



LUCIANO PELLEGRINI EXECUTIVE CHEF & PARTNER

Biography

James Beard Award-winning chef Luciano Pellegrini was born in Bergamo, Italy, and as most Italian chefs, began his culinary experience in his mother's kitchen. At age 13, he enrolled at San Pellegrino, one of Italy's most prestigious hotel schools. He spent his teenage years attending school and gaining experience at various restaurants throughout Italy. After graduation, Pellegrini was exposed to dining at its finest when working at Locanda dell'Angelo in Bergamo.

At the age of 18, after completing his required one-year of military service as a parachutist, Pellegrini started his culinary career and gained valuable experience and working inside the kitchen's of some of Italy's top restaurants. In 1985, Pellegrini took what would be his career-changing step by moving to the United States to work with restaurateur Piero Selvaggio, who had achieved a solid reputation for bringing genuine Italian cuisine to California.

By 1987, Pellegrini was quickly developing both his cooking and kitchen leadership skills as a pasta chef at Selvaggio's restaurant, Primi. In 1991, Pellegrini was promoted to executive chef at Posto restaurant in the San Fernando Valley. Pellegrini was immediately recognized for his talents and was critically acclaimed by both the *Los Angeles Daily News* and the *Los Angeles Times* whose renowned restaurant critic; S. Irene Virbila, commented that Pellegrini executed "the kind of rustic main courses you might find in the Italian countryside."

Looking to take his culinary skills to the next level, Pellegrini returned to Italy, and while there learned the art of grilling on the "fogolar," a traditional, flavorful way of cooking on a wood-burning open hearth. He also spent a great deal of time with Bruno Libralon, a renowned Italian Chef and head of the Italian Chef Association, who is often referred to as the "King of Fish." Pellegrini also spent time with a local sausage expert in order to perfect the art of sausage-making, something very important in Italian cooking. During different stages in his travels, Pellegrini has worked with some of the most creative and respected Italian chefs in the world including Gianfranco Vissani, Fulvio Pierangelini, Paola DiMauro and Nadia Santini.

Pellegrini returned to California to showcase his honed craft and it paid off as the James Beard Foundation listed him among the Top 10 chefs in Los Angeles. He maintained this position for six consecutive years.

In May of 1999, Pellegrini seized yet another opportunity and moved to Las Vegas to become executive chef and partner of Valentino Las Vegas (The Venetian Resort-Hotel-Casino), the sister restaurant to Selvaggio's iconic Santa Monica location. Over the past decade, Pellegrini's dedication and passion in the kitchen has solidified Valentino as one of the leading Italian restaurants in the southwest. Valentino Las Vegas has received numerous awards including the esteemed DiRoNA (Distinguished Restaurants of North America) Award of Excellence, six *Las Vegas Life* Epicurean Awards for Best Italian Restaurant in Las Vegas and a 2007 Epicurean Award for the city's best wine list. Valentino Las Vegas has also received the Grand Award from *Wine Spectator*, annually, since 2002.

In 2004, Pellegrini achieved one of the culinary world's highest honors by receiving the prestigious award for **Best Chef in the Southwest by the James Beard Foundation**. Pellegrini is a frequent guest chef for some of Italy's leading culinary events, including the Bacco d'Oro di Brunello wine dinner in Montalcino, *Gambero Rosso* magazine's dinner gala in Rome and the *Guida L'Espresso* celebration dinner in Palermo. He played a critical role as one of the host chefs for the 2008 James Beard Foundation's Taste America Las Vegas – the first multi-day event ever executed in Las Vegas by the James Beard Foundation.

Pellegrini has taken a great interest in the local culinary scene in Las Vegas and played an influential role in the creation of ChefLive.com whose mission celebrates food as an essential fuel for life; and the many ways in which cooking and eating contributes to health and happiness. They produce and distribute educational and entertaining programs, promoting recipes and chefs.

Pellegrini is also a partner at Giorgio Ristorante, a more casual Italian trattoria-style restaurant located inside the Shoppes at Mandalay Place on the Las Vegas strip; and PS Valentino Vinbar inside Houston's Hotel Derek, which opened its doors in the fall of 2009.