

A portrait of Denia Valdéz, a woman with reddish-brown hair pulled back, wearing a dark green button-down shirt and a light blue apron. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a kitchen setting with a white wall and some equipment.

UNSUNG HERO *at*
GIANNA RESTAURANT

Denia Valdéz

DENIA VALDÉZ

Pasta Maker

7 YEARS AT GIANNA

HOW DID YOU GET STARTED?

I started as a dishwasher at Herbsaint and was there for one year before coming over to Gianna when it opened in 2019. After Covid, my boss, Rebecca [Chef Rebecca Wilcomb], asked me if I wanted to take on the role of Pasta Maker.

WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING IF NOT THIS?

I love this company and would do whatever they need me to do! But before coming to New Orleans, I studied agronomy, which is the science of crop production and soil management with an emphasis on sustainable agricultural practices.

WHAT IS YOUR TYPICAL DAY?

I clean the restaurant every morning, and three times a week I clean the hard wood floors. Then I start making the different pastas needed for the dishes. Once that is done, I help other people in the kitchen.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE DISH?

I like the ricotta gnocchi; ricotta is my favorite filling, and I like making the gnocchi. All of our pasta dishes are very good because the flavors pull together all the elements.



RICOTTA GNOCCHI

with Pomodoro

YIELDS: 4 portions

PREPARATION FOR PASTA: 25 minutes

COOK TIME FOR PASTA: Until gnocchi float, 4 to 5 minutes

COOK TIME FOR POMODORO: 30 minutes

RICOTTA GNOCCHI

INGREDIENTS

185 grams whipped ricotta (whisk for a better consistency) 25 grams grana, grated
60 grams eggs, beaten 5 grams salt
120 grams OO flour

DIRECTIONS

1. In a large bowl, mix ricotta, eggs, grana, and salt.
2. Mix $\frac{1}{3}$ of the flour into the ricotta mixture.
3. Make a well with the remaining flour and add the mixture to the well. Bring together until a smooth ball is formed. If the dough is too wet, add extra flour or semolina.
4. Let the dough rest for 15 minutes once a smooth ball is formed—do not over mix.
5. Divide the dough and roll into shape. Roll into a long rope, approximately 1" thick, then cut into 1" pieces. Roll each piece on a grooved surface or gently along the back of a fork to give a grooved texture, essential for trapping the sauce.
6. Boil salted water in a large (2 gallon or more pot), then cook until the gnocchi float, approximately 4 to 5 minutes. Cook them in batches, 5 to each batch.

Note: An uncooked portion can be stored

POMODORO

INGREDIENTS

1 cup onions, julienned (small diced) 1 cup water
1 Tbl garlic, chopped 2 Tbl Extra Virgin Olive Oil
1 28-oz can San Marzano tomatoes Salt, to taste
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup fresh basil leaves, torn

DIRECTIONS

1. In a medium sauce pan over low heat, gently heat (sweat) onions and garlic until translucent, approximately 10 minutes.
2. Purée the San Morzano tomatoes.
3. Once onion and garlic are translucent, add tomatoes and 1 cup of water with a pinch of salt.
4. Allow flavors to combine on a low simmer for 30 minutes.
5. Stir in olive oil, then taste for seasoning.

TO SERVE

On a pasta plate or shallow bowl, place 8 to 10 gnocchi. Add 3 ounces of pomodoro and then garnish with torn fresh basil leaves.

GIANNA RESTAURANT

Nominated by the James Beard Foundation as the Best New Restaurant in 2020, Gianna is the newest member of the Link Restaurant Group family. The restaurant features rustic Italian cuisine such as daily antipasti, a curated selection of savory small plates highlighting locally grown produce and Gulf seafood, and house-made pastas.

