

BUSINESS & REAL ESTATE

Cetrella ventures from seaside to Silicon Valley

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Managing partner M'hamed Bahet oversees the new downtown Los Altos restaurant Cetrella, which features coastal cuisine and decor that celebrates the Peninsula region.

“Rustic,” “worldly” and “free-spirited” aren’t typical descriptors for what’s on the dinner plate, but a new downtown restaurant intends to serve just that in both meals and milieu.

Cetrella Los Altos – offering Mediterranean-rim and California coastal cuisine – is slated to open for dinner Tuesday at 400 Main St. Already a mainstay in Half Moon Bay, the award-winning restaurant sources local growers and purveyors for seasonal dishes specific to the region. Restaurant leadership will keep many of the features of the seaside location but plans to extend hours and boost menu options.

“We’ve expanded,” said M'hamed Bahet, Cetrella managing partner. “You’ll see similar offerings with more choices. Keep in mind that Half Moon Bay is a destination. Now within Silicon Valley, there are more opportunities.”

Bahet, a seasoned restaurateur, said he works with the dining needs of the community. At the downtown Los Altos establishment, the doors will open for dinner daily, lunch on weekdays and brunch on weekends.

Michael Ellis, Cetrella’s executive chef, shapes his seasonal menus with fresh meats, fish and heirloom produce. Bahet said Ellis has mastered the modern American steakhouse, outdoor barbecue and progressive fine-dining cuisine.

Many of the offerings are made in-house, Bahet noted. The kitchen staff bakes bread, squeezes fresh juice and smokes and cures meats.



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And it's not just the recipes made from scratch – Bahet said he likes to train employees under Cetrella's customized model of service. He anticipates hiring 40 staff members for shifts throughout the week.

"We've been in the business for a long time, so we put out the word and find the right people to do the job," he said, adding that the company often promotes from within.

One employee, for example, began as a dishwasher and now serves as an on-site manager when Bahet isn't available.

Bahet joined Cetrella when the flagship restaurant opened in September 2001. In addition to steering the service, he acts as Cetrella's wine director, curating its award-winning wine list and coordinating dinners featuring winemakers and other guest speakers.

Article I. All about the locale

In the decor, restaurant leadership sought to reflect the Peninsula region with site-specific murals – a local creekside in the foyer, redwoods in the private dining space and foothills in the public dining area.

"We made it all about Los Altos," Bahet said. "You can have a nice dinner without feeling intimidated."

The restaurant seats approximately 240 patrons with dining both indoors and on the outdoor plaza. One private dining space accommodates up to 50 people for weddings and other special events. A private executive table overlooking First Street is designed for lunch meetings and dinner parties – a draw for businesspeople from around the area, Bahet hopes.

Bahet said the restaurant also plans to cater to a later-night crowd with seatings until 9:30 p.m. and live jazz on weekends.

"What we've been hearing is that the town dies down too early," he explained. "We're trying to change that."

Responding to other input, Bahet noted that he has heard concerns about parking, but he doesn't believe it will be a problem. He said the building's underground parking accommodates employees and evening patrons. Daytime diners can find parking behind the building or in the city's public lots, he said.

After searching for six years for a second location along the Peninsula, Bahet said the Main Street find appears ideal.

"Los Altos is growing – we are here at the perfect time," he said. "We're very excited."

Menu items range from \$9 to \$30 for appetizers and \$20 to \$40 for entrees. The restaurant accommodates private parties and offers off-site catering.

For more information, call 948-0400 or visit cetrella.com.