

# Paramour: The Wayne Hotel's Culinary Star

With passion and panache as key ingredients at this Main Line restaurant, the Wayne Hotel gets its gastronomic groove back.

BY BETH CECCARELLI PUBLISHED JANUARY 19, 2012 AT 04:40 PM

## Paramour

**Atmosphere:** Sleek, chic and modern.

**Extras:** Seating at a special chef's bar; afternoon tea coming soon.

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When Restaurant Taquet closed in the summer of 2009 for renovations, it would never reopen—after some 20 years as a fixture on the Main Line's high-end eating scene. The Wayne Hotel's prime dining space has seen a series of chefs over the years, and it took a decidedly modern turn when the hotel's owner, S.W. Bajus Ltd., brought in Michael Giampa as a consultant for what is now Taquet's successor, Paramour.

After a two-year overhaul of the space and its concept, Giampa has assumed the role of Paramour's executive chef and director of restaurant development. It's a role he naturally fell into, given his involvement in the project from day one.

Giampa knew that Paramour would have to be a complete departure from its buttoned-up French predecessor. And it would be a challenge in light of the restaurant's iconic local presence for so many years. "How do you break the mold of a classic French restaurant and make it a place where people in their late 20s all the way up to their senior years would want to come?" he poses.

One way is through a total redesign—a feat impressively executed by Radnor's L&M Design and DePallo Design & Planning of Conshohocken. The revived space now has a chic bistro/bar area, a comfortable outdoor veranda, a private dining salon, along with a more formal dining area. "When you walk into the restaurant, you won't know you're in the suburbs," says Giampa. "People have said it has a Manhattan feel."

And prices are city-like, with entrées ranging from \$24 ravioli to a \$45 rack of lamb or whole market fish. Topped with earthy, sage-infused chanterelle mushrooms and tender shredded duck, the handmade chestnut ravioli were special enough to warrant the expense.

The menu's "primal cuts" section offers \$28-\$45 meat entrées (sides not included) that are popular with the business crowd. For those looking to scale back a bit, the flatbread, raw bar, crudo and small plates are quite delicious and filling on their own—especially the crudo sampler, with its citrusy, lightly dressed tuna, salmon, fluke and oysters.

A world traveler, Giampa understood that putting crudo on a Main Line menu was risky, but he was determined to give it a shot. The delicate flavors and beautiful presentation are impressive, even if some might argue that the crudo trend has run its course.

Paramour prides itself on its fish selection, and rightly so. On a recent visit, a beautiful filleted Hawaiian Kona Kampachi was remarkably flavorful, the sashimi-grade yellowtail's naturally rich flavor benefiting from the simple salt-baked preparation.

The pan-roasted wild striped bass was well prepared and carefully plated alongside a deliciously reimagined take on creamed corn, with heirloom beans and vibrant green snow-pea shoots.

A good 70 percent of what Paramour offers is from domestic sources—even the far-reaching wine and beer lists. Still, you won't see Paramour touting organic and local ingredients. Giampa hopes his guests will realize that, with a restaurant of this quality, they're going to get that regardless of what it says—or doesn't say—on the menu.

Be sure to save room for dessert. Pastry chef Amelia Dietrich (formerly of Alison at Blue Bell and Philadelphia's Opus 251) offers refined preparations that are both meticulously executed and playful.

The light-as-air espresso pot de crème was a highlight, its deep-roasted flavor balanced expertly by its creaminess. The raspberry fig linzer tart and steamed lemon pudding cake were also standouts.

**THE SKINNY:** Cushy white-leather seating and sleek, contemporary touches have utterly transformed the Wayne Hotel's restaurant space. Paramour's vibrant bistro/bar area is a great spot to grab a drink and a quick bite with friends. But be prepared: The more formal dining room can be a bit loud.

Giampa's modern American menu is executed with thoughtfulness and finesse, demonstrating an appreciation for ingredients and a fine-tuned instinct for flavor combinations. Pricey and fairly ambitious, Paramour is a likable addition to the local dining scene.