



BETULA ASPEN RESTAURANT

| TRACY BEARD

French Chef Laurent Cantineaux and Venezuelan architect and restaurateur Juan Carlos Pérez Febres opened Betula Aspen in December 2018. The two are also co-owners of Bonito Saint Barth. They opened this restaurant, known for its flavorful cuisine, impeccable service, and comfortable chic interior, in St. Barts in 2009. In 2017 Hurricane Irma devastated the island, requiring Bonito Saint Barth to close for reconstruction for six months. During the rebuilding, Chef Laurent and restaurateur Juan Carlos decided to open Betula in Aspen, a place Chef Laurent found while vacationing. Aspen is named after the tree, so the owners followed suit and named their restaurant “Betula,” a Latin word for the birch trees in the area. Betula is the sister restaurant to Bonito.

The restaurants have differences and similarities. Mountains surround Betula, and Bonito is on an island in the sea. Both are highly desired destinations for celebrities and prestigious visitors. In the words of Juan Carlos, “Bonito has a beach-house atmosphere, and Betula has an alpine backdrop.” Aspen is a stunning place

with gorgeous landscapes and Victorian houses. Betula’s design is that of a welcoming Victorian-style home with modern accents. When asked how Chef Laurent would describe Betula, he said, “The ambiance is unpretentious—friendly, cozy chic, like being at home with friends—with a sense of art de vivre.”

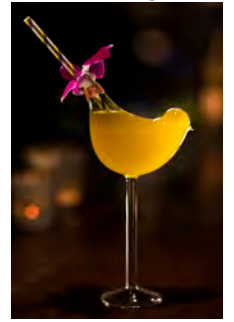
Betula, located on the second floor above high-end shops in downtown Aspen, boasts beautiful views of Ajax Mountain. Juan Carlos designed Betula with a bar lounge and indoor and outdoor seating for 130 guests. The outdoor dining area, used when the weather is favorable, has the feel of a garden terrace.

Executive Chef Laurent was born and raised in Paris, France. He attended culinary school in Paris before working with Michelin-star restaurant owners Guy Savoy at Guy Savoy Restaurant in Paris, France, and Michel Troisgros at Restaurant Troisgros in Roanne, France. Chef Laurent then moved to New York City, where he worked for Daniel Boulud at Daniel’s for five years. After New York, he spent time in Venezuela at other impressive restau-

rants. Before he opened Bonito Saint Barth, he continued to master his innovative cuisine using French techniques, Latin influences, and various spices from around the world.

The menus at Bonito and Betula parallel one another but are also unique. Laurent said, “We have an old-style rotisserie that we brought from France. It is the centerpiece of the kitchen, visible from the dining area, and where we prepare most of the hot dishes.” Betula uses high-quality ingredients from excellent suppliers. Chef Laurent said, “One of my favorite things to cook is seafood, and I like to explore Peruvian cooking techniques and seasonings. At Betula we like to make interesting, diverse cocktails with assorted flavors and colors.”

My son Garrett and his wife Victoria joined me during my visit to Aspen. They live in Colorado, so it was an easy trip for them. Aspen is one of Victoria’s favorite places, and she recommended that we dine at Betula. It was a lovely evening, and we sat outside under a large white canopy. We began dinner with a few delicious creative drinks. Chef Laurent told me that he



and his partner Juan Carlos plan to put in a retractable cover over the terrace in the future.

Cocktails at Betula Aspen arrive in an assortment of attractive glasses, various colors, and deliciously unique taste profiles. I was glad there were three of us at dinner so I could sample more than one drink. I ordered the Drink Me from the Bottom, a light and refreshing vodka cocktail made with strawberry and ginger syrup, lime juice, a homemade birch and basil tincture, fresh nutmeg, and fever tree club soda. Another delicious cocktail was the Betula Rhumtini made with cardamon-infused rum, coffee liquor, fresh espresso, cacao, and bitters. Yummy!

Chef Laurent sent a delicious amuse-bouche (free appetizer) to the table to get us started.

The plate comprised three small smashed potatoes topped with luscious guacamole. His ceviche bonito followed with striped bass and sweet potato; it was light and refreshing with different tastes and textures. Next, we enjoyed a beautiful fresh tomato salad with balsamic vinegar and cheese and a decadent dish of duck foie gras with pineapple-curry chutney and homemade brioche. It was rich and creamy.

One of our favorite dishes was chef's roast Peking duck with pineapple chutney. It was so flavorful, and the chutney was the perfect accompaniment. The seared Chilean sea bass had a crispy skin and was moist and flaky on the inside, and the bok choy and asparagus were cooked perfectly crisp-tender.

We finished dinner with a couple of tasty desserts. The warm caramelized apple Napoleon featured freshly baked puff pastry, caramelized apples, hot caramel sauce, and vanilla ice cream. The raspberry cream cheese mousse had yuzu gel, strawberry coulis, and a ginger hibiscus infusion; it was a delicious mix of sweet and tart.

If you are in Aspen, book a reservation and dine at Betula. Go early and bring friends so you can try out a few decadent cocktails offered at this chic restaurant. ♦