

# CHICK

C O M P A S S

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**JERICK  
PADSING**

THE NEXT BIG THING  
IN THE RING



## ART OF THE MEAL

### RESTAURANT ROUNDUP OF PALATE, AQUA SEAFOOD & CAVIAR RESTAURANT AND SOCIAL STATION

By Stacey Gualandi

#### From Painting to Plating, Palate is a Masterpiece

How many of you remember being told as a kid, "Don't play with your food?" Sterling Buckley, executive chef for Palate Las Vegas, is lucky. He never got that message.

"The plate is your canvas, so I like to have a little fun with it," Chef Buckley says. "I always say my food is playful, like my kids, and sexy, like my wife."

After a decade in Las Vegas, mastering the art of the meal under many of the culinary world's most famous chefs—including Kim Canteenwalla (Honey Salt), Gordon Ramsay (Gordon Ramsay Steak) and David Chang (Momofuku)—Buckley is now at the helm of the kitchen inside Palate.

"I've worked for all these celebrity chefs, but this is the first project where it's all me," Buckley says. "I think the whole off-Strip scene from Chefs Roy Ellamar and Jennifer Murphy to Brian Howard and James

Trees, we're all trying to show that, 'Hey, we've all worked for the big guys, but we're somebody special.'"

Bar-Kada Hospitality owners (and good friends) Marisa Martino and Rudy Aguas say their concept for Palate was to seamlessly combine art and food in the heart of the downtown Las Vegas Arts District. Martino lives by the philosophy, "Food is art." "When Marisa said that, I was hooked," Buckley says.

*Above: Palate interior. Photo courtesy of Palate*



*Above: Palate interior. Photo courtesy of Palate*

After an unpreventable pandemic pause in 2022, Bar-Kada finally unveiled its minority, woman and locally owned masterpiece this June with a huge grand opening party that celebrated the artist in all of us.

Palate is part exhibit and eatery. The walls surrounding the studio-like space—filled with royal red and purple velvet-colored furniture, a

massive chandelier and floor-to-ceiling trees—are covered with works on display by local artists (including Martino's mom).

"Our staff bought into what we're doing here, and we're doing something very unique," Buckley boasts. "I don't know any restaurants doing what we do right now, especially here in Las Vegas."

The menu is modern Southern cuisine mixed with multicultural influences. It

reflects Buckley's own abstract and romantic style and, with one swift brush stroke, he has already made a lasting impression.

I recommend you clean your palate first with The Rose signature craft cocktail. For me, the tiger-style scallops and shrimp gnocchi were the perfect prelude to dishes like the soy-charred short ribs. His signature banana bread-filled dessert is also a true work of art.

"I've already thought about doing some new creative things, like putting octopus on the menu, cooking it in squid ink so it's like jet black and calling it the Kraken," Buckley says. "I think of crazy stuff like that, and Palate has given me the ability to do that."

The Los Angeles transplant and Le Cordon Bleu Las Vegas alum first had dreams of being a performer and songwriter. "I was signed, sealed, delivered and headed for a music career and you couldn't tell me anything else," Buckley admits. He came by performing naturally—his mom Hazel Payne gave us "Boogie Oogie Oogie" as a founding member of the musical group A Taste of Honey—but ultimately, at 18, he went from writing music to writing menus.

"Martin Heierling [at Silk Road] was the first chef to teach me about creative cuisine and multiple cultures," Buckley says. "I loved him. He is such a great chef. Big energy. Great dude. I still hear his voice in the back of my head. I would love to see Martin again. I'd love to thank him."

After appearing on TV shows like "Chopped" and "Beating Bobby Flay" and working his way up to his first executive chef job at 27, Buckley only recently learned just



how deeply food runs in his family. "My grandfather was high up at a bank in Little Rock and would entertain all their major accounts at his house by making this beef tenderloin dish," Buckley explains. "My aunt was also a popular pastry chef in Little Rock known for her apple pie... My [landscaper] grandfather on my mom's side owned a quick service restaurant in Compton and decorated cakes on the side."

Buckley, whose brother is also a local Wolfgang Puck sous chef, credits his ascension to his inspirational idols, Kobe Bryant, Chef Michael Mina and Chef Marcus Samuelsson.

"Marcus Samuelsson, of course, because I'm African American. There's not a lot of African American celebrity chefs out there," Buckley says. "Marcus Samuelsson was the first one from whom I wanted to learn more."

But the best advice he says he ever got came from his father. "It's something that I remember all the time. He said, 'Aim for the stars. You might just hit the roof.'"



(Well, his biscuits are certainly selling through the roof!)

It's advice well-taken, and Buckley says he'll continue to follow his God-given talent wherever it takes him. After all, as American artist John McNeill Whistler once said, "An artist is not paid for his labor but for his vision."

"This is thoughtful cooking," Buckley emphasizes. "I don't just put things on a plate just to put things on a

*Above Left: Palate Chef Sterling Buckley. Above Right: Palate's Southern Hospitality.*

*Bottom Right: Palate's classic cocktails. All photos courtesy of Palate.*

plate. I think about it...and at the end of the day, I think my vision as a chef is to make great food that's always very well balanced."

To learn more, visit [www.palate.tv.com](http://www.palate.tv.com).

