

PHILADELPHIA STYLE

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TALENT PATROL



Kevin Sbraga, tops in our book

winning streak

OUT TO PROVE HE IS MORE THAN JUST A *TOP CHEF*, NEW JERSEYAN KEVIN SBRAGA MAKES HIS FIRST SOLO FORAY INTO THE PHILADELPHIA DINING SCENE. BY CHRISTINA PELLEGRINI

If there were a holy trinity of Philadelphia toques, it would be Georges Perrier, Stephen Starr, and Jose Garces. Fortunately for Kevin Sbraga, the season-seven winner of *Top Chef* and the owner and executive chef of Sbraga, currently home to the hottest tables in town, he has trained in the kitchen with all of them.

Most recently the executive chef at Rat's Restaurant at Grounds For Sculpture (managed by Stephen Starr, in Hamilton, New Jersey), Sbraga has held posts in revered Philadelphia establishments: executive chef at Le Mas

son. Diners are urged to pair each plate with a recommended beverage, which can include wine, beer, or fresh cocktails. And, of course, these are unexpected, ambitious dishes, like foie gras soup with rose-petal relish, or squab with lentils and grapes. "Every so often, someone sets a new standard, and that is ultimately what we're trying to do," Sbraga says. "I don't know if we'll achieve that, but we're trying."

If this new restaurant is any indication, Sbraga may soon earn his place among the greats. **PS**

Perrier, chef de cuisine at The Grill at The Ritz-Carlton, and director of culinary development for Garces Restaurant Group. "They have all affected me very differently," Sbraga says. "Perrier taught me a lot of sauce work, and I learned a lot about taking care of people and hospitality. From Stephen Starr, I learned a lot about consistency and management. And from Jose, I learned a lot about flavor and execution."

INSIGHT

Location:
440 S. Broad St.,
215-735-1913,
sbraga.com

Inspiration:
Atlanta's
Bacchanalia

Favorite Dish:
Lamb belly with
tamarind and
sesame granola

In 2010, Sbraga took this colorful culinary background with him to the set of Bravo's *Top Chef*, unaware that he would eventually win the title, an honor Sbraga says he still doesn't fully grasp. "I've always been one to take risks and not be afraid to do what I think is right," he says. "*Top Chef* gave me the opportunity to break out on my own."

And break out he did. After the show wrapped, Sbraga quit his post at Rat's to focus on finding a location and raising funds for his new venture. He finally settled on the former site of Chew Man Chu, in the Symphony House building on the Avenue of the Arts, as the home for Sbraga, a modern American restaurant that offers only a four-course prix-fixe menu (diners at the bar can order his creative dishes à la carte). His clientele ranges from well-heeled residents of the Dranoff property upstairs to the Avenue's theatergoers as well as the TV show's legions of fans, but all feel comfortable within his concept. "People ask if it's fine dining or casual; I think it's a new face of fine dining," Sbraga says. "The music is louder. The lights are lower. There's a little bit more energy. The kitchen is open. And the food and service are executed at a very high level. It's about great product, great people, and having a great time."

Sbraga's menu is a welcome escape from the small-plate revolution that had taken control of the Philadelphia dining scene. Although the portions are certainly on the smaller side, there are a set number of courses, and each is orchestrated to hit the table in uni-