

REACHING *FOR* *THE STARS*

In the middle of a pandemic, "Rampoldi's" chef, Antonio Salvatore, was able to obtain his first Michelin Star. Imagination, creativity, and quality are the keywords. Above all, his cuisine is about taste, flavors, and feeling at home.

By MELINA HABERL



A chef that relies on authenticity: Culinary genius Antonio Salvatore serves sumptuous delights at the highest level in the gourmet temple "Rampoldi" and was recently awarded the first Michelin star.

Congratulations are in order, you have just received your first Michelin star! What does it mean for you personally to join the Michelin Guide?

Thank you. As an Italian chef in Monaco, joining the French Michelin Guide is a great accomplishment. Although this is something I've been dreaming about for a long time, I didn't expect it to happen so soon, especially given the current situation.

Are you dealing with more pressure now that you have received the Michelin star?

We were already under a lot of pressure before, even more so due to the Covid-19 situation. We are dealing with more pressure at the moment for sure, but I remain confident in my team and we will do our best to keep up the good work.

Has becoming a chef always been a dream of yours or was there initially a different career that you wanted to follow?

I was born in the small medieval town of Guardia Perticara, in the province of Potenza. Growing up, I used to help my family in the garden, so we always had fresh ingredients, herbs, and tomatoes. For me, this is what cultivated not only my appreciation for cooking but the culture of fresh produce. However, it was only a few years later that I really decided to pursue my career as a chef.

How did you get into cooking professionally? Where does your passion for food come from?

At the age of 12, I was working in restaurants in Potenza and went to hotelier school, where I spent every holiday

Photos: Rampoldi



Noble ambience: The setting is also right - the Monegasque "Rampoldi" relies on dignified, elegant interiors and thus appeals to a sophisticated clientele from all over the world. An overall culinary experience also requires the appropriate interior to make the sophisticated clientele feel well taken care of.



working to learn new skills. But I always come back to this: my culinary education is derived not only from my studies but from the knowledge of the natural process acquired in my family's garden.

What made you move to Monaco? What do you associate with this place?

Joining "Rampoldi" in 2016 was a dream come true. The restaurant has an impressive history and is part of the cultural Monegasque landscape, so having the opportunity to manage such an institution was an honor. To me, Monaco is the **peak** of gourmet excellence.

Monaco has the best the world has to offer. How do you surprise such an elitist audience that appears to have seen and tasted it all?

Offering Mediterranean cuisine, we bring our customers the best that Italy and France have to offer. I always cook with fresh ingredients and let myself be inspired by what I find daily at the Menton market. I believe this is one of the things my customers love the most. I like to listen carefully to their preferences and always provide them with the highest quality of products.

"Rampoldi" is a restaurant with a long history and great notoriety. How do you manage to uphold its reputation while making your own mark on the menu?

"Rampoldi" is set up in the heart of one of the most exclusive places in the world, that's already very different from any other place I've had the chance to work at before. As for "La Table d'Antonio Salvatore **au Rampoldi**", the concept is quite different, as we propose a creative gastronomic menu. We offer an exceptional, intimate and prestigious setting that is unlike any other.

The menu at "Rampoldi" offers a fusion of French and Italian food. How do you combine these two cuisines that are quite different in technique and taste?

In Monaco, it is not surprising to find a fusion of these two cuisines, which blend very well together. I have developed a set of techniques and a combination of flavors that my clients appreciate and consider to be the new Monegasque style of gourmet.

What can guests expect when dining at "Rampoldi"?

My customers want to know where their food is coming from. As a chef, I have taken the responsibility seriously to support sustainable food systems. The menu in both restaurants is built around the philosophy of hyper-seasonal and sustainable ingredients.

How do you want your guests to feel when they are leaving your restaurant?

Since the beginning, my idea has been to create a "family restaurant" where my guests can come and feel at home. The best compliment to me is when my guests come back to the restaurant day after day and feel at home.

Are you also involved in creating new food trends?

Yes, I'm working on other food concepts that will be launching soon in New York. My aim is to reproduce the ambiance of the South of Italy in the city. All of my concepts are part of the **Monte Carlo** Hospitality Group that I manage with my business partners.

At your restaurant, you offer high-class and high-quality products, such as caviar, truffle, royal crayfish or foie gras. What is your favorite product to cook with?

Given where I grew up, I stay true to

my origins. I would always choose good olive oil, fresh tomatoes, basil, and fresh bread over any other product. This is why I try to use them as much as possible in my kitchen. We also created a range of products that are available in our restaurants.

You have cooked with so many incredible chefs. What was your most memorable meal?

For many years, I've had the privilege to cook alongside many incredible chefs around the world. It would be impossible to choose one meal because each chef and restaurant was different. But what's memorable is the identity of each cuisine, the personality of each chef, and the attention to detail.

The ongoing pandemic has made life difficult for many restaurants all over the globe. How do you still attract new customers in these difficult times?

It's more difficult now to have international customers. Not to mention the international events happening in Monaco, which always bring guests willing to discover or to come back to our restaurant. But luckily, "Rampoldi" is very committed to the local community and our restaurant is still working at a high capacity despite the complicated times we're living in.

What is next for you?

I am extremely pleased about this recognition and intend to continue improving myself over the coming years. For now, I intend to maintain and improve the level of quality in our restaurants. But of course, I like to set high goals for myself so yes, the next goal would be to obtain the second Michelin star.



A feast for the eyes: The pictures of Salvatore's dishes alone whet the appetite. The star chef relies on a fusion of Italian and French cuisine and uses the finest ingredients. Extremely luxurious, yet very authentic - this is the best way to describe his culinary signature.

Photos: Rampoldi

