in and day out? I know some days half the battle is just getting yourself into the kitchen.

LC: Well honestly, I'm really not a morning person, so working nights has always agreed with me. I think the excitement of opening my own place and striving to better myself has really been driving me for awhile. Ultimately though, I just love to cook and enjoy feeding people.

SH: What is your favorite and least favorite thing about cooking?

LC: I love the creative aspect, but hate the long hours.

SH: Yeah, it's definitely a labor of love relationship sometimes in the restaurant business. How would you describe your style of food at Brix?

LC: We're trying to support local farmers and ranchers from the northern Arizona and Four Corners area. The food at Brix will be contemporary american cuisine with an emphasis on mediterranean flavors. We're also using some local organic produce from McClendan Farms north of Phoenix and our goat cheese is from Black Mesa Farms in Snowflake.

SH: What about seasonality? How often will you change the menu?

LC: Our menu will definitely revolve around the seasons. We'll change the menu with the seasons and whatever is fresh and available at that time of the year. I want the food to be straight forward and ingredient driven-no more than four or five ingredients in each dish. The food will be uncomplicated yet interesting.

SH: Sounds great! Having cooked in Oregon and northern California for the past ten years I can really relate to that style of cooking. It keeps things interesting, not only for you and your staff, but for your regular customers as well. Speaking of seasonal foods, what is your favorite season?

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LC: I love spring. Everything is so new! It's like a new beginning to the cooking year!

SH: What are some of your favorite spring ingredients?

LC: Let's see ... spring peas, favas, asparagus and fiddlehead ferns. I love cooking with aged vinegars, citrus, different olive oils and various salts.

SH: Any signature dishes you see developing thus far for Brix?

LC: We really want to do some fun things with our cheese offerings. Maybe a really good crispy skinned half chicken and a killer steak frites. I guess time will tell.

SH: I was in the other night and loved the cheese plate. The house made crackers and poached apricots were great. I could have sat at the bar all night and just eaten cheese.

LC: Well ... you more or less did! (Laughing)

SH: That goat cheese is so incredible! OK, next time we'll do entrees and desserts.

LC: Perfect. I'm looking forward to it.

SH: Laura, thank you for taking the time to chat a bit and for the coffee. I know you've only been open for a couple weeks and are extremely busy. Good luck to the three of you with Brix and what is already looking to be a bright future in Flagstaff.

LC: Thanks so much, this was great.

Brix Restaurant and Wine Bar is located in the Historic Carriage House Building at 413 N. San Francisco St., just two blocks north of downtown Flagstaff.

Hours of operation: Lunch 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Friday; dinner 5 to 9 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

Reservations recommended. Phone: 213-1021

Executive Chef Scott Heinonen graduated with a degree in Hotel and Restaurant Management from the acclaimed Hospitality program of Northern Arizona University in 1994. Following graduation, Heinonen moved to the Oregon Willamette Valley to help open the Third Street Grill just outside of Portland.

Since then, Scott's many culinary experiences have included positions as chef at a number of restaurants; Forest Highlands Golf Club, The Resort at the Mountain, Plumpjack Squaw Valley, Jack Rabbit Moon Restaurant, Lahontan Golf Club and Moody's Bistro in Truckee, CA.

In addition, Scott has attended several courses at The Culinary Institute of America at Greystone studying Cakes and Pastries, Artisan Breads, Wedding Cakes, Chocolate Fundamentals, Charcuterie and Wine Sensory. Chef Heinonen even had the opportunity to be Paul McCartney's private chef while residing in Lake Tahoe.

Upon returning to Flagstaff last January with his family, Chef Heinonen took on the challenge of Executive Chef at The Pine Canyon Club here in Flagstaff.

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