

HITTIN' THE HEIGHTS

The new 42 shines like never before

By ANDREA KENNEDY

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRYAN BEDDER

In the dark of night, the royal blue hue of The Ritz-Carlton, Westchester roof lights up the White Plains skyline like a sapphire. Follow that same blue down the hotel's second floor corridor, and its neon lure will lead you with anticipation to a glassed-in elevator that skyrockets you to 42, the recently redesigned restaurant by Chef Anthony Goncalves. With its singularly lofty perch, lush design, world-class menu and 360-degree views, 42 is a natural crown jewel.

"We get to look at the entire county, to watch the seasons change," says Goncalves. "It's extremely inspirational up here looking out. It's special."

After the renovation, the panorama from Manhattan to the Hudson Valley remained one of the only constants. A new layout opened up the floor plan so each table enjoys the view. Dark, organically shaped plates of smooth-fired concrete replaced white tablecloths and traditional china. The new SkyLounge swims in hip-low lighting and subdued neon while the dining room uses a fresh palette of pearl leather and deep brown woods in furniture and flooring. The transformed Swarovski chandelier centerpiece lends romantic crystallized candlelight.

It's comfortable yet sophisticated, the way a chic blazer can be dressed up or dressed down. And though Goncalves says jackets are far from required — he's a T-shirt guy, after all — you'll want to put on the Ritz for the New Year's Eve blowout bash where partiers can linger at the open bar, shimmy to DJ Ski-Hi (so apropos) and graze 42 fare before watching the White Plains ball drop from on high.

"It's not a (sit-down) dinner, it's a party," he says. "Delicious food. Dancing everywhere."

Whether or not you're in your party shoes, get thee to the new 42 for the food. Made famous by Goncalves' renowned Iberian-inspired New American offerings, the menu also evolved to include tapas like those from his former Bellota to drive a more sharing-friendly experience. In fact, the entire tapas section of the menu is titled "Share," though it's a tall order to let one bite escape your clutches. This concept comfort food includes beef and pork in a puff pastry with luscious burrata; succulent pan-roasted foie gras with corn cake, mustard membrillo and green apples; and meaty grilled octopus with habanero mayo that will make any cephalopod first-timer see the light.

"You can just come here for tapas and share everything," he says. "We're good with that. You can make it what you want to make it. You can make it into a four- or five-course dinner."

And you don't need to wait for a promotion, birthday or anniversary to stop in.

"That's not only what we're here for. We're here to do

dinner and to have fun, and the atmosphere is now conducive to that style."

He calls his style "casual and refined." Patrons can consult the sommelier about an import from Châteauneuf-du-Pape or opt for a domestic Rogue Dead Guy Ale. The feel, he says, is more like his family's former outpost, Trotters Restaurant, which translates to high hospitality and accessibility as well as a cutting-edge culinary experience. This winter, he's planning a seasonal surprise concoction of seven citrus fruits. The envelope-pusher known for playful and high-design presentations hints at "some vessels" arriving to the table in the new year, plus a smoked and smoky scallop dish served up in a humidor.

"One of my best dishes is Portuguese fried chicken," Goncalves says, describing what folks in the know simply call PFC. "We put a lot of love into it. We have a 24-hour preparation period where it's soaking in this beautiful liquid."

He spikes his buttermilk with Portuguese spices, adds fermented peppers, then gives the coated deboned chicken thigh a pan fry before handing it over to an 800-degree pizza oven.

"Then I top it with tomato honey, which is something I grew up eating for breakfast, lunch and dinner with cheese in Portugal," says Goncalves, who spent summers there with extended family and now draws inspiration from a life lived more simply, revolving around food and family. "What we had was like a tomato marmalade, so we did a tomato honey."

Though the thin, crispy crust and possibly the tenderest chicken you'll find make the meat alone a game-changer, the garlicky kale and particularly the cheddar grits make the whole dish bucket-list fodder. Don't just take our word for it. It's also a favorite of some New York Knicks.

As far as celebrity chefs go, Goncalves generally flies below the TV radar — "Today" show airtime excluded — but that's not to say he doesn't run in powerful circles in and out of the food world. He says he's "like brothers" with Knicks' Coach Mike Woodson and is friendly with the team as well as many of the Rangers.

He's also "family" with mighty local business figures like 42 partner and local real estate magnate Louis Cappelli. No doubt his keen social savvy helped propel his metaphoric — and literal — rise to the top.

Just 10 years ago, Chef Anthony was simply Anthony, when changing tides at Trotters left the eatery without a chef. Not one to leave the family in a lurch, he took the



Chef Anthony Goncalves.

reins and chef's whites for the first time.

"It was easy for me. I love food," he says, and launches into his family's obsession with mealtime. "We were eating breakfast talking 'bout lunch, eating lunch talking 'bout dinner, eating dinner talking 'bout the next day's dinner. That's what we do. We make sausage. We make wine. We make tomato jams. We do it as a family. Now it's extended to everyone here."

A decade after his formal foray into professional cooking, he went from a 650-square-foot kitchen and virtually no culinary know-how to an executive chef with a spot at the top of the Ritz and a kitchen seven times that size.

"I have made a lot of friends doing this," he says. "You make chef friends that had other doors open for them, and they open up the doors for you and the world changes."

He's not shy about namedropping who helped turned the knob, calling Manhattan restaurateur Drew Nieporent of Nobu and Tribeca Grill fame "my rabbi." He speaks of inspirations "Daniel" (Boulud) and "Jean-Georges" (Vongerichten) and how "it's beautiful to dine with those guys." He travels to, cooks with and hosts his "Portuguese chef brothers" like the acclaimed Luis Americo and Marco Gomes and points to a tight-knit local chef community.

But relationships aside, sans heart and hustle Goncalves would not be the epicurean force he is today.

"We did it through reading, wanting to learn, experiencing it, going and traveling," he says, with the "we" encompassing his tight-knit kitchen team that has stuck it out. "It's been 10 years of investment of trying to get to where I am now. Through it, lots of mistakes."

Molecular gastronomy, for one, though more a phase than a mistake, "wasn't me," he says. Nor were the previous iterations of 42.

"I feel like I'm back," he says. "And I'm glad I'm back."

For more information or to purchase tickets for New Year's Eve, call (914) 761-4242 or visit 42therestaurant.com. ■



SkyLounge. Inset from left, beef and pork pastry with burrata and Portuguese fried chicken..



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