

INTERVIEW

Marchesa
535 N. Wells St.
312-527-9535

Opened: December 2017

Owners: Kathryn Sullivan Alverà and Jason Clark
Executive Chef: Mark Sabbe ((Mercat a la Planxa, Sono, Sociale)
Cuisine: continental classics

February 27, 2017: Interview Kathryn Sullivan Alverà about her plans for Marchesa

The interview was all Kathryn. She's a smart engaging gal.

Penny Pollack: Has that space been empty since Crofton?

Kathryn Sullivan Alverà: Yes.

It's been so many wonderful restaurants since the 1930s. The beautiful terra cotta goes back to the 30s. Continuously operating restaurant here. People have come here for a good time and drink and a meal. Built in 1878, after the fire.

In 1900 a music hall called the Chicago. We have a copy of the newspaper article talking about . . . it was a rowdy district over here. Like the Everly Sisters on the south side. Mayor tried to put the kibosh on it.

There's a photo of Rudolph Valentino's nephew and the owner in the 30s.

[In the tradition of] Jacques. Jovan. Gordon. Doing continental b/c we want to do a great coq au vin or Jacques Coquilles. Spanish is great and we love paella. This way we can always have something that you long for instead of focusing on one region or country. Want a broad canvas to paint on.

Every light fixture, every dish has a story. Trying to create a home that has opulence but is comfortable. Not fancy-schmancy but not too casual either. When you dine out, you feel a little special.

Moderate [prices and offerings] to truffles. Not every diner has an expense acct these days. Delicious and simple. Moderate wines from all over the world. We will also have a Champagne cellar. Limestone Champagne cave. You can go down there and enjoy dinner or [also] open late after dinner. Lunch, dinner, and late night.

Full kitchen, even late night.

First floor 100-120. Private table in the kitchen.

Restaurants have all become chef-driven and bartender-driven. We are trying to do a guest-driven restaurant here. Not everyone wants to be part of the kitchen. Chefs can come and go. Sometimes you just like a restaurant and the way it makes you feel. We want people to love it b/c they can hearken back to yesterday. Make the guests feel like the stars.

We will not be about rules. Or dictating to the guest.

Lower level: the cave for Champagne.

About 30 seats. Has a fireplace, so it's cozy. We have permits from the city to store wines underneath the sidewalk. So we can have temperature and humidity control. We can lay down some aged wines. We have verticals of three years in a row that you can compare and that you can splurge on.

PP: By the glass?

We can open things that we normally wouldn't and know they will last a couple of days b/c of the Coravin system.

Second floor: Frenchy style. It's between two buildings and it's like the light well in between. Big shaft was built in the middle to get a breeze.

PP: I can't picture this. Is it like a balcony?

Doorway and you step out and you are on the same level as the second floor. Look up and there's the sky. Like a light well. About 15- 20 people could stand there or 8 to sit and dine. We are opening all the nooks and crannies of the bldg. and breathe life back into it.

PP: Where is the kitchen?

Main kitchen is on the first floor.

Other floors have a hood (meaning an oven) and a kitchen. Each floor has its own oven, whatever it needs. Like catering kitchens on the other two floors. Own kitchen and own staff.

No one on the main floor would know there is a party for 20 upstairs.

Jason and I look at this as evolution of all things we have learned in the business.

PP: Will it be possible to snack inexpensively?

Charcuterie items by the person, by the platter, some dishes for the table – a whole chicken. You can also spend \$35-\$45 for three small courses plus a drink.

Wines from Argentina, Chile.

Pretty flowers, nice linens. Not a disco at 6 pm so you can't talk.

The menu will not look so tiny that you need your iPhone lamp to read it. We want to be user friendly.

We asked ourselves: What drive us crazy and what do we love when we go out.

PP: Opening when?

20-year anniversary of Narcisse is in May. Hope to open in May. [Marchesa opened in December.]

My partner is Jason Clark. He has always been my business partner. The chef is Mark Sabbe. He was at Mercato and Sociale and he is also a sommelier. And sommelier Cressman. He is so enthused about wine. He is a people person.

PP: Cocktails?

Oh yeah. Trying to go . . . Euro beers. Belgian ales. Full bar. But nothing with a 1,000 ingreds that takes forever to make.

There was a real-life jazz-age marchesa. Lived in Venice. Not a speakeasy theme. Not reinventing the wheel. Good meal, good wine, nice ambiance. Make the guests happy.

PP: And what about rolling cart service?

The cart for wine tastings will be on the main floor. We will bring it around *if* you are interested. Use it to bone a fish tableside, but that's it. We don't want a dog and pony show. We will use it only when it makes sense.

MY DINNER AT MARCHESA: March 2018

All deliciously decadent.

Shrimp Jovan \$15

Pan-sauteed shrimp, garlic, black pepper and butter sauce, grilled sourdough bread

Iberico de Bellota "secreto" \$39

Secret cut of Iberico pork, beet purée, marinated baby beet excabèche, Iberico bacon

Duck breast \$38

Breasaat of Moulard duck, seared foie gras medallion, pomegranate compote, chestnut purée, sliced fennel, blood orange and sherry vinaigrette

I started with a well-made Cosmo (my drink of choice these days), and I finished with house made coconut sorbet drizzled with dark chocolate. The chocolate was my request!