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Italian Masterpieces

There's an artist in the kitchen at Michaelangelo's

The bartender tells me she's convinced that executive chef Michael Annandono goes home every night and "unzips the Michael costume," revealing a little old Italian lady who's been cooking hearty sauces, meat-filled handmade pastas, carpaccios, and risotto all her life. Old-school cooking and unique Italian vintages define **Michaelangelo's** (2198 Murray Hill Road, 216.721.0300, mangelos.com), the Cleveland restaurant and wine bar Annandono opened with partner Joseph Rutigliano in May 2006.

A case in point: Annandono is clearly, unabashedly in love with Ramato XL, a copper-colored pinot grigio from the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region in northeastern Italy. It's made using grapes with the skins left on, an old-style

method only a few vintners still practice. The talented young chef says this wine pairs perfectly with his lobster sage raviolini and rock shrimp in vodka tomato cream sauce. He found it last year at Vinitaly, an annual wine show in Verona that Annandono attends regularly.

Michaelangelo's specializes in the hearty, rustic cuisine of

web exclusive

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the Piedmont region of northern Italy. Annandono lived, worked, and studied there for three years, learning to prepare the traditional carpaccios, meaty ragus, and veal dishes that are the highlights of his menu. "The area has a unique culinary style that has a lot in common with its neighbor, France," the chef explains. "We used butter, duck, and truffles, and prepared things that I do here, like the roasted escargots, and cannelloni in a rich mascarpone béchamel." A stickler for authenticity, Annandono insists on guinea fowl, veal, and duck for his Bolognese sauce, wild boar to stuff the tortelloni, and organic ingredients. "That's what I was taught — everything fresh, no preservatives, and made from scratch every day," he says.

other readers.

Annandono is a veteran of numerous acclaimed Cleveland kitchens, but this is the first place he can call his own. It's a lovely, contemporary-looking space in a 100-year-old building that once housed a neighborhood social club. He's created a distinctly European ambience, combining elegant surroundings and polished white-linen service with a casual, ties-not-required attitude. "The atmosphere," he says, "is fine dining without the stuffiness."

Citizen reviewers have given Michaelangelo's high marks — earning it a spot in Zagat's 2009 America's Top Restaurants survey. Whenever you show up, you're likely to become a fan of this Italian-inspired dining destination too.

— *Laura Taxel*

Getting There: Continental offers nonstop service to 67 destinations worldwide from its hub in Cleveland.



Five to Try

Some recent additions to Cleveland's dining scene:

- 1 L'Albatros.** 11401 Bellflower Road, 216.791.7880. A modern take on the French brasserie in a pair of interconnected, beautifully renovated brick carriage houses in the University Circle neighborhood. albatrosbrasserie.com
- 2 Bar Blue.** 12718 Larchmere Blvd., 216.721.5500. New owner and chef Kurt Steeber has reinvented the restaurant formerly known as Boulevard Blue with imaginative seasonal regional cuisine. boulevardblue.com
- 3 Bistro on Lincoln Park.** 2391 W. 11th St., 216.862.2969. It's a white-tablecloth dining room in a building with vintage charm, but the food is all here and now: chorizo blini, ratatouille ravioli, and sous vide salmon. bistroonlincolnpark.com
- 4 La Strada.** 2050 E. 4th St., 216.861.3663. Movies are projected on the wall, and Fellini would have loved the dreamy décor. You'll love the pasta, kabobs, and Mediterranean street food. lastradacleveland.com
- 5 Taste.** 2317 Lee Road., 216.932.9100. This sleek, modern spot in Cleveland Heights has an

open kitchen that turns out a small selection of tasty and creative fare, matched by a long list of reasonably priced California wines. tastefoodwine.com



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