

THE STRIP'S STRANGE AND WONDERFUL NEW BAR AND GRILL (PAGE 69)

VEGAS

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December 6-12, 2012

THIS WEEK IN YOUR CITY

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A special report by Heidi Kyser

FREE



## LOBSTER FRA DIVOLO

**MAKES 4 SERVINGS**

- 2 1-pound lobsters
- 2 cups marinara sauce
- ½ cup lobster stock  
(or vegetable stock)
- ¼ cup dry white wine
- Pinch of chili flakes
- 2 mild cherry peppers,  
diced
- 1 clove garlic, sliced
- 1 ounce olive oil
- ½ pound tagliolini pasta
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Flatleaf parsley, chopped

Process the live lobsters by cutting each in half lengthwise from head to tail (hit YouTube if you're never worked with live lobster before). Remove all of the meat and leave the tails whole. Discard the organs and the shell. In a large pot, heat 1 gallon of water to a rolling boil. Add salt to taste. Cook the pasta until it's al dente; drain and set aside. While the pasta is cooking, heat a sauté pan over medium heat and add the olive oil and the garlic slices. When the oil starts to shimmer, add the lobster tails; the remaining meat can be used in another dish such as lobster cocktail. Season with salt and black pepper, and cook the tails on each side for one minute. Deglaze the pan with the wine, and add the chili flakes and the diced cherry peppers. Let the wine reduce slightly, then add the stock and marinara sauce. When the mixture comes to a boil, add the cooked pasta and garnish the dish with chopped parsley to finish.

# Nicole Grimes

Upholding more than a century of tradition, Rao's young chef de cuisine summons her family's food history to keep the Feast of Seven Fishes alive

By **JEN CHASE**

► **HOLIDAY FOOD TRADITIONS** don't discriminate. They crisscross the globe and resonate with anyone who has ever looked forward to a once-a-year dish. So when Nicole Grimes became chef de cuisine at Rao's, memories of her Hungarian and Polish grandmother's Christmas *baccalà* (salted cod) wafting through her Pittsburgh home compelled her to make the restaurant's holidays just as unforgettable. "I know, when I go out to eat, that feeling of disappointment you get if a meal doesn't meet expectations," Grimes says. "I want to make sure that Rao's meets whatever expectation [diners] have in their head."

Rao's is the iconic Italian-American restaurant whose flagship New York City location is so popular, Grimes says, that people come to Las Vegas thinking it'll be easier to land a reservation—she then laughs while saying it isn't. Known for its year-round Christmas decor that someone allegedly put up but never took down, Grimes keeps her holiday patrons

## WINE PAIRINGS

When it comes to matching wine to this dish, Grimes says a smoky, spicy, or even briny Oregon pinot noir is your best bet considering the heat from the peppers, the acid from the tomatoes and the richness of the lobster. She suggests the 2010 Torii Mor, \$80 by the bottle at Rao's and \$20 at Khoury's Fine Wine & Spirits.

happy with a recipe that's one part youth (she's 27), one part experience (the Cordon Bleu-trained chef started at Rao's in 2006 and was named chef de cuisine in 2009) and about 116 parts history. That last stat represents the years Rao's has served its Feast of Seven Fishes, the Italian tradition of preparing a menu of seven seafood dishes (sometimes more) on Christmas Eve to commemorate waiting for the birth of Jesus.

Rao's has historically offered

a prix-fixe feast, but because of its seafood-laden year-round menu, Grimes is keeping things au courant this year by adding a set of feast-worthy seafood specials for Christmas Eve along with Rao's regular offerings. They include a spicy cioppino that's a specialty of Grimes' sous chef Fatimah Madyun. A pan-seared sea bass with a cous cous medley, wilted spinach, and zucchini and cherry tomatoes in a white wine-butter sauce is also recommended. For dessert there's a chocolate pistachio yule log and a chocolate-covered cherry crème brûlée.

But the true fan favorite is Rao's lobster *fra diavolo*. "It's something special," she says. "It's something you put on the table, and everyone shares." A subtle twist that might make Rao's rendition a new tradition in your own holiday rotation is the bright bite of cherry peppers. They offer a one-two punch of heat and tang that is unmatched by chili flakes alone. As if all those garlands and bows weren't enough to get you in the spirit. 7