





ELIA ON THE RIVER

Q+A with Operating Partner Raymond Kaprzak

| BY TRACY ELLEN BEARD

Perched along the scenic waters of River Landing in Miami, Elia on the River brings southern Italian cuisine to life with a coastal flair. I caught up with operating partner Raymond Kaprzak to hear more about this exciting new dining destination.

Who owns Elia on the River, and who is the chef?

Aden Hospitality, a South Beach-based group behind properties like Tiana Beach Inn and Salt Café, owns Elia on the River. Our Executive Chef is Peter Valdes—Chef Pete, as we call him—and he is well known to locals for his Italian dishes, particularly from his time at Serafina.

How old is the restaurant?

We are nine months in and gearing up to celebrate our first anniversary this July.

What inspired the opening?

We had been wanting to expand beyond South Beach and immediately saw the potential at River Landing. After exploring the area, it was clear that an Italian restaurant would be a perfect fit for the neighborhood.

How many people can Elia seat?

About two hundred, and that includes our riverfront patio.

What style of cuisine do you serve?

We serve Southern Italian cuisine with a coastal twist—fewer ingredients, higher quality, and bold, clean flavors.

What sets Elia apart from other Miami restaurants?

First and foremost, our location. While other restaurants along the river have views obstructed by drawbridges or industrial sites, Elia overlooks a peaceful marina and lush greenery. You can even see the stadium from here. Beyond that, we focus heavily on hands-on service training. Daily recaps, mock service sessions, one-on-one coaching—everything is about creating an exceptional guest experience.





How was the menu developed?

I curated the menu myself after spending considerable time researching Italian restaurants across Miami, Coral Gables, North Beach, and Hialeah. I looked for patterns, gaps, and opportunities and built a menu specifically for this community. Then, I brought in a chef to refine and execute the vision. I also curated the wine and cocktail list.

How was the early experience of finding a chef?

It was a challenge. We cycled through two chefs within the first two weeks. Sometimes chefs are not willing to collaborate, and you must set the tone early. Then Chef Pete walked in. After one conversation, I invited him into the kitchen for the day—and he never left. He has been here for nearly eight months now, and it has been a great match.

Do you change the menu often?

We run specials constantly. If a dish becomes popular, we consider adding it to the permanent menu. We track analytics closely. If an added item underperforms and cannot be improved, it's replaced. We also try to highlight what is fresh and local in both the food and drinks.

What is your background in hospitality?

I grew up in the restaurant business in New York. My family owned two American-style pubs, and I worked with them from age 14 until I was 33. After stepping away, I traveled and eventually landed in Miami. I started from scratch as a barback at the Royal Palm Hotel, moved up to management within months, and later worked at the 1 Hotel South Beach and the Mandarin Oriental. I eventually opened my own restaurant before joining Aden Hospitality.

Do you have personal favorites on the menu?

I love our branzino—it is honestly one of the best in town. My wife and I used to frequent another spot just for their branzino, but after perfecting ours, I cannot eat it anywhere else. Cocktail-wise, the Red Sicilian is my favorite: tequila, fresh blood orange honey syrup, and a hint of basil.

Tell me more about Chef Pete's background.

Pedro Valdes is a career restaurant operator with 32 years of experience, from dishwasher to Executive Chef. He spent 18 years as a Corporate Chef Trainer for The Cheesecake Factory, helping open restaurants nationwide. He has led over 25 successful openings and helped launch Serafina Miami before joining us.

How much input does Chef Pete have on the menu?

A lot. He has earned my trust. We always offer daily specials—a fish and a meat—and Chef Pete drives those decisions. Today, for example, we are featuring a Two-Way Snapper: a whole fish, half grilled, half fried. He also brings seasonal creativity with dishes like pumpkin risotto and squash gnocchi.

Has Chef Pete had formal training?

Yes. Pete's professional training, combined with decades of kitchen experience, allows him to excel across cuisines, though his heart is firmly rooted in Italian cooking.

Does he have a favorite childhood dish?

Gnocchi. Always gnocchi.



If Chef Pete had only five ingredients to cook with, what would they be?

Starch, tomato, salt, oil, and garlic—the foundational pillars of Italian cuisine.

Has he ever created a dish that surprised even him?

Yes, a ceviche made with piso foam, grapefruit, and avocado—it is still one of his fondest culinary memories.

How would you describe the leadership style in the kitchen?

We lead by example. Hands-on training and repetition are key. It is about staying consistent and building a strong, collaborative team.

Do you think restaurants are more collaborative today?

Absolutely, though it depends on the area, here at River Landing, there is a genuine sense of community. We support each other and want everyone to succeed.

What is the most challenging part of your role?

Every day is different—whether it is a staffing issue, a broken piece of equipment, or a delayed delivery. You are constantly problem-solving, and honestly, that is what keeps me excited to come to work every day.

Are there any future projects in the works?

There is always something brewing. We are just waiting for the right opportunity.

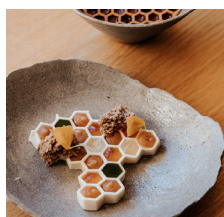
At Elia on the River, passion, precision, and a love for Southern Italian cuisine come together in a stunning waterfront setting. With Chef Pete's inspired cooking and the partners' collective vision, Elia promises not just a meal but a memorable experience—one that is already making waves along Miami's vibrant River Landing.

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