



**Chef Scott Halverson has led the growth of three prasino locations, all built on clean, seasonal foods.**

# good & green

**Scott Halverson keeps it clean with Chicago's eco-conscious prasino restaurants.**

BY PETER AGOSTINELLI, PHOTOGRAPHY BY LARA KASTNER

For Chef Scott Halverson, the philosophy behind his kitchens at three Chicago-area restaurant locations is all about the name – “prasino,” Greek for green.

In its first two years, prasino has satisfied local demand with several locations and a mind-set fueled by sustainability. The newest and third outpost opened earlier in 2011 in Chicago's Wicker Park

neighborhood, at one time a Polish and then Puerto Rican stronghold, but which during the last decade became more known as an arts enclave. Two other prasinos serve the city's western suburbs.

“This is my calling,” says Halverson during a break while preparing to open his Wicker Park spot. “It's something I've loved since my first steps into a kitchen at 15, but I started much earlier helping my family and

cooking at home. I love that there are so many types of cuisine and that it's constantly changing, progressing and evolving.”

That vitality supports the foods and philosophies behind prasino's daily breakfast, lunch and dinner services. From the restaurant's juice bar to its grilled and roasted proteins and fresh, seasonal vegetables, Halverson uses as many local and organic foods as he can source. Niman

Ranch supplies most of the antibiotic- and hormone-free meats for prasino's entrées and sandwiches; Eggland's Best organic eggs are behind many breakfast dishes and baked goods.

Prasino also sources fish and shellfish from fully sustainable and environmentally friendly seafood purveyors. Even the furnishings are sustainable, with bamboo chairs and reclaimed building materials used throughout the restaurant's three locations to equip the dining and common areas.

And the food? Halverson calls it contemporary American cooking with global inspirations: Try the ancho braised lamb shank with olive oil smashed potatoes, feta, greens, spiced olives and lamb jus, or the grilled Thai curry pork loin with brown rice, mango salad and coconut cashew sauce. (Note that some of the ingredients included in the entrées may change slightly from season to season). Many spices and dry rubs evoke the Mexican and Southwestern cooking Halverson learned in Texas when he attended Austin's Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts, while others reflect Asian influences.

But guests who follow a vegan, vegetarian or gluten-free diet are also in luck at prasino. Halverson has featured dishes such as miso-glazed tofu, variations of homemade hummus and cremini mushroom bruschetta to boost local

**Below: Halverson features menus with lighter fare but big flavors in a comfortable environment.**



**Above: Eco-friendly materials and soothing interiors set prasino apart.**

interest and create a welcoming environment for all diners. Such variety is part of what drew him to the enterprise when the Maglaris family, known Chicago restaurateurs, prepared to open the original spot in suburban La Grange, Illinois.

“I was drawn to prasino because I love

“Food is food, but what you do with it is up to you.”

the accessibility of a restaurant serving breakfast, lunch and dinner with an array of differently priced dishes,” says Halverson, who began his career like so many chefs when he took a dishwashing job as a teenager. Prasino also provides a substantial platform for the chef to share recipes and cooking techniques on local television and directly with guests. For example, a simple but frequently overlooked practice Halverson emphasizes is properly organizing everything before cooking. Classic *mise en place* “will make your life easier in the kitchen,” he says.

The chef also advises buying foods and seasonings that require little to no manipulation. For example, Halverson suggests purchasing a

high-quality cut of meat or fish from a professional butcher or fishmonger and pairing it with local, seasonal vegetables – perhaps grilled or roasted while the meat cooks – to build an easy and delicious meal without advanced technical skills.

“When cooking, use your ears,” Halverson adds. “You should be able to hear items cooking, such as meat sizzling and vegetables sautéing. And use the controls on your stove. A lot of people when cooking tend to have two temperatures – low and burning. Start things on high heat and adjust temperatures as you work through the recipe.”

More knowledge helps home cooks grow confident in their choices, including when it comes to dining out. As Halverson says, “Food is food, but what you do with it is up to you.”



## Tips for the Home Cook

**USE A TIMER** Timers are great tools for cooks; they free you up to focus on cooking instead of the clock, reducing costly mistakes.

**TOWEL UP** A good kitchen towel is another key tool for cooks for cleaning work surfaces and retrieving hot cookware from stove tops and ovens.

**MUST-HAVE TOOL** Hand (or immersion) blenders make life much easier by blending foods in the same pot they were cooked in, which also reduces cleanup time.

**THE RIGHT BOARD** A large, high-quality cutting board provides ample work space for chopping, slicing and dicing.

**KNOW WHAT TO SPLURGE ON** Heavy-gauge cooking vessels ensure even cooking. As for cutlery, spending a little extra on a few basic pieces will result in longer-lasting cookware.

Exclusive recipe  
from Chef  
Scott Halverson  
for Clean Eating  
magazine

## Grilled Calamari & Tomato Salad

WITH LEMON VINAIGRETTE & GRILLED BREAD

Serves 2.

### INGREDIENTS:

- 8 oz whole squid tubes and tentacles, cleaned
- 4 slices whole-wheat or whole-grain baguette
- Olive oil cooking spray

### VINAIGRETTE

- 5 lemons, halved
- 2 tsp chopped fresh oregano
- 2 tsp chopped garlic
- 2 tsp raw honey
- 4 tsp olive oil

- 2 tbsp white wine vinegar
- ¼ tsp each sea salt and fresh ground black pepper

### TOMATO SALAD

- 1 pint grape or cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh basil leaves
- 2 tsp chopped garlic
- 1 tsp red pepper flakes, or to taste
- Pinch each sea salt and fresh ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 tsp olive oil
- 2 tsp chopped pitted Kalamata olives
- 2 tsp red wine vinegar

### INSTRUCTIONS:

**ONE:** Prepare vinaigrette: On a grill set to medium-high, cook lemon halves, cut side down, for 5 to 8 minutes, until lightly charred. Leave grill at medium-high.

**TWO:** Juice lemons into a small bowl. Add remaining vinaigrette ingredients and mix well; set aside.

**THREE:** Prepare tomato salad: In a large bowl