

BRACE YOURSELF

At Brace restaurant in Copenhagen, a fusion of Italian and New Nordic cuisine has resulted in some of the city's most exciting fine dining. A seemingly incongruous pairing, these two cultures have more in common than you might imagine, explains chef-patron Nicola Fanetti.

• **What do you miss most about Italy?**

The food culture and the produce. That said, I've been living in Denmark for so many years that I do really consider it my home now. At Brace, I get to have the best of both worlds.

• **What inspired you to marry New Nordic and Italian cuisine?**

My connection with nature is deeply rooted in my character and has been a constant my whole life. I grew up in a small village in a mountainous region in Northern Italy, which was the start of my inspiration. When I was young, I used to spend lots of time foraging with my grandparents for berries, mushrooms, herbs... all sorts, and when I was a little older, I would go hunting with my uncles. We made our own cheeses, butter, sausages, and charcuterie. My family back in Italy still does this, it's part of our tradition. It's in our blood.

When I arrived in Denmark, I went to work at Noma. The first day I went foraging with the team it was as if all of my past experiences came rushing to the present in a second. It was an amazing feeling that I wasn't expecting. Shortly after this I started to discover more local products and traditions that were similar to mine, and it was then that I started to fall in love with Denmark.

• **How are the cuisines similar and how do they differ?**

In my opinion, the two cultures are very similar in terms of heralding their produce, with both preferring to use local ingredients and maintaining their culinary and cultural traditions. One of the main differences is, of course, the weather, which dictates the possibility to grow certain produce. This in turn affects the flavour profiles within dishes. I think Nordic cuisine is more delicate and light in flavour, whereas Italian cuisine is deep and bold.

• **How have you managed these differences at Brace?**

It happened pretty organically and I am still learning and improving every day. I did a lot of research on local products and producers and started to build my own philosophy. Figuring out new ways to combine these two worlds feels natural and exciting; I get so much pleasure from creating the food at Brace.

• **What is the Brace signature dish?**

The linguine with raw fjord shrimps, saffron dashi and santoreggia leaves is the dish that best showcases my philosophy: 100% sustainable, local, simple, and delicious. The presenta-



tion is humble but the flavours are bold and have a distinct flavour profile. I use the shells of the prawns which would otherwise be discarded to make the dashi and the raw prawns make for a wonderful mouthfeel and texture. The dish allows the produce to shine.

• **There isn't much meat on the menu. Why?**

There aren't any specific ethical reasons behind it because all our products are organic, locally sourced and sustainably farmed. I've always been intrigued by exploring more of the vegetable and fish world due to the diversity of what is available. They are far more interesting to work with as there is a much wider range of textures and flavour profiles to explore.



• **What season – and ingredients – do you enjoy working with most?**

I love summer and autumn, when the vegetable kingdom is in its prime. From wild to farmed produce, it's really nice to cook with such a huge quantity of different flavours of the highest quality. I don't have one favourite ingredient, but last year I discovered a local farm that grows the best tomatoes that I have ever tried. Since then I've been waiting impatiently for summer to come around just so I can use them on my menu again.

• **Do you have any favourite producers?**

We couldn't do what we do without any of them. From Birkemosegaard and Kiselgaarden for vegetables to Thomas Laursen for wild products, Fiskerikajen for fish and Hindsholmgris for pork, they are all an inspiration.

• **What's the best lesson you've learned in the kitchen?**

The best lessons were learned in my own kitchen at Brace. Having my own restaurant has afforded the opportunity to make and recognise mistakes, and to correct them by myself. It's not been easy but learning through trial and error is the best lesson one can have.

• **Any plans in store for the future?**

My priority is to spend more time and attention on my family and myself, while raising the bar at Brace. One day it would be nice to open an osteria with the same philosophy as Brace but a more laid back and informal atmosphere. There's no rush – or *piano piano*, as we say in Italy.

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