

Creative, Indulgent Risottos by Some of Houston's Most Regarded Chefs Shine at 10th International Risotto Festival

By [Carla Soriano](#) Wed., Nov. 13 2013 at 11:00 AM



Photos by Carla Soriano

The People's Choice of the 10th International Risotto Festival was awarded to Triniti's risotto -- "a take on dirty rice," as Chef Ryan Hildebrand described it.

The 10th International Risotto Festival held this past weekend at the Houston Design Center showcased the versatility of the beloved Italian grain. Fifteen chefs from Houston restaurants showcased their versions of risotto in a competition judged by both the public and a panel of judges that included The Honorable Consul General of Italy, Fabrizio Nava; Tanji Patton, host and producer of GoodTasteTV; and James Brock, managing editor of *Houston Press*.



Phillipe's was the greenest risotto of them all, and was bathed in a creamy roasted poblano broth. It also incorporated fennel pollen.

Whether or not the competing chefs serve risotto on their menus or their restaurant specializes in Italian cuisine, each one brought a delicious version of the traditional dish to the table. Chef Brandi Mchan of Vic & Anthony's produced a thick and rich lobster and three-cheese risotto. Prego impressed with its Texas Rabbit Risotto, one of the restaurant's current seasonal dishes, which features caramelized butternut squash, roasted potatoes, leeks, and local rabbit -- the work of their Chef John Watt. The hearty dish was *molto delizioso* and was a great demonstration of incorporating local and seasonal ingredients. Philippe's entry in the competition, crafted by Chef Manuel Pucha, went out on a limb -- the greenest risotto of them all, the dish was bathed in a creamy roasted poblano broth, incorporated fennel pollen, and was topped with crispy bacon.

While the competition was fierce, the panel of judges had to pick the winners. Chef Jaime Zelko took third place for her fragrant, perfectly cooked wild-mushroom risotto topped with truffle oil and lemon zest, to "cleanse the palate," as she explained. Second place was awarded to Arcodoro for Chef Efsio Farris' rosemary roasted-pumpkin risotto topped with crawfish confit, a beautiful blend of ingredients that stood their own ground. Chef Maurizio Ferrarese of Quattro, the Four Seasons' Italian restaurant, took home the coveted first place trophy with his "old fashioned" Saffron Milanese Risotto, a decadent combination of risotto with saffron, bone marrow, porcini mushrooms, and veal ossobuco.



Chef Efsio Farris' (**correction- Arcodoro Chef Lulzim Shimaj**) rosemary roasted pumpkin risotto topped with crawfish confit was a beautiful blend of ingredients.

The People's Choice was awarded to Triniti's risotto -- "a take on dirty rice," as Chef Ryan Hildebrand described it. His over-the-top version was a combination of chicken liver mousse, pork, sausage, shrimp, calamari, green bell pepper, okra, and a home-made Tabasco corn chip. Hildebrand's risotto was a creative, spicy explosion of flavor that people couldn't stop talking about. Although it did not win a prize, festival-goers also couldn't stop talking about Eleven XI's sweet creation -- candied Meyer lemon-infused risotto topped with lemon zest and home-made whipped cream made with Limoncello and simple syrup. Though it may have exceeded the boundaries of what constitutes a true risotto, the people loved it, and many were spotted going back for seconds.