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## Set to make you Blush

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It may seem daunting (especially for someone in this publication's demographic) to casually walk up to a restaurant like Blush and request a table. Besides the obvious cost concerns, there's the perception that high-end dining should be reserved for special occasions. By the time you further consider issues like required dress, demeanor, etc., you've probably already dialed for reservations at your old standby. Luckily for those of you curious, but deterred by preconceived notions, there's Smokin' Tuesdays.

Going on throughout the fall, Smokin' Tuesdays is Blush's effort to attract an after-work crowd to the upscale bistro, which opened its doors last April. The plan is to offer a tapas-style menu, including mussels and Kobe sliders, and reduced drink prices on the outdoor veranda from 5 to 7. Tucked off of Lancaster on North Merion Avenue in Bryn Mawr, the hope is that the events will encourage the uninitiated to discover Blush's charm.

"We're going to have specialty martinis and we'll be doing some cooking outside. People will be able to have a cocktail and maybe a few appetizers," says executive chef and owner Nick Farina. "The restaurant shows itself very well and, of course, I think our food's excellent, so I think it's an easy sell once we get people in the door."



Nick Farina of Blush

The gesture is part of Farina's overarching plan to create a welcoming environment at Blush. Having left a steady job to take his chances as a restaurateur, the native of Flourtown would like nothing more than to remove some of the pretentiousness from fine dining.

"We want it to be like you're coming into our own living room or dining room to spend the evening," explains Farina. "To me, a restaurant is everything; it's more than just the food. It's the appearance, the music and the way the wait staff is personable—all that creates the experience."

Chef Nick's philosophies have been well cultivated. Having turned an internship at Solaris Grill in Chestnut Hill into a job as the sous chef, Farina subsequently went on to study at the Culinary Institute of America. After matriculating, he appeased the discriminating tastes of operagoers, as a chef at the Grand Tier restaurant in New York's Metropolitan Opera House. A return to Solaris and work as a food consultant followed, but marriage and the birth of his son lead Farina to take a hiatus from the kitchen.

"I was with Sysco [Food Systems] just because I was getting married," admits the chef. "It was a steady paycheck with benefits and a 401K and at the time it fit my life, but I always wanted to have my own restaurant. It's a lot of money and a huge time commitment, but I knew it's what I wanted to

do. If I didn't take the chance, I'd always be asking myself, 'What if?'"

Farina's passion is evident after a few bites of Blush's Apple Bacon Wrapped Filet or Seared Crab Cakes. Those entrées along with creative salmon, lamb and ono dishes are absolutely delectable. Meanwhile, tantalizing appetizers like the Chipotle Calamari and Lobster Cigar fill out the menu nicely. Another flavorful touch is the homemade gelato (as far as satisfying light desserts go, the margarita-flavored gelato is in a class of its own).

For ambiance, the restaurant features two stories of warm candlelit dining rooms possessing the type of romantic atmosphere perfect for impressing even the most discerning date. But to really sweep them off their feet, make reservations for Thursday night. That's when Blush's recipe includes a jazz trio.

"We decided from the get-go we wanted to have some energy and there's nothing like live music to really bring that energy to the room," declares Farina. "It was a way to do something that other places aren't doing around here, a way to really distinguish ourselves."

The tunes are just a small part of Farina's plan to differentiate Blush from other Main Line restaurants.

"I'm a single owner. I'm here everyday. I have a concept and I make sure we stay within that and we don't try to become something we're not," he maintains. "We're not going to be a Savona, nor am I trying to be Savona. We have our niche and we're going to stick to that."

Considering the previous tenet occupying the North Merion location lasted only 18 months, it'll be interesting to see if Blush's niche can ensure its success. A decent turn out for the Smokin' Tuesday events should increase those chances and help Farina forget about that inactive 401K—at least for a little while.



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