

High on fine food

At Aerie — Grand Traverse Resort's renamed and revamped gem — the cuisine is as good as the view.

BY PATTY LANOUE STEARNS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY J. MICHAEL DEAGOSTINO



of Food & Wine magazine's "Best New Chefs" in 2000 after creating two critically acclaimed restaurants, Grace and Elaine, in Chicago. After that, he served as an independent corporate event planner, caterer and educator, and he worked for Disney World and the ESPN Winter X Games. He also oversaw the food and beverage operations of Chicago's John G. Shedd Aquarium and is a founder of Chicago's all-sustainable Green City Market in Lincoln Park.

As the son and grandson of two butchers, Cizma learned to savor the intricacies of cheeks, brains and tongue — "underutilized pieces, cooked with love," he says — in dishes such as daube Provençal, a la French-modernist chef Alain Ducasse, one of his culinary heroes.

Judging an after-Labor-Day feast, when my friend and I dropped in without a reservation, Aerie was sitting pretty — beautiful, in fact. We were ushered into a quiet, soft-gray, half-moon banquette looking out at the sunset over sparkling Grand Traverse Bay. The dining room's dramatic two-story windows, columns and black ceiling with tiny spotlights play well with the understated Asian-inspired.

Chef Cizma is a wine enthusiast and Level Two Master Sommelier, and his current list of 261 bottles includes locals and deals on what he calls "ethereal wines" from the south of France and Spain. We ordered a "crisp and clean" Tangley Oaks Chardonnay (\$32), and it set off the night.

Our server, Mike, helped us decide on

The fanfare had reached its crescendo after more than 3,000 people submitted entries to rename Trillium restaurant, which had been closed since May. On the eve of the mid-June opening, at a VIP ceremony that included the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians Tribal Chairman Robert Kewaygoshkum, the winning name was revealed.

Trillium, which occupied the glass-walled 16th floor of Acme's soaring resort and spa for 26 years, is now Aerie, a nod to the tribe's symbolic eagle and nest, built on a cliff or other high place. And in Acme, another word for "at the top," Ted Cizma, the new executive chef, knows he has his work cut out for him.

The 45-year-old chef, whose credo is simple-yet-sophisticated food, is pumped for the challenge and comes with some dazzling credentials. He was named one

Inside Grand Traverse Resort

Stay: After a multi-million-dollar re-do, check out the new lobby, guest rooms, plush bedding and package deals.

Play: Great shopping, an indoor pool and golf course, and the sumptuous expanded spa (get the hot rocks massage) will keep you as busy as you want to be. Culinary excursions and concerts are icing on the cake, and you never have to leave the resort.

Festivities: The Festival of Trees rings in the holiday season, when the lobby is a-glimmer with sparkling pines.



