



GOODtaste > Dining Out



Crispy octopus with romesco sauce from Glass Light. Top right: Glass bunny sculpture in the dining room. Right: Butter poached halibut with kohlrabi.

Global Flavors

Get away without going away in Norfolk.

By PEGGY SIJSWERDA

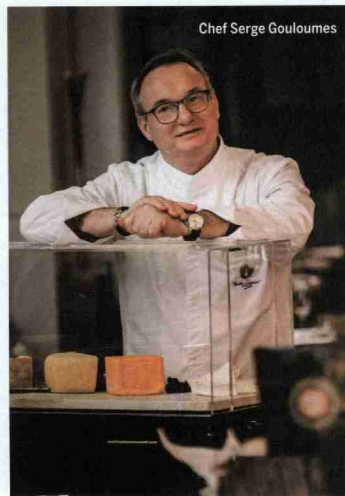
TRAVELERS HAVE HAD IT ROUGH this year. Meticulously planned holidays abroad evaporated when the pandemic hit, leaving frustrated vacationers with empty dreams and passport pages. The good news is you can enjoy a mini-escape to your favorite world destination anytime when you dine at an international restaurant.

In Norfolk three global restaurants offer transcendent meals that will transport you to your favorite exotic destination—whether it’s the verdant hill towns of Italy, France’s azure Mediterranean coast, or a Moroccan medina.

Let’s take a culinary adventure and meet a few masterminds behind Norfolk’s global flavors.

Glass Light Hotel & Gallery CHEF SERGE GOULOUMES

With a boyish grin, chef Serge Gouloumes welcomes my husband, Peter, and me to the tasting table overlooking Glass Light’s open kitchen. After opening in late 2019, the restaurant closed for three months during the spring, but Gouloumes and his team are back in the kitchen and ready to



Chef Serge Gouloumes

serve their unique blend of continental cuisine.

The plush setting and tasteful décor of the dining room evoke a high-brow Parisian restaurant, but playful human-sized glass bunny sculptures hint that stuffiness is not part of the game at Glass Light. In fact, Gouloumes says that having fun with food and pleasing his customers are what make him happy. “Cooking is an art,” says the chef, and indeed his Instagram-worthy dishes are miniature paintings. “I want to amaze all of your senses, beginning with the eyes.”

He succeeds. Our culinary odyssey takes us on a journey to the Med, where freshness and flavor rule. The chef’s take on caprese explodes with flavor—light-as-a-cloud mozzarella floats above a layer of tomato marmalade, a dab of caviar on top adding complexity. Next Gouloumes presents grilled octopus in a savory romesco sauce with slices of zingy peppers, followed by a creamy foie gras torchon served with peach relish and crunchy crostini.

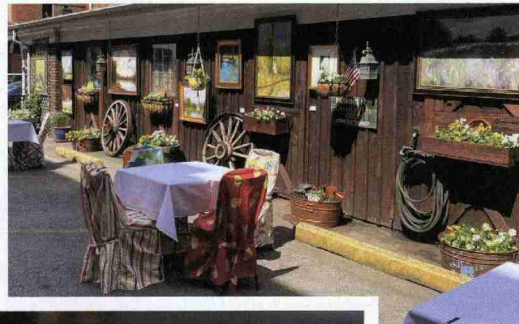
Finally, we meet “The Egg,” one of Gouloumes’ signature dishes, bathed in a decadent lobster sauce. How he prepares this wondrous egg is a secret, but we are wowed by the rich flavors and unique texture. The chef, a self-professed wine enthusiast, can suggest wine pairings for each dish, and, as you would expect from a Frenchman, he knows his wine.

Gouloumes prefers to keep his dishes simple, letting the flavors speak for themselves, but admits to being a bit crazy at times. “If we are not crazy, life is not fun,” he says. Crazy-good haute cuisine is my takeaway from this amazing destination restaurant. GlassLightHotel.com

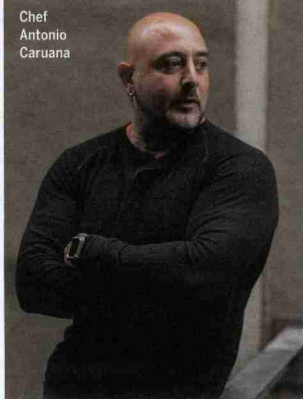
PHOTOS COURTESY OF GLASS LIGHT HOTEL & GALLERY



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Far left: Red shrimp, Maine razor clam, and baby octopus from Luce. Above: The patio at Omar's Carriage House. Left: Thai chili salmon with polenta cake and mango relish from Omar's Carriage House. Below: Kefta served in a tagine.



Chef Antonio Caruana

Luce
 CHEF ANTONIO CARUANA

"We're gonna have some fun," says chef Tony Caruana as Peter and I sit at the cozy bar at Luce (pronounced loo-chay), an Italian restaurant on Granby Street that opened in 2013. Caruana became interested in cooking while growing up in a food-centric Italian family, some of whom are pictured in photos lining the walls. Modern lounge music plays in the background of this friendly, laid-back venue, a favorite among locals.

They come for Tony's hearty Italian fare and a menu brimming with rustic dishes that reflect the flavors of Italy: pizza, pasta, pesci, pollo, and carne, each prepared with authentic ingredients that will make you feel miles from home.

We start with a duo of luscious house-made cheeses. Silky burrata served with a slice of lean prosciutto and a swirl of basil-infused oil nestles beside slices of creamy mozzarella with tiny, marinated tomatoes—simple presentations and balanced flavors, which I soon realize are a hallmark of Caruana's cuisine.

Luce's charred octopus is fork tender—thanks

to a sous vide preparation—and it's served with a cherry reduction and white beans. Together it's a party in your mouth: salty, sweet, tangy, textured.

One of Caruana's signature dishes is wild boar ragout, which we taste next. I can see why it's so popular: house-made tagliatelli cooked al dente with an amazing smoky ragout redolent of rosemary. To add a local touch, the chef tops the dish with a dollop of pulled pork—also wild boar—that tastes like heaven.

Our last course is a carnivore's delight: tasty duck slices, served rare, and a juicy veal chop, medium rare crowned with caramelized onions and smoked gouda. Creamy mashed potatoes flavored with rosemary oil and sautéed spinach round out this hearty offering.

Caruana credits his kitchen crew with the restaurant's success. "I'm very proud of my staff," he says. Luce offers an extensive cocktail and wine list, local beer, and artisanal mineral waters from Italy and France. For a delectable Italian adventure, Luce is your go-to. LuceNorfolk.com

Omar's Carriage House
 CHEF OMAR BOUKHRIS

In Norfolk's Freemason neighborhood a stately two-story brick building (circa 1840) was once a stable for horses. Today it's home to a legendary Moroccan restaurant owned by Omar Boukhriss, who's been sharing his native cuisine with guests since 1998.

While Moroccan dishes are always on the menu, plan to visit on Monday, a.k.a. Moroccan night, when Omar's Carriage House offers a variety of tagines, kebabs, kefta, and couscous. Peter and I visit one rainy Monday and meet Shaina Sandler, general manager and catering director, who takes us on an unforgettable Moroccan food journey.

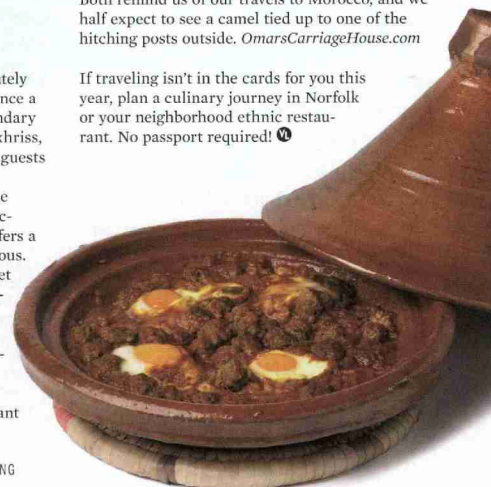
We start with a trio of sides: meaty marinated olives and peppers, creamy hummus loaded with herbs and spices, and Moroccan zaalouk, a smoky dip made with eggplant

and tomatoes. Garlicky pita wedges serve as the perfect scoops. Sandler says many people believe Moroccan cuisine is spicy, but it's the seasoning that makes it special. We love these authentic dishes with their savory flavors.

Bastilla is a "super traditional" Moroccan dish, says Sandler, and a local favorite. It's a puff pastry that can be made with different fillings. What makes it unique is the combination of savory and sweet. Inside phyllo dough is a mixture of chicken, ground almonds, spices, and egg. After baking, the bastilla is dusted with cinnamon and sugar, and the flavors play really well together.

Tagine is two things: a typical Moroccan stew and the ceramic cookware it's prepared in, characterized by a cone-like lid. The cover ensures the flavors of the ingredients don't escape, resulting in a moist, tender stew. We sample two of the restaurant's delicious tagines: one featuring a Cornish hen with olives and saffron rice, and one prepared with whiting, onions, raisins, and couscous. Both remind us of our travels to Morocco, and we half expect to see a camel tied up to one of the hitching posts outside. OmarsCarriageHouse.com

If traveling isn't in the cards for you this year, plan a culinary journey in Norfolk or your neighborhood ethnic restaurant. No passport required! 🌍



PHOTOS (FROM LEFT) COURTESY OF: ANTONIO CARUANA (2), SHAINA SANDLER