DON ALFONSO 1890, TORONTO

A taste of the Amalfi Coast.

Writer **Renee Suen**

For Canadians, enjoying a meal prepared by a Michelin-starred chef is anything but easy (Canada has been, after all, notoriously absent from the Michelin Guide). However, with the opening of chefs Alfonso and Ernesto Iaccarino's **Don Alfonso 1890** in Toronto, world-renowned cooking is now a little more accessible. This is the first North American outpost of the two-Michelin-starred restaurant concept, which started in Italy and has since expanded to New Zealand and China. Created in partnership with the Liberty Entertainment Group, the new location brings flavours from the **Amalfi Coast** to Toronto's Financial District.

Instead of transforming the neighbourhood's historic Consumer's Gas Building into one unique space worthy of its new tenant, creative director Nadia Di Donato has created three. The main dining room drips with refined contemporary details, with white marble– and stonework-lined interior inspired by French artist Philippe Pasqua's *Crane*. In addition to an entrance bar outfitted with a backlit onyx bar-top and gold-accented furnishings, there's a glass enclosed wine cellar with 650 labels and a three-storey waterfall cascading down custom mosaic tiles.

> Mixologist Oliver Stern's playful molecular numbers guarantee imbibers a drink and a show.

In the relaxed mezzanine lounge, walk-in guests are welcomed by low sofas, dark woods, and commissioned artwork by Toronto-based visual artist Daniel Mazzone. Besides an à la carte menu and well-crafted classic cocktails, it's mixologist Oliver Stern's playful molecular numbers that guarantee imbibers a drink and a show. The flashy two-part Mojito Then and Now starts with a traditional rendition of the cocktail with muddled lime and mint, and finishes with a boozy liquid nitrogen mojito sorbet made tableside. Meanwhile, the whimsical Aperol Bubble Tea Spritz tops a fruity gin-based cocktail with encapsulated Aperol "pearls".

Still, perhaps the most notable space in the heritage Italianate and Neo-Renaissance style building is the eye-catching open kitchen. Half encased in glass, the gleaming state-of-the-art kitchen is where Toronto-based executive chef Saverio Macri and his culinary team prepare the perfectly manicured dishes on the eight-course tasting menu.

Dinner may launch with a flight of canapés before proceeding to the restaurant's signature: a sturgeon caviar crowned quenelle of ice creamed eel. Ernesto Iaccarino's version of a traditional baked egg surrounds a slow-cooked yolk with creamy burrata foam, while a medallion of organic Manitoba bison tenderloin is swaddled in a rustic bread crust. Silky sheets of seared Muscovy duck breast are served with swirls of anise demi-glace and reduced balsamic vinegar. The elegant combination is enhanced by a savoury cabernet sauvignon-cinsaut blend from Bekaa Valley, Lebanon—one of the many interesting wine pairings available to sip alongside your meal.

Although Iaccaronio is excited about the exceptional Canadian ingredients showcased on the menu, it's the multicultural kitchen brigade assembled that has the restaurant patriarch beaming. "I cannot do this alone," explains Iaccarino. "It's the team. I am the conductor of this international orchestra."

With Iaccarino leading this culinary concerto, Toronto is all ears.

Don Alfonso 1890, 19 Toronto St., Toronto, ON