

# OCEAN DRIVE

## MARK ZEITOUNI OF LIDO RESTAURANT & BAYSIDE GRILL

*The Versatile Executive Chef Brings Healthy Simplicity to The Standard*



Mark Zeitouni cut his culinary chops working for some of South Florida's most talented chefs and as an executive chef in Northern California. Now he is catering to The Standard's health-conscious clientele, offering fresh Mediterranean-influenced fare.

### IN THE KITCHEN

BY SUZY BUCKLEY

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GARY JAMES

As one of the few truly healthy and truly waterfront dining options on Miami Beach, it's no wonder The Standard's peaceful Lido Restaurant and Bayside Grill has cultivated a legion of local, die-hard regulars. The sunny, Scandinavian-inspired indoor dining room is warm and charming, but—judging by the number of foodies sitting under oversized umbrellas overlooking shimmering Biscayne Bay—executive chef Mark Zeitouni's fresh, Mediterranean-influenced fare is meant to be enjoyed outside under the sun and stars.

Zeitouni spent his formative years in New York and moved to Florida with his American mother and Cairo-born father when he was nine. He was part of one of the first classes to graduate from Johnson & Wales University in North Miami and later worked with top South Florida chefs such as Robin Haas and Johnny Vincenz. After cooking at the Delano's Blue Door during its opening, he spent six years in Northern California, garnering praise as executive chef at a now

defunct bistro in Berkeley. In 2001, Zeitouni moved back to Miami and worked at Azul and the Miami City Club (now the Havana Room) before hearing about the culinary opportunity at André Balazs' holistic-edged Standard hotel, which he immediately saw as a perfect fit.

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"I live the lifestyle of the typical Standard spa member," the 37-year-old Zeitouni says. "I'm one of those guys you see on Key Biscayne riding his bike in a group every morning, and I take occasional yoga classes and enjoy the water. It really helps that I understand what my guests are looking for. It's hard to find a restaurant that really just focuses on great salads, meats and fishes prepared in a healthy way."

**OCEAN DRIVE:** What did you have in mind when creating the Lido's menu?

**MARK ZEITOUNI:** The Standard is the only spa-hotel in the [André Balazs hotel]

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Clockwise from above: Grilled Madagascar shrimp with pickled watermelon and mango chutney; fresh burrata cheese, tomato and green-bean salad with truffle vinaigrette; Himalayan-salt black-grouper ceviche.

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chain, so we talk a lot about freshness and local sustainability but also focus on general health and the feeling you get from eating the meal and experiencing the property. We call The Standard’s menu ‘contemporary spa cuisine specifically from the bathing cultures’—Turkey, Greece and the South of France, where you find a lot of the original bathhouses. It’s that flavor palate of clean food made of really clean ingredients such as oregano, olive oil, garlic and tomato.

#### **What was your inspiration?**

I cook a certain way, but the space and the guests really dictate what should be there. Most of our guests are out there sitting on the water [at The Standard’s outdoor pool and dining area] the whole day. We try to ensure the menu will work within any diet they have—whether they’re vegan or vegetarian or they eat good, natural meats. If you’re a hotel guest here for a retreat, you can come here two or three times a day and not get tired of it. Our food won’t leave you with that heavy, ‘you’ve just had some kind of extravagant meal’ feeling.

#### **You seem very tuned in to how different foods impact the body. When did you first develop this sensitivity?**

I personally spend a lot of time thinking about how food affects how you feel. It’s the difference between eating a meal of sushi, where you feel almost euphoric afterward, and having a French tasting menu and thinking it was absolutely delicious but that you need to lie down for a couple hours. In college I worked at a Japanese restaurant, where I really noticed how different foods can affect you dif-

ferently. I rode a mountain bike all around campus all day, and I’d feel fine eating rice, salads and vinaigrettes. But when I began cooking French food, I’d go to New York and try out all the best restaurants; no matter how much I loved sitting at three-hour meals with great bottles of wine, I noticed the feeling the next morning. There is such a difference: Why can you eat almost any kind of Asian food you want and feel great afterward, but a lot of French and Italian food weighs you down?

#### **So our bodies send us messages about what foods aren’t good for us, based on how we feel after eating them?**

People overlook a lot of things because they’re not listening to their bodies. Do you not like curry because of the flavor or because you don’t like the way you feel an hour later? The fact that you might not like it might have a lot to do with how your body digests it. Your body might have a really hard time processing the different things you’re putting into it, so we avoid foods with nutritional labels that have any kind of additives in them.

