



Faith, Family,

Martin Amaya says he never set out to own Carmelina's, never felt a need to reclaim the Hadley restaurant and restore its legacy.

But now that everything is all falling into place, he admits, it feels pretty good.

"I didn't plan it," Amaya says with a big smile, "but it's good to be back."

In October, Amaya bought the restaurant where, eighteen years earlier, he began his storied rise from dishwasher to head chef. On November 1, he reopened the restaurant under the name Alina's Ristorante, selling his

South Deerfield restaurant of the same name (to former Del Raye chef Joseam Jiminez) and moving to Hadley.

Since then, Alina's dining rooms have been filled as Amaya's long-cultivated clientele follow him back across the Connecticut River.

In his new location, Amaya introduces a

menu comprising the best dishes from the South Deerfield Alina's and classic Carmelina's dishes, some of which haven't been on a menu in years.

"We'll go back to some of Damiano's [earliest] dishes," Amaya says, referring to his mentor, Damien DiPaola, who opened Carmelina's in 1985.

Alina's menu is well-focused but expansive, giving patrons a choice not just of meat, fish or poultry, but specific cuts or varieties. For the Marsala di Carne, an Italian classic, Amaya offers a choice of "Dry-aged Sirloin, Filet Mignon, Rack of Lamb, Chicken Breast or Veal Cutlet."

Along with classics, Amaya has made his mark with a consistent flow of his own creations. The V-One Cannelloni—chicken and spinach can-

Scallops Mare Monte, an appetizer finished in a spicy tangerine sauce



Friendship, Food

What goes around comes around for Chef Martin Amaya.

BY TOM VANNAH
PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAUL SHOUL

nelloni in a tomato basil cream sauce, served with crisp Guanciale (an Italian bacon)—is one of Martin's most popular dishes. The Convict's Pasta, like many of Amaya's entrees, is indulgent but restrained: mushrooms and shallots sautéed in garlic butter, blended with porcini in a basil cream sauce and tossed with penne and smoked mozzarella; Amaya uses basil and shallots to tame butter, cream and cheese in the delicate company of mushrooms.

It won't be just his food, of course, that Amaya brings back to the quirky roadside location in Hadley. The Amaya-era Carmelina's is remembered not just for its dining room, but for its bar and the good times patrons had there. Under Amaya, the place hopped.



Amaya's departure from Carmelina's in 2010 was big news. A protégé of DiPaola, today a culinary star in Boston, Amaya became the restaurant's head chef in 2001 and guided it through years of popularity and acclaim. In 2007, when DiPaola sold the restaurant to David and Debbie Windoloski, he asked Amaya to join him in his new ventures. Martin

chose to stay at Carmelina's.

But the next few years would be difficult ones for Amaya, not only at work, where he sometimes found himself in disagreement with the new owners, but for his family. Maritza badly injured her back and couldn't work. To make ends meet, Martin, who was by then widely recognized as one of the Valley's best chefs, added to an already brutal work



A crew of regulars who followed Martin and Maritza from South Deerfield to Hadley

schedule by taking on extra work painting at Carmelina's.

Under DiPaola, Amaya had enjoyed being head chef; he was treated like family. "I worked for Damien for sixteen years and he always took care of me. He's like a brother to me," Amaya says. Under the Windoloskis, with Martin "working crazy hours," the chef began dreaming about what he might be able to do on his own: "I pretended I was happy [at Carmelina's], but I was looking for a way out."

With the help of his friends and patrons Chris and Cindy Aquadro, who bankrolled Martin's new venture in South Deerfield, Alina's Ristorante was born.

Amaya opened Alina's to great fanfare. Soon Maritza was back in good health and able to step into the vital roles of managing the front of the house, keeping the books and taking charge of the look and feel of Alina's dining room and bar.

As the Amayas tasted success, they promised to remain true to Martin's sense of culinary discipline, one marked by an unrelenting commitment to the Northern Italian cooking tradition. When they spoke about their success, it was to express gratitude for all the help and support they'd received.

