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Liberty Entertainment Group, helmed by Nick and Nadia Di Donato has introduced Toronto to restaurants and entertainment venues like Don Alfonso 1890, that have transformed the cultural experience of the city

Don Alfonso 1890

Brings Michelin-Starred Cuisine to Toronto

World-renowned Italian restaurant is a game-changer to the local scene

WRITTEN BY RICK MULLER
INTERVIEWED BY VICTORIA SCOTT

Very rarely in recent memory has the opening of a new restaurant in a major city caused the same sense of buzz and anticipation as Don Alfonso 1890, which is bringing its Michelin-starred reputation to downtown Toronto.

And even more rarely has a restaurant under this type of spotlight and scrutiny delivered to such high acclaim as Don Alfonso 1890 has since its opening in June of this year with its first North American location, becoming the go-to spot for gourmands in this truly great restaurant town.

Showcasing the incredible talents of Michelin-starred chefs Alfonso Iaccarino and his son Ernesto, Don Alfonso 1890 is an internationally recognized, award-winning restaurant concept bursting with the wonderful fresh flavours of Italy's Amalfi coast, with exceptional organic ingredients and Mediterranean

flair in both its menu and service. The new Toronto location was created in partnership with Nick Di Donato of the Liberty Entertainment Group.

"I am very happy to be bringing Don Alfonso to Toronto," says Chef Alfonso in an exclusive interview with *Dolce* on a recent trip to Toronto. "I have many Canadian friends, and in Italy they were always asking when we were coming to Canada. We are pleased to be in Toronto because it has such a big and vibrant Italian community."

Don Alfonso 1890 in Toronto is already making headlines because of its menu reflecting the incredible cooking of Chef Ernesto, and the care and precision taken with each dish, using the finest-quality ingredients available.

"People must know what they're eating and where it comes from," says Chef Alfonso. "That's why organic is number one and is so important.

That is my tradition and I cannot change. The food and ingredients here in Toronto are very similar to the original Don Alfonso 1890 in Italy, using the best of the best in fresh and seasonal ingredients."

Chef Saverio Macri, who spent several months in Italy working with Chef Ernesto, oversees the open-concept kitchen at Don Alfonso 1890, treating diners to a nightly behind-the-scenes show of the astounding artistry that is today's world-class cooking.

This was the vision of hospitality icon Nick Di Donato, president of Liberty Entertainment Group, when he approached Chef Alfonso about bringing Don Alfonso 1890 to Toronto, culminating his four-year journey and a quest for the best.

"My inspiration was to bring a Michelin-starred restaurant to Toronto, one that would reflect the quality of Michelin style, service and the culinary

With locations across the world, chef Alfonso Iaccarino has finally branched out to North America, partnering with Liberty Entertainment Group to bring Don Alfonso 1890 and its dedication to quality to an even wider audience



The sophisticated and modern interior design features contrast with the historical nature of the mid-19th-century building, in turn reflecting the simple yet intricate style in which the dishes are prepared at Don Alfonso 1890



experience,” says Nick. “I looked all over different continents — South America, Asia and in Europe — and interestingly, I ended up in my hometown in Italy, and the original Don Alfonso is just 15 kilometres from where I was born. When I went there it was more than a culinary experience; it was more about a family who, for multiple generations, have been providing incredible food.”

For the Liberty Entertainment Group, Don Alfonso 1890 is yet another step in bringing the best to the Toronto restaurant scene. “This ties us to the finest level of cuisine, and to do that you have to have the best chefs available,” says Nick. “We believe we have found that in the Iaccarino family; they execute our menu and continue what we do, which is to deliver on service, esthetics and execution. Both of us share a passion for the restaurant business, and there is great synergy in our approaches.”

Next to its elevated culinary experience and Michelin-starred quality, perhaps the most incomparable quality of Don Alfonso 1890 is the style, sophistication and elegance of its stunning design, created by designer Nadia Di Donato, wife of Nick and vice-president and creative director of Liberty Entertainment Group.

“I see interior spaces more through the eyes of an artist rather than a technical interior designer,” says Nadia. “When I enter a space, first and foremost my consideration is the one single reaction I am attempting to capture within the first 30 seconds [after] one enters the space. My design approach is not just about the interior space, but originates from the clear vision of food we are serving and

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the experience we are creating. Then my signature is to always incorporate special art pieces within the space.”

These conversation pieces start with the 30-foot waterfall featuring intricate porcelain inlays which adorns the bar area. The eye is then drawn to the rose-coloured walls, an homage to the Rosewater Supper Club that once occupied this historic space on Toronto Street.

The stunning centrepiece of the dining room is *Crane* by French artist Philippe Pasqua, an original bronze and white patina sculpture incorporating a skull and butterflies. The combination, Nadia feels fits perfectly with the sense of contrasts throughout this eclectic and exciting space. Don Alfonso 1890 is truly “dinner and a show.”

“When I experienced Don Alfonso 1890 on the Amalfi Coast, the concept that resonated with me the most was the simplistic yet intricate contrast of the food,” says Nadia. “The main dining room is designed to showcase our chef’s eight-course classic and contemporary tasting menus, and the mezzanine area is a contrast to the main dining room, with custom furniture and designs exuding a more casual atmosphere conducive to the à-la-carte menu and molecular cocktail program.”

“I think we have elevated the bar in the local hospitality industry in hopes of establishing a new standard of dining,” says Nadia. “It is the first restaurant of its kind in Toronto to showcase father-and-son, world-class, Michelin-starred chefs, a display of incredible talent in a beautiful space unlike any [other] in the city. We hope that this first North American location will be the start of a long-lasting partnership in perhaps expanding the Don Alfonso 1890 legacy throughout Canada and the United States.”

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PHOTOS BY PAULA WILSON