



## Ambra Italian Kitchen + Bar

### **Vic Casanova**

#### *Executive Chef*

Vic Casanova was born in Manhattan and grew up in the Bronx. As a teenager, Casanova needed a job and began working at various local food joints around New York City. What started as a necessity quickly turned into a love affair with cooking, as Casanova recalls, “No matter what was happening in my life, when I walked into the kitchen I could be great for a few quantifiable hours of the day while on the line.” Casanova’s passion followed him throughout his accomplished career, leading to his current role as executive chef at Ambra Italian Kitchen + Bar at MGM Grand.

Once Casanova realized his culinary ambitions, he enrolled in the Institute of Culinary Education, where he graduated with a diploma in Culinary Arts and Restaurant Management in 2001. While in culinary school, he garnered experience as a line cook at staple spots on the NYC restaurant scene in the kitchens of acclaimed chefs and restaurateurs, including Danny Meyer at Grammercy Tavern, Daniel Boulud at db Bistro Moderne and Scott Conant at Alto. Following graduation, Casanova began working under Chef Cesare Casella at Beppe Restaurant, who quickly became a mentor figure. Casella’s affinity for uncomplicated Tuscan-style dishes were reminiscent of Casanova’s own Italian heritage, furthering his curiosity in the country’s culture and his family recipes.

After honing his skills in various accredited kitchens, Casanova embarked on a journey around the country to learn the ins and outs of the industry. Casanova moved to Delray Beach, Fla. to produce American fare at Gotham City as a sous chef. Later that year, he headed to San Francisco and served as chef at Buca Giovanni for two years, where he executed a farmers’ market menu daily and curated a boutique all-Italian wine list.

Casanova continued his quest in Las Vegas, bringing his talents to one of the premier fine dining scenes in the country. He spent a year as the sous chef at Neros at Caesars Palace on The Strip before making his return to New York City in 2005. He fine-tuned his craft over the next two years as a sous chef with B.R. Guest Restaurant’s at Ocean Grill.

With diverse experience in a variety of markets, Casanova landed his first executive chef position at the upscale-Italian Il Terrazzo at the AAA Five Diamond Phoenician Hotel & Resort in 2007. Following his two-year tenure, he served as the opening executive chef at Culina Modern Italian at the Four Seasons in Beverly Hills, Calif. In his new role, Casanova earned Modern Luxury’s *Rising Star Chef* award and his kitchen performance helped establish Culina as Esquire Magazine’s *Best New Restaurant* in 2010. While at Culina’s helm, he also competed in the premiere episode of the 10<sup>th</sup> season of “Iron Chef America.”

Following three successful years at Culina, Casanova decided to expand his horizons by owning and operating Gusto Los Angeles with his wife in 2012. Over the next seven years, Casanova served as the co-owner and executive chef, creating Italian-style dishes and learning to run a restaurant while leading the kitchen. His inventive Italian food secured him another *Best New Restaurant Award* from Esquire in 2012. Two years later, Casanova opened Pistola, an Italian-style steakhouse in Los Angeles, which was open from 2014 to 2017. Following his run at Pistola, Casanova became the executive chef at Balboa Bay Resort in Newport Beach, Calif., where he oversaw catering, banquets and two restaurants at the property before deciding to move his family back to Las Vegas in 2019.

Upon Casanova's return to Las Vegas, he became part of the opening team as executive chef at Ambra Italian Kitchen + Bar, the newest addition to MGM Grand's award-winning culinary portfolio. With an extensive background in Italian cooking, Casanova brings his enthusiasm and authenticity to Ambra's rustic Italian cuisine. He is most excited about sharing his personal interpretation of the Italian kitchen with guests from around the world.