#### **How did you use this insight to shape what you’re cooking at the Lido?**

I started looking at the differences and thought, Wouldn’t it be great if you could have a Western-style meal with Western flavors and get the same feeling? I began pulling out a lot of the things that, if you looked at them individually, you wouldn’t eat. If you looked at the amount of butter you’re going to get in a *beurre blanc*, would you eat that chunk of butter by itself? How do you think

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you'd feel after that? And if you looked at how much cream is put in the mashed potatoes at any of the big restaurants in the country? You probably wouldn't ingest the ingredients separately like you would when they're put together. But if you look at a ceviche—some onions, a piece of chili, some fresh herbs, and superfresh fish—of course you would.

### Which regions have influenced your menu?

We try to concentrate on the Basque region and the South of France all the way over to Greece. We serve a lot of seafood and foods prepared with a lot of vinegar, olive oils and things like that. For example, I've always loved grilled shrimp with pickled watermelon. The pickled watermelon and chutney are high in acid, which cuts the grilled flavors. You don't end up with one of those sticking-in-the-mouth, creamy, buttery tastes. And we serve a traditional fish stew from the South of France, *bouillabaisse*, that doesn't contain any cream. It's actually thickened like you would thicken a bisque—puréeing the shells and fish product—but the difference is the absence of cream.

### What is your favorite dish at Lido?

The vegan *fritto misto*. Everybody says, 'But, Mark, it's fried.' And I tell them there's a good way to fry and a bad way to fry. This dish

## “We try to concentrate on the Basque region and the South of France all the way over to Greece.”

isn't breaded. The main ingredient is chickpea fries, which is one of my favorites. It's made of dried chickpeas ground into a flour and made like a *polenta*, with boiled water and a touch of olive oil. Most people make this kind of dish with cream and butter, but something mild-flavored like a chickpea really pairs better with olive oil and a little water. We make a dough out of it, then spread it into a pan. After it cools, we cut it into what looks like thick-cut fries. We peel raw artichokes and cook them like a French fry, blanching them really quickly in hot oil. When someone orders them, we take a little bit of the artichoke and the chickpea fries and finish them so they're really crispy on the outside. We serve this with a vegan aioli: Your traditional aioli is made with eggs, oil and garlic, but we emulsify it by using non-dairy products. It doesn't taste exactly like mayonnaise, but it does a pretty good job.

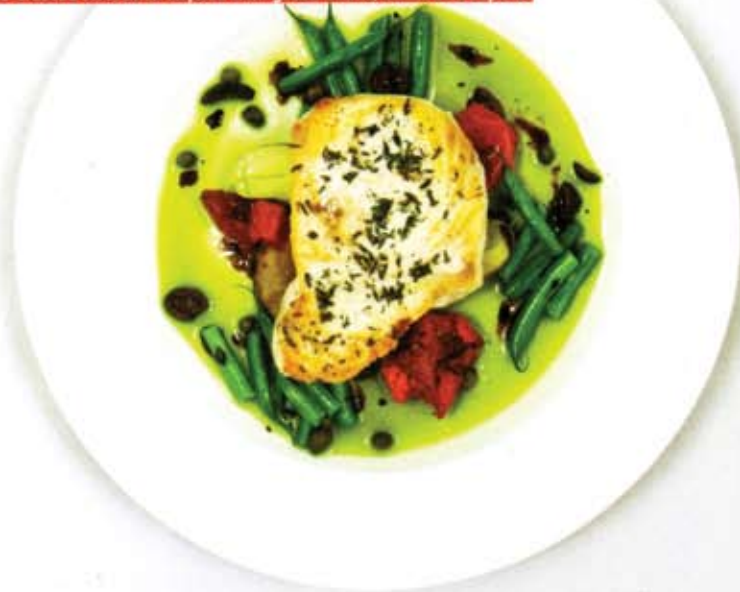
### Your grilled meat is called 'Natural Beef New York.' What makes it natural?

We're using a brand of meat called Brandt. The cows are eating grass and are not injected with hormones or fed antibiotics. They are fed a little bit of corn in the end, but this process results in a higher yield rate of what is considered better-quality beef.

### What is the restaurant's best-selling item?

We sell an inordinate amount of Mediterranean *branzini*, which is basically a farm-raised sea trout. We carefully watch the trends of which aquaculture works and which doesn't, so we don't mind using farm-raised seafood if it's done in a way that's good and healthy. There is only a certain amount of wild fish out there available. To accompany the fish, you choose your sauces and sides. We sell a tremendous amount of broccoli rabe and *quinoa*. We have a section on the menu where you pick your meat or tofu and a sauce and grains: You can have *quinoa*, giant white beans,

Thyme-crust swordfish Niçoise with green beans, olives and capers.



Grilled Idaho trout with olive oil, lemon and sea salt.



*farro* or different types of greens and make a meal that has more character than something like grilled vegetables. Three quarters of our dishes are created by people putting together their own combinations of food associated with their particular diets. 🍴