



## Let Them Eat Local

The Gramercy to bring gourmet options to Vegas' southwestern dining desert

By **Xania Woodman** 6/15/14 5:46pm



An aerial rendering of The Gramercy, set to open in late 2014

The area surrounding Interstate 215 near Russell Road is hardly what anyone might call a dining destination. Other than brunch staple DW Bistro, pizzeria Due Forni and a handful of hit-or-miss Thai and taco joints, the southwest quadrant of the Valley is effectively a culinary desert. The Gramercy, however, could be the remedy.

Last June, the former Manhattan West site lay fallow, a casualty of the Great Recession that left the \$180 million residential, office and retail project unfinished and with an uncertain future. WGH Partners, which specializes in turning around distressed properties, purchased the site with the Krausz Companies, retitling it the Gramercy, after New York's famed park of the same name. The owners aim to re-create the neighborhood feel of that tree-lined

community with the project's four-story luxury lofts (160 units) and mixed-use dining, retail and office space; a nine-story condo tower with 85 units will arrive in a later phase. In all, the Gramercy encompasses 500,000 square feet over 20 acres, plus underground parking, and it has been moving full-steam-ahead to meet the late 2014 deadline set for Phase 1.

Jennifer Guevara-Leone does property acquisition for WGH Partners and is among those charged with filling the mixed-use property with tenants. "I'm the demographic," she says. "I'm 39; I love to go out to eat. I'm a local—born and raised—and I don't frequent the Strip to eat. I would eat there [at the Gramercy], I would work there, I would play there, I would live there." Already a medical group has signed on, adding 600 daytime users to the community's eventual full-time residents. The Gramercy also has desirable neighbors in Rhodes Ranch, Spanish Hills, Spanish Trail and the Ridges, as well as nearby Bishop Gorman High School.

But it's the Gramercy's dining options that will bring the rest of the city to their doorstep.

At present, the slated anchor-space tenants include a new concept from Ferraro's chef Mimmo Ferraro and his wife, Nicole; an Italian steakhouse by Chef Alex Stratta; and a fourth Bachi from Lorin Watada, this one with a bar focus. A market from DW Bistro owners makes up the fourth prominent corner space opening onto the lushly landscaped circular courtyard. Other units include The Cuppa, a second coffeehouse by former Strip aerialist Holley Steeley, and a medical spa with a possible juice bar by *Dr. 90210's* Dr. Gary Motykie, as well as a proposed sushi bar, healthier-choice concept, gym and salon.

Like Tivoli Village and the District at Green Valley Ranch—and the upcoming Downtown Summerlin—the Gramercy is looking for that just-right mix of dining options that will serve its urban dwellers and workers, as well as attract a destination diner. Guevara-Leone says that while she could have snapped her fingers and filled the retail and dining spaces with the usual mix (Pottery Barn, Subway, Starbucks), she convinced her partners to seek local up-and-comers and regional proven performers instead of chains and franchises.

Stratta was among the first to come aboard.

"The most exciting and interesting thing about the Gramercy," Stratta says, "is that there's not that much in that area, but there *are* a lot of people who can afford to go out often. It's a part of their routine."

Since parting ways with Steve Wynn in 2011, Stratta has been bouncing around from the Bay Area to L.A. to a just-concluded menu-consulting gig with Las Vegas' Marché Bacchus bistro and wine bar. He has since joined restaurant franchise company KCI Investments and plans to open Alex Stratta Italian Steakhouse (working name) at the Gramercy, while also starting a high-end catering company and developing new fast-casual brands.

"It's keeping me real busy," the chef reports, but he still plans to run the steakhouse full time. Despite his career highs, this is the first time Stratta says he'll get to be his own boss. "You can only go so far [at a hotel-casino]," the chef says, "and I think it went as far as I possibly could."

That's exactly the kind of partner Guevara-Leone is looking for. "I'm putting it to the chefs that whatever culinary idea or dream they've ever had that they could not do in a casino, or it just wasn't the right time, this is your canvas. You are the artist."

The space Stratta's chosen in the northwest corner of the Gramercy's central park boasts floor-to-ceiling windows and a partial Strip view, which will be reserved for the private dining room. Italian elements will include fresh pasta and flatbreads made in a wood-burning oven, plus a shellfish and raw bar. The steakhouse menu will be straightforward American, he says, "but I'm gonna fancy it up a bit." And pricewise, "It will be very approachable."

That's hugely important to Stratta, who is eager to avoid the perception that he's going to charge Strip prices. He will focus instead on building a team that can deliver the quality of service diners have come to expect from Stratta restaurants, regardless of price. "It doesn't cost anything to have good service," he says. "It's just a matter of training." The spot will have a bar, happy hour, live entertainment and occupy 5,300 square feet, including a patio. Watada's 4,200-square-foot Bachi Bar (also a working name) will also have a heavy bar focus, with an emphasis on craft beer, twists on classic cocktails, and original creations with an Asian influence.

He will also expand on the Bachi model with entrées, salads and appetizers.

Both Stratta and Watada say they are in lease negotiations, though Bachi Bar won't open until May 2015, as Watada is currently expanding into California with Bachi Burgers in West Los Angeles and Pasadena. Despite his brand's growth, "I'm one of those people who can't stand chain concepts," Watada says. "I've always been a big supporter of local businesses first."

Steeley is another local business success story, and was actually the first to sign on to the project. "It's a new style of business venture," Steeley says. "This side of town is in need of a gourmet feel." Her 2,000-square-foot brick coffee shop and patio will also be a showplace for locally made artwork.

Ferraro, meanwhile, is close to signing. "We like the project, and we're very interested," he says. The chef is keeping the details quiet for now, but he says, it's "definitely not 100 percent Italian. It's fun, hip, sexy—something I know I haven't seen yet, at least not in this town."