

inquirer.com/food

MARKET BASKET

GOOD TASTE

CRAIG LaBAN ✉ CLaBan@inquirer.com



Using noodles, Pasta Lab crafts a delivery plan

Philly's creative fresh pasta revolution over the last few years has largely been driven by restaurants with access to machines that extrude the kind of perfect noodles once only produced by large manufacturers. Chris Wright and Gina Rubineti's goal with the Pasta Lab was to craft that level of pasta excellence using fresh milled local grains and seasonal inspirations, then make them available to the retail public at local farmers markets.

Toothy rigatoni made with organic sifted Redeemer wheat. Double-barreled casarecce turned a tawny brown with local spelt. Bucatini made from farro. And oh, their superb filled egg dough pastas stuffed with everything from milky sweet Caputo Bros. ricotta to minced mortadella tanged with mustard, cabbage, and apples. We were always out of luck for those stuffed gems due to high demand for these limit-

ed products and my family's habitually too-slow arrival to the Headhouse farmers market.

The pandemic, however, has changed things for the Pasta Lab (not to be confused with the very good quick-serve pasta restaurant called DaM^A² Pasta Lab on S. 12th St.). Wright and Rubineti, two catering industry vets who work out of a commercial kitchen in Olde Kensington, have been obliged to evolve their nearly two-year-old business model and have launched an online store with free home delivery (for orders over \$30) within the city of Philadelphia. It has both increased access to these special products and become a source of nearly 50% of this company's revenue over the last 10 weeks alone as they reduce their farmers market presence to a handful of standbys.

Of course, you still need be on the ball to pounce on the stuffed pastas when the ever-changing weekly offer-

Balanzoni pasta made from local flour turned green by pureed nettles is stuffed with ricotta. CRAIG LaBAN

ings are posted on the website and Instagram each Sunday. Our recent reward was an extraordinary pasta called balanzoni, a large tortellini shape typical of Bologna whose dough was greened with a puree of stinging nettles from Lancaster County, then stuffed with ricotta scented with nutmeg and aged Royer Mountain Reserve cheese. Drizzled with a little brown butter and crispy sage leaves, and it was like a bite of Pennsylvania spring transformed into a magnificent dumpling.

The Pasta Lab, \$10 a pound for most extruded noodles and usually under \$15 for 8-oz. of filled pasta, available online (the-pasta-lab.myshopify.com) each Sunday for prepaid orders and free delivery in Philadelphia, or several farmers markets each week, including Chestnut Hill, Clark Park, Head House Square, and Christ Church.