



Sharon CAROLE

Creator & Owner
of Sage Restaurant
in Sarasota

*Y*ou enter Sage Restaurant and lose your bearings if your compass is set to Ceviche (the building's former life). There's nothing even slightly similar to the previous occupier except that familiar Mediterranean revival style and obviously bygone era exterior that is now painted a deep shade of sage. So, reboot and begin to experience the space as totally new, re-energized and re-envisioned—which is exactly what Sage's energizer owner and visionary-in-chief Sharon Carole has done.

You enter Sage Restaurant and lose your bearings if your compass is set to Ceviche (the building's former life which shuttered back in 2012). There's nothing even slightly similar to the previous occupier except that familiar Mediterranean revival style and obviously bygone era exterior that is now painted a deep shade of sage.

So, reboot and begin to experience the space as totally new, re-energized and re-envisioned – which is exactly what Sage's energizer owner and visionary-in-chief Sharon Carole has done.

Sharon had her eye on the four-story Mediterranean Revival Style building and purchased it in 2014. The building's first name was The Sarasota Times Building and possesses a fine pedigree since it was designed by famed architect Dwight James Baum who created the El Vernona Hotel, El Vernona Apartments (now called Belle Haven Apartments), and, oh yeah, he also built John Ringling's Ca da'Zan as well as the Sarasota County Courthouse.

Enter off First Street and your eyes get a visual feast even before you sit down to dine. There's statuary from Asian cultures – carved elephants, a serene Buddha and a huge lychee root wall hanging from Laos. Good thing the building has strong bones to support that large object as well as massive transparent light fixtures hanging from the ceiling. Having been home to a newspaper, the building, back in the day, held equally heavy printing presses.

Sharon chose each and every item in the restaurant from the lights to the furniture—even the sinks in the ladies' rooms. Actually, she designed them. They're like wide blocks of ice, but they also light up. Then there's the famous rooftop bar where many spent a relaxing evening having drinks and delighting in being on one of the few (if only) rooftops in Sarasota. That too has been re-imagined. A semi-transparent screen goes up and down to create private spaces and also to keep out the rain. A communal area has a fire and water feature with stones that were so heavy a crane had to be used to get them to the roof. Yes, she designed that space, too. It draws people of all interests and ages and Sharon likes how they “come together” at the space. That was her intention all along.

A new event space that Sharon created is on the third floor. It's perfect for those in that fewer than 150 head count. It's open and airy and would be ideal for smaller weddings or business, nonprofit, or club events. The light streaming in from the west makes the room, with its white and silver décor, positively shimmer.

The cuisine was designed by Christopher Covelli and the operations side is under the purview of Cameron Hall who lastly ran that Sarasota gem, the 5 O'Clock Club. Sage opened January 29 of this year and, like any new restaurant, it's been solidly booked even though Sharon says her goal was to “start out quietly.” She calls it “mind blowing” that the restaurant has taken off.

So who is this talented woman? I ask Sharon if she owned restaurants before.

Nope. The building came first and then the idea for a restaurant came after. To Sharon, “I felt this was in the heart of Sarasota ...yet there was no place to celebrate birthdays or anniversaries” and, like others, “I was in love with this building.” So she bought it.

Sharon has a background in design and architecture. When some people said Sage was “too much work” to renovate – knocking out walls and doing modifications - she didn't feel intimidated at all. It was then on to structural updates – the wiring, the plumbing—you name it. Then came the rooms themselves. “There's not a surface we didn't redo,” she explains. Ceviche was noisy as I recall, as are many spaces with hard floors, high ceilings and nothing on the walls. Sharon employed the use of soundproof foam covered in fabric on the walls that absorbs sound.

The cuisine at Sage is “international” meaning it doesn't fit neatly into any single category, which is similar to the interior décor. Comments online rave about dishes like Thai Bouillabaisse, Salmon Marakesh and especially the tagliatelle. But the menu changes all the time so best to come with an adventurous spirit. “The plan was to have food from different countries. The menu has food from all over the world.” She describes her restaurant as having a “chill vibe” — meaning, “I want people to feel peaceful. I want it to feel like home – cozy. That worked for me. It's expensive, but worth the effect.”

Speaking of home, Sharon has lived in Sarasota since 2008. She grew up in San Diego and has lived in Los Angeles and Colorado Springs. In Florida, she lived first on Siesta Key before settling in on Casey Key. When she first arrived, she home-schooled her three children who are now 12, 20 and 26. She was a mom in motion back then – heading the PTO, involved in homeowners' associations, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts and more.

Like so many, Sharon has immersed herself into philanthropy via organizations such as Equality Florida and ALSO Youth which both support LGBTQ adults and youth, respectively. She likes “creating safe places for kids” and admits to having seen family members being bullied. She's also been involved with the Florida Winefest because they support charities that work with children and Sage will be hosting a wine dinner for them in April.

Some time before Sage opened, Sharon was at her Casey Key home and she saw some young people making a film on the beach near her property. Long story short, she helped to produce their film which went on to be included in the Sarasota Film Festival a few years ago. The Sarasota Film Festival will have its closing night party at Sage, replete with a red carpet outside for celebrities.

Sharon is a woman in motion. She shared with me a desire to connect with women who want to change the world. Her last words to me were something like, “I'm gonna...” 🍷

■ For more information, visit sagesrq.com

🍷 STORY: Louise Bruderle

🍷 IMAGES: Evelyn England