

# DOLCE



SINCE 1996

## ANDREA BOCELLI

OPERA'S FINEST MAESTRO OPENS UP  
ABOUT HIS SUCCESSES AND A LIFE  
LIVED IN THE LIGHT

**+** ARTIST AND GALLERY OWNER GINA GODFREY,  
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Publications Mail Agreement # 40026675

SUMMER 2019 | US / CDN \$15.00



# The Upper ECHELONS OF HOSPITALITY

Steven Salm has redefined what it means to run a restaurant. Developing and managing venues that take guests on a culinary journey, Salm has permanently changed Toronto's food scene with establishments such as Arthur's Restaurant and Planta Queen

WRITTEN BY VICTORIA SCOTT

**F**or many of us, a restaurant is a place of luxury and comfort, a temporary escape from the responsibilities of everyday life. We don't typically sit back and think about how that oasis came to be. From ideation to design, construction and menu development, a number of factors affect the success of creating a single restaurant. Now imagine doing that 10 more times.

It's not just an exercise of the imagination for Steven Salm; he's done exactly that since founding Chase Hospitality Group in 2013. Working on his laptop in the back booth of Arthur's Restaurant, he fits in perfectly with the ambience of the space. Salm has spread his vision across the city, opening restaurants that can only be described as enchanting.

"I think a lot of my inspiration and drive came from exposure — living in New York, having the ability to be in a place where dining and being around tons of people in a service environment are very normal," he says. Salm got a first-hand taste for the industry while working for both BLT restaurants in New York City and for Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment in Toronto as a general manager. He was determined to take on a more leading role. "It was always a passion and a drive for myself to be my own boss and have a business of my own [with which] I could shape the dynamic for the future as I saw it," he says.

In 2013 he accomplished that goal by creating Chase Hospitality Group with co-founder Michael Kimel. The company grew quickly, debuting with the Chase Fish and Oyster, and following that up with fine dining restaurant The Chase. The Colette Grand Café came next, followed by Little Fin, Kasa Moto, Planta Yorkville, Planta Burger and Palm Lane in subsequent years. The company branched out to the United States to open Planta South Beach and has since returned to Toronto with Arthur's Restaurant and Planta Queen.

This extensive expansion was not necessarily the company's original goal. Rather, Salm describes it as opportunity-based growth after finding individual real estate opportunities. "All of the destinations were so unique, in terms of what they had to offer from a guest experience, that the concept had to follow suit, and we had to create an ambience in an environment that suited the real estate that we found and fell in love with," he says. Developing these concepts takes a special touch, one that is fuelled by creativity, magic and a little bit of fear, something Salm knows all too well.

With this approach, Chase Hospitality Group has opened a diverse selection of restaurants — ranging from classic American to Japanese to plant-based cuisine — all thoughtfully crafted to bring to life Salm and his team's vision of offering guests an experience that transcends simply sitting down for a meal. Salm's passion for this business is

unrivaled. Just this year, Chase Hospitality Group celebrated the grand opening of its two newest restaurants, Arthur's Restaurant and Planta Queen.

Arthur's Restaurant, which opened in January, can be described as an elegant tribute to mid-century eating establishments that provides guests with a simple yet high-quality experience. The menu is brimming with American classics, including matzo ball soup, Dungeness crab cake and the ever-faithful pastrami on rye. Stepping into the space, one is struck by the detail incorporated into the bar and dining room, from the tufted leather furniture, to the suspended ceiling crafted from wood panels that mimic the facets of cut crystal, to the bronze patina that draws your eye to the centre, a feature used throughout the space.

The inspiration behind this restaurant is Salm's late father, a man whose mentorship he credits as having a great impact on who he is today. The design, theme and menu all honour the period in which his father grew up. Guests are transported back in time and reminded of some of the events of that era, which his father experienced first-hand.

Planta Queen, the fourth establishment to bear the Planta name, was introduced in March. Chef David Lee's menu, inspired by his youth, is composed of dishes with a range of Asian influences, including spinach and shiitake dumplings, sashimi pizza and pineapple fried rice. The space lends itself to the Asian influences

Steven Salm drew  
both inspiration and  
drive from his time  
living in New York City





- 1 Innovative plant-based dining, with a commitment to environmental sustainability, is featured daily at Planta restaurants' locations, including Planta Queen, shown here
- 2 The Chase Fish and Oyster; cousins of the sea, featuring lobster, oysters and crab, are drizzled with lemon and packed with flavour
- 3 Triple-deckers are on offer at Planta Yorkville
- 4 Planta Queen; Asian-inspired salads delight the most discerning palates



that pervade the menu. Metal archways, dragon motifs, exposed brick and custom wallpaper can be found throughout the dining room, lounge, bar and private room.

The distinguishing feature of the Planta restaurants is that their menus are 100 per cent plant-based. This may be a deterrent to some diners, but Salm's mission is simply to provide options for everyone, regardless of their lifestyle choices or dietary restrictions.

"There's no difference between dining at Planta and dining at The Chase; they're both restaurants, they both have great design, they both have impeccable service, they both have great leadership, [and] they are both part of a company that stands for amazing values. There's no difference between the two. The only difference [with] one is that there are no animals on the plate," he says. "Nobody gets out of a \$150,000 Tesla and says, 'It was pretty good for an electric car.' They say, 'It's a pretty awesome car,' – and that's the same experience that we're trying to create at Planta. No one's leaving there saying it was great for a vegan restaurant; it's just a great restaurant."

Chase Hospitality Group is committed to running a business that prioritizes sustainability. While Planta boasts an entirely plant-based menu, each of Chase Hospitality Group's other restaurants boasts a menu that is 25 per cent plant-based. The impetus behind this business model lies in lifestyle changes adopted by Salm and his ensuing realization about his role in environmental sustainability.

"About three and a half years ago, I made a significant change in my lifestyle toward a plant-based life and diet, so for me as a restaurateur, I felt a significant shift in responsibility of things that I wasn't necessarily as aware of, particularly some of the harmful aspects of animal agriculture and how it affects the environment," he recalls. "So on a personal level, I felt like I had a duty to change the way I was living my life, and then also at that time, with maybe 300 employees and six restaurants, I felt a professional responsibility, as well."

With this shift in its business model, Chase Hospitality Group shows that, even in the hospitality industry, where it can be quite difficult to implement sustainable processes and regulations, steps can be taken to make a change for the better. Not only has Chase Hospitality Group restructured its supply chain to decrease its carbon footprint, but it has also committed to reducing its paper usage in 2019 by 50 per cent. Looking back on this decision, Salm has to laugh at the ambition, considering the company opened two new restaurants this same year, but he feels pride knowing it is on its way to accomplishing this goal by eliminating paper contracts and implementing a new system of emailing receipts instead of printing them.

Salm also has the opportunity to help others through various philanthropic efforts. One of the



PHOTO BY ELAINE FANCY



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PHOTO BY CARLOS A. PINTO

Created and imagined by the architectural firm gh3\*, Arthur's Restaurant, elegantly appointed and fabricated by Unique Store Fixtures, offers the exquisite experience of luxurious ambience and superior food offerings. Light-filled, with intimate and sumptuous bench seating, Arthur's has quickly become a favourite to all who dine there

main organizations he supports is SickKids. He has taken a very personal role within the SickKids Innovators program and has participated in the Chase an Idea grant for the past few years, contributing a sum of money toward mental health research. “I think that’s a big part of child illness that isn’t understood from a young age,” he says.

His connection to SickKids may have grown stronger since the recent birth of his own child. Last March, he and his wife welcomed their first son, Asher Salm. Describing himself as his wife’s co-pilot throughout her pregnancy, Salm’s face

beams with joy as he describes his son. “I hope when he’s 16 through 20, he’s better behaved than I was,” he says, laughing. But for Salm, the benefits of fatherhood outweigh the challenges that are sure to come. “I think previously, the only thing that you’ve been able to nurture and see grow are your family and your business, and now being able to sort of have somebody who looks up to you, that you have that opportunity to be that figure [for], has been really amazing,” he says.

In only six years, Salm and Chase Hospitality Group have made their name in Toronto, deeply impacting the landscape of the hospitality industry

here. Buoyed by success, Salm keeps looking to the future, with no sign of slowing down. With ample runway ahead of him, he is always on the lookout for new possibilities to expand the business and introduce guests to a whole new world of flavours and ideas.

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