

EPICURE

RESTAURANT
DECONSTRUCTED 101
HEATING UP 104
LOCAL KITCHEN 110
MAIN DISH 112

DAVID STUCK



Citron pastry chef Yassmeen H. Jackson shows off her sweets.

RESTAURANT DECONSTRUCTED

NOT A LEMON

Charles Levine recently opened **Citron** at Quarry Lake, joining La Food Market in bringing some authenticity to a newly fabricated neighborhood on the shores of a fabricated lake. Levine, who started his career working for his uncle, Alfred Davis (partner to Lenny Kaplan at the legendary Pimlico Hotel), has operated a catering business for more than 30 years. His clients have ranged from Johns Hopkins Hospital to Nationals Park to the Rolling Stones. Now he wants his capacious new place (well over 10,500 square feet, not including the 4,000-square-foot deck overlooking the water) to be a go-to spot—whether it's hanging in the bar for a burger, holding a meeting in a private room with built-in audiovisual equipment or lounging in a cushy banquet for a multicourse meal.





Clockwise from top left: Chef Jerome Dorsch's osso bucco; owners Susan and David Levine; potato gnocchi with English peas, mushrooms and grano padano; a blood orange cocktail at the bar; a mid-century-style drum chandelier from Jones Lighting illuminates the entry, a piece by Baltimore artist David Brown in view.

DAVID STUCK



Building and Décor. The brand-new building (owned by Obrecht Properties, developers of the Quarry) was designed by Colimore Architects. Inside, Levine's wife, Susan, worked closely with Jenkins Baer Associates to create a soothing palette of champagne, beige and charcoal, plus dark wood, broken up with Hèrmes-orange upholstered benches and cushions on patio chairs, pastel ikat-patterned wallpaper and modern art curated by Martha Macks-Kahn of Goya Contemporary gallery in Hampden. Alan Ibello upholstered the banquettes in a fabric that feels like kid gloves to the touch, while the mid-century-style lighting, including a dramatic pattern of chrome kidney-shaped

fixtures, is by Jones Lighting. In other words, Levine has tapped plenty of local businesses, and the overall effect is understated and elegant. The views of trees and water through the floor-to-ceiling windows enhance the subdued color schemes.

Problem Solving. As a caterer, Levine explains, he's been in the business of composing the stories his clients want to tell. "Who is the bride at the Peabody Library? Who is Bob, the guy retiring?" he says. "Every day of my life has been figuring things out." Now that he has a restaurant of his own, Levine can manage the surprises: the flow of a room uninterrupted by "a sofa bolted to the floor" or a client's

tiny kitchen. "Sometimes there isn't even a kitchen," he laments. Now, he says, "we get to be in the same place every day." But the caterer in him is still ready to configure the space for whatever might arise: Pocket doors can close off a room for a corporate retreat or a birthday bash; glass panels that lead to the deck fold away, bringing the outdoors in. The eight-seat Henry's Bar, named after Levine's friend and mentor Henry Rosenberg, tucked between dining room and bar, is a nice place to escape the hubbub. And the Cove, a freestanding event space with its own terrace, is large enough for a wedding party with 150 guests. A late-night menu in the tavernesque bar, he hopes, will attract folks

on their way home from an evening at the theater or symphony.

Food and Drink. The Citron menu, says the owner, should appeal to a wide audience: “People who eat out all the time, and people here for a special occasion.” The bar features a short rib brisket burger, pizza and small plates, and the dinner menu is available throughout the restaurant. Chef Jerome Dorsch, who was executive chef at McCormick & Schmick’s at the Inner Harbor and more recently ran the kitchen of a chophouse in Rockville, offers up solid portions of thick swordfish, dry-aged steak, duck confit ravioli and osso bucco. Though Levine plans to keep an eye on the kitchen (“I’ll remind him [Dorsch] that, for example, white nectarines are in season”), the owner wants to concentrate primarily on a front-of-house role. “We’re going to do it right,” he says. As an example, he points to oyster shucking: “When you serve it, it should be plump and sit on the part of the shell that is not concave.” Also, Citron’s lobster bisque arrives as a bowl of lobster chunks, the broth poured tableside. And speaking of pouring, Levine is often rankled by what he considers stingy portions of both wine and spirits. “You’ll get a real pour here,” he promises.

Yassmeen H. Jackson, who’s been baking for Levine’s catering company for about eight years, is behind desserts such as the Citron Sundae with fried bananas, hazelnuts and chocolate-raspberry coulis. There’s also a gluten-free lemon torte served with blackberry sorbet, a chocolate macadamia nut bar dusted in gold leaf and other treats.

Final Verdict. The space is to die for (or get lost in), and if Levine delivers on his promise, Citron will be one-stop shopping for a casual beer or a wedding reception. His years in the catering business indicate he should have no difficulty making good on his pledge. □

—MARTHA THOMAS

CITRON

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