



CASTAGNA

*Decadent Dining in
Portland, Oregon*

| BY TRACY ELLEN BEARD
PHOTOS COURTESY OF CASTAGNA RESTAURANT



Over the last ten years, Portland, Oregon, has experienced an exponential increase in the number of new high-end restaurants. With the influx of new dining options, only the best have withstood the test of time and [Castagna](#) is one of them.

THE TEAM

Owner Monique Siu opened Castagna 18 years ago, and today [Executive Chef Justin Woodward](#) indwells the heart of the kitchen. He has fashioned multiple menus for diners to choose from; but if you desire a superior culinary adventure, order the chef's tasting menu paired with Wine Director/Sommelier [Brent Braun's](#) specially selected beverages.

This dynamic chef/sommelier duo works closely together to create combinations boasting magnificent dishes paired with a variety of wines and libations. Chef Woodward said, "I like to keep things seasonal, and I try to be creative with our flavors and our presentation. I have fun with our plate-ups and always want to keep us on our toes."

The team at Castagna is not only known in the Portland area but also is recognized by the culinary world at large. Chef Woodward shared with me that he has not intentionally labored to receive awards; however, he is thrilled to have been nominated for the James Beard Foundation's Best Chef Northwest award for the last four years, and for the Foundation's Rising Star Chef award in 2013. He chuckled and said, "I just keep doing what I'm doing." Brent also has a claim to fame. He received StarChef's 2018 Rising Star award and was

named one of Food & Wine Magazine's Sommeliers of the Year in 2017.

EXTRAVAGANT DINING

The chef's tasting menu is usually a dozen courses, but I know from experience that many courses include more than one bite-size delight. Initiating the event with a glass of bubbly, I settled in for a night of feasting.

The meal commenced with a selection of "snacks." The falafel of halibut mousse with bib lettuce and violet mustard was flavorful with a rich abundance of textures, while the Shigoku oyster from Hood Canal bathed in chicken consommé was a decadent gift from the sea. The following course, albacore tuna with rice sake, fresh almonds and wasabi was light and refreshing. Brent brilliantly paired the dishes above with everything from a light sake and pear cider, to a bright and tasty orange wine.

AN EDUCATION IN WINE SELECTION

Brent joined me for a few moments, and I asked him, "With the vast number of wines in the world, how do you choose for a chef's tasting menu?" He explained that he has a kind of rubric in his head that a wine or libation must meet.

Brent said, "Chef Woodward's food is focused and elegant without a ton of components on the plate." When Brent selects wines for the menu, he said he asks himself these questions: "What would work with that dish? What is interesting? What is from a region not overly represented? What is not too classical of a pair-

ing? And finally, what is a special wine that is either underrepresented or highly represented and therefore allocated so that normal consumers don't ever get to try it."

THE FEASTING CONTINUES

The dinner progressed with a course of summer beans in an aromatic cream, squid with society garlic blossom, and a stunning piece of Salish Sea halibut wrapped in Swiss chard over tomato, fava beans and a ramp sauce. The foie gras spread like butter over the huckleberry muffin, and summer botanicals and a white alpine strawberry adorned the plate featuring squab. Brent married the squab with a Beaujolais, and then we moved on to a curii "giro" Valencia Alicante with spicy black pepper notes which perfectly complemented the herbaceous beefsteak.

Dessert courses arrived with rhubarb and a buckwheat tuile, strawberry cream cheese tarts, and shards of honeycomb custard with almonds and almond paste. The final treat was mind-blowing, a caramelized potato skin ice cream with buttermilk granita and aged sherry vinegar, all topped with toasted meringue pieces.

Monique's secret to staying in business is selecting first-rate talent for her team. Both Chef Woodward and Brent fancy trying new things ensuring that food offerings and libations are always delicious and innovative. Whether you are a first-timer or a regular at Castagna, book your next culinary adventure with this inventive team and take pleasure in what they dream up for the upcoming seasons. ☘