

## Ancora offers Vancouver fine dining with Peruvian twist

Staff meals are not to be sneezed at. These could be a sample of the next big thing.

Ancora, the latest addition to Vancouver's fine dining scene in the old C Restaurant at 1600 Howe Street, looks like this kind of story.

As chef Ricardo Valverde recalls, he used to prepare staff meals at the previous place he worked at, and would put in a Peruvian touch every now and then. One of his former colleagues at Blue Water Cafe and now his teammate and Ancora general manager—Andrea Vescovi—loved it.

"Sometimes I would bring in Peruvian ingredients in the restaurant and Andrea was the one that truly appreciated it," Valverde told the *Straight* in a phone interview Monday (August 31). "He'll be like, 'This is good you know, like this should be on the menu'."

"We did this for years, right, where he comes in and says, 'Rick, I feel like something Peruvian tonight'. So yeah, 'Okay let me see what I can do'," the Peru-born chef related.

Although Valverde and Vescovi wanted to do their own thing, they were content about having the occasional Peruvian taste in the staff meals.

"We were happy there," Valverde said about the former place he and his friend worked at. "We were doing well. It wasn't like we would plan to do this."

This all changed when the Viaggio Hospitality Group began to put together a new concept for C Restaurant, one of two establishments it had acquired from restaurateur Harry Kambolis.

When the company approached Vescovi, he suggested the adoption of Peruvian influences in the menu. Not long after he left Blue Water Cafe, Valverde followed.

"Literally the stars aligned and everything just happened that way," Valverde said, "because in order for us to do that, we needed someone that we want to work with the two of us together, right? And the chances of that are like one in a million."

When he did his cooking interview, he prepared Peruvian pepper-glazed sable fish with eggplant dip. Based on the reaction he got from the dish, he knew he had a new job.

Glazed sable fish is part of the menu of Ancora, which started its soft opening in August. There's also halibut with a Peruvian twist.

"Punchy," Valverde said about the Peruvian bite in cooking.

Although Ancora didn't put in something old from the C Restaurant, which was famous for seafood, Valverde said the menu includes some classics like lobster risotto.

"I'm straightforward with my dishes," Valverde said, adding that the restaurant has everything Vancouverites want, from seafood to meat and poultry to vegetarian ceviche and entrée.

Valverde, whose family came to Canada when he was 17 years old, is pleased with the way things came together: "It's my first time as executive chef, and my first time opening a restaurant."