When I find Amaya at his restaurant on the first Monday morning of 2013, he seems changed from the man I interviewed in July, 2011. Maybe it's that he wore a chef's coat in 2011 and now, eighteen months later, he's in a T-shirt and jeans, but Amaya seems a little fitter, a little freer and a lot more at ease than he did then.

"Every night, somebody from South Deerfield comes back," Amaya says, referring to his clientele as they reconnect with him. A big smile spreads across his face

and his eyes widen. His good fortune, he says, continues to amaze him.

A native of San Salvador, Amaya didn't have his first pair of shoes until he was seven. When he came to the United States in 1994, poor and in need of work, he found his opportunity with DiPaola, grabbed it and has never stopped working at his craft. That he still loves it despite the years of unrelenting ninety- and 100-hour work weeks is clear not only when he talks about food, which he does passionately, but when he talks about his customers, about the connections he and Maritza make with the people who come for his food, about the friendships that evolve at Alina's. It is, for the Amayas, an ever-growing universe.

"It happens all the time. Not just with us, but between customers. People who come here often, they meet people and become very close friends outside Alina's. They socialize outside Alina's... vacation together," Amaya says, incredulous at the notion that his food might be the start of lifelong friendships.

For Martin, clearly the return to Hadley is special for reasons that go beyond his faith in the location or his abil-

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—MARTIN AMAYA

ity to triple his seating capacity, from forty seats in South Deerfield to about 125 in Hadley. (Amaya plans to use regularly only about eighty seats—the two upstairs dining rooms—and keep the downstairs dining room for special events.) The return also results in an important reunion: longtime Carmelina's bartender Steve Tremblay left when Amaya did in 2010; so did Emery Smith, who'd been playing piano at the restaurant since 1986. Upon hearing that Amaya bought the Hadley restaurant, both Tremblay and Smith were soon in contact and instantly agreed to return to Martin's side.

With Sous Chef Rolly Daffunchio, all his staff from Alina's in South Deerfield and half the staff who worked for the Windoloskis, Amaya has assembled what he believes is the best crew in the Valley. "Maritza interviewed each of the Hadley staff who wanted to stay and she did the hiring," Martin says, always keen to emphasize the



fact that his is a family business. “I have the right people in the kitchen, the right people on the floor, at the bar. Without them, I can’t do this.”

As we sit in the south-facing dining room, dubbed “The South Deerfield Room,” we’re joined by Maritza and nine-year-old Alina, who immediately locks her dad in a hug.

Maritza tells me about her own evolution in the restaurant business, how she’s applying skills she learned as a manager in a bank to the varied demands at Alina’s. She says she loves what she’s doing and feels more grateful for the direction of her life every day: “I’ve always believed that God had a plan for my life. And I am so thankful to Him.”

The move to Hadley, Martin says, was ultimately built on his success in South Deerfield, a venture he’d never have been able to attempt without one man’s generosity and faith. “Without Chris Aquadro, we wouldn’t have made it. I’m so lucky. No bank would have listened to me then, but Chris was there ready to help. And he wanted nothing in return.”

The banks listen now, I suggest.

“Yes, now the banks will listen to me. But most important,” Amaya says, pointing to the heavens, “thanks to God and to good friends. It’s not just me. I am not doing this alone.”

Ingredients

12 oz. center-cut veal chop
1 Tbsp. balsamic vinegar
1 Tbsp. pinot noir
1 Tbsp. veal stock
½ tsp. sugar
2 oz. enoki mushroom
1 tsp. unsalted butter

Directions

In a sauce pan combine vinegar, veal stock, pinot noir and sugar. Bring to a boil and reduce to 1 tablespoon.

In a separate sauté pan, using vegetable oil, sauté enoki mushroom until golden brown. Take out mushroom. Sear the veal chop and place in the oven (400 F) for 8 to 10 minutes. In the meantime, finish the pinot noir reduction. Slowly whisk the reduction with butter. Serve sauce on veal chop and garnish with mushroom.

Alina's Veal Chop Pinot Noir