

Savor Arizona's Original Farm-to-Table Dining Experience

by TAYLOR TRANSTRUM



Executive Chef Dustin Cristofolo at Quissance at
the Farm shares his vision for bringing local
flavors to the forefront of dining.

At **Quissance at The Farm**, farm-to-table dining has always been so much more than just a trend. Founded by Pat Cristofolo, it's one of the first restaurants in Arizona to use exclusively fresh and local produce, paving the way for the expanding farm-to-table movement. Under Executive Chef Dustin Cristofolo's direction (Pat's son and now a co-founder), the restaurant's menu has grown to include produce from the on-site Soil & Seed Garden—curated and harvested by Cristofolo himself—as well as fruits harvested from more than 60 fruit trees at The Farm, eggs from the on-site chicken coop, fresh breads made from scratch, and meats and cheeses from other local farmers and purveyors. Add in seasonally-rotating menus based on what's in harvest and Quissance is as fresh—and authentic—as it gets.

It's certainly not the easiest way to run a restaurant, but as a native Arizonan—born and raised in Tempe—Cristofolo sees no other option. “Not only are you using the best product, but you are also supporting the people of your region,” he says.



While Quiessence’s holistic approach to dining has involved much more planning and strategy than Christofolo originally imagined, he’s figured out the secret ingredient for flawless execution: a lot of give and take. He frequently meets with his growers and keeps busy planning out Soil & Seed’s next crops. He’s learned to focus on growing fewer seeds at once, giving them more room to grow, and “a lot of love.”

While Christofolo is now at the helm of Quiessence, the beginning of his career was a humble one. He started at the front-of-house as a server, which sparked his interest in food and wine. Eventually he worked his way to the back-of-house, falling in love with culinary arts along the way. Part self-taught and part formally-trained, Christofolo took his skills as a chef to the next level when he joined the Italian Culinary Academy—an intensive, culinary immersion program that took place in New York and Italy.



While he attributes part of his success as a chef to the training he received, he's certain to acknowledge the experience he gained from the mentors he's worked with throughout his career—formally and informally. "It's really the chefs you work under that influence you the most," he says.

He became the Executive Chef at Quissence and continued his education in a more informal matter, researching his craft any chance he got, which led him to become a self-taught butcher and meat curator. "We do all the meats in-house," he says. "There's a lot of factors that go into it in order to create the right product. It's a really tough technique—you can tell it's a labor of love."

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Although he didn't find his culinary calling until adulthood, food has always been in the family. One of his earliest and fondest food memories was visiting his grandpa's bakery as a child. In fact, he can still recall the smell of his grandpa's freshly baked bread. “Seeing how hard my grandpa worked to build up the Christofolo name and [the bakery] always strikes a chord in me and drives me to work hard to carry on the family name.”

Naturally, growing up in a family of chefs instilled in Christofolo an appreciation for good food.

“I was a diner long before I was a chef,” he says. “That's always been a secret weapon for me.” This foodie even plans his vacations around where he'll dine. His favorite spots? New York, San Francisco, and Italy, the latter of which has influenced him heavily in both his personal life and as a chef.



“I love preparing pasta and working with different shapes, flours, and eggs,” he says. “All of the sizes and shapes of pasta are so unique and work with ingredients so distinctively together.”

It’s this type of curiosity and energy that drew Christofolo to cooking in the first place. “My favorite part about being a chef is that I’m a bit ADD,” he says. “I get bored easily and always need to be moving. There’s always something lively and new going on in the kitchen, and I’m always really excited to see what the season has to offer.”
