

## THE SWEET SIDE OF JOHNNY V: PASTRY CHEF MALKA ESPINEL

Perhaps one of South Florida's preeminent pastry chefs, **Malka Espinel** is the talent behind the acclaimed dessert offerings at **Johnny V** – the chic, 225-seat Fort Lauderdale restaurant owned and operated by acclaimed chef **Johnny Vinczencz**. Born on a farm in Colombia, Espinel (32) credits her passion for desserts to many childhood hours in her grandmother's kitchen. At Johnny V, that passion is evident in her eclectic creations, which artfully blend Latin flavors with the textures and simplicity of classic American desserts.

Driven by a desire for excellence and an unappeasable sweet tooth, Espinel's innovative desserts have garnered much acclaim. She excels at molding everyday staples into extraordinary delights – such as a chocolate cake she infuses with peanut butter and dulce de leche and a three berry crème brûlée “pot pie.” “I like surprising diners with uncommon flavor combinations,” says Espinel, who often uses herbs in her desserts to play off the sweeter elements. “Diners are far more educated than ever,” she says regarding reactions to her desserts. “They've all had molten chocolate cake and are looking for the unusual.” Extraordinary offerings at Johnny V feature Espinel's newest creation, **Lemon & Rosemary 3 Ways**. This towering delight features three mouth-watering lemon and rosemary layers – cheesecake, pound cake and mousse – served with whipped cream and blueberry compote. Another dish of note is her “**drunken**” **mojito rum cake**, an ode to the classic Cuban, mint-infused cocktail. The moist cake is served with tropical fruit salsa, a heaping scoop of Tahitian vanilla ice cream and churritos (twisted sticks of fried, sugared dough).

Espinel is always playing in the kitchen, creating specials sure to please any palette, whether it's gooey **chocolate chip cookies** (“Heavy on the fudge, don't skimp,” Espinel adds), or **poached guava skins** with crème anglaise. With Vinczencz, she's found the perfect partner in crime for her playful culinary sensibilities. “Johnny and I have similar styles and approaches,” Espinel says. “We both love surprising our diners, taking what they expect and expanding on it.”

With degrees from the Cooking and Hospitality Institute of Chicago, Jorge Tadeo Lozano University of Bogota and Florida International University, Espinel first met Vinczencz when she joined his team at Astor Place on Miami Beach in the mid-1990s. There, her innovative take on all-American desserts were a perfect complement to Vinczencz's bold, Southwestern-inspired cuisine.

After many successful years at Astor, Espinel followed Vinczencz to De la Tierra at Sundry House in Delray Beach, Florida – a funky, tropical resort which boasted its own gardens. There Espinel thrived, using the multitude of tropical and sub-tropical fruits grown on-site in everything from house made ice cream to fruit parfaits. When Vinczencz departed in 2003 to launch Johnny V, it seemed natural to follow. Prior to meeting Vinczencz, Espinel worked at several high-caliber South Florida restaurants, including Mark's Place – chef Mark Militello's first restaurant in North Miami, 1220 at The Tides and Nick's Place, both on Miami Beach. She also enjoyed a three-month stint at the acclaimed Fauchon in Paris.

**Johnny V** is located at **625 East Las Olas Boulevard** in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. **Dinner is served nightly, 5:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m., Sunday through Thursday; 5:00 p.m. to midnight on Fridays and Saturdays. Lunch is served Monday through Friday, 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m..** Ample municipal parking available. Reservations suggested. **Telephone: (954) 761-7920.**

Recipes, photography and interviews available upon request.

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