

Featured Chef: James Siao

Written by Interview by Melissa Larsen
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Chef James Siao of Taggia, A Kimpton Restaurant at FireSky Resort & Spa



How did you get your start in the restaurant business?

I started in the restaurant business at an early age washing dishes and busing tables at my family's restaurant in Ohio. I learned many aspects of the business given the opportunity to grow up around it. The creativity that goes into cooking sparked my interest as I got older, and I feel the restaurant business has given me many opportunities to showcase and grow my creativity.

What is your favorite Valley restaurant, besides your own?

The Valley has many great restaurants that appeal to many different cultures. I really enjoy going to Tottie's Asian Fusion and Frank & Lupe's. They both do a wonderful job with flavor and quality to represent their cuisine. They are always consistent with great service and fun atmosphere.

What is your favorite dish at your restaurant?

A tough one because I feel we have a great balance to our menu. But if I had to choose it would be the veal chop or seasonal risotto. The veal chop is pan seared and roasted, then served with soft Anson Mills polenta, toasted rapini, and crispy prosciutto and sage in a brown butter sauce. Our risotto is made with carnaroli rice and paired with some great ingredients daily.

What is the most memorable meal you've ever had?

At the end of a three-month trip to Italy last year, I went with family and friends to Belsit 954 in Fono. Over the four or five hours we spent enjoying the antipastos to the pastas to the entrees, I felt I truly understood the culture and what it meant to be a guest in it. That's when it really hit me how a restaurant experience combines the food and the company of the people you're with. This changed my thoughts on the chef-to-table aspect of the business. It's about the great food we're able to prepare at Taggia, but it's also about the experience we're able to create for the guests by providing that great food or by visiting the tables to provide guests information about a dish or to simply ask how the meal is.

If you could have anyone visit your restaurant, who would it be?

Ming Tsai. He was on TV a lot when I was growing up that made a difference. He wasn't about the reality or drama of it, but showcasing the creativity behind cooking and the in-depth culture behind dishes.

Name three ingredients that you have at home at all times.

Rice, classic spaghetti pasta for the times you want something straightforward and comforting, and fresh vegetables.

What is your favorite bottle of wine or cocktail?

Sapphire and tonic because it's clean and crisp.

What do you like to do in your free time?

I like to golf and spend time with friends.

[For more information about Taggia at FireSky Resort and Spa, click here.](#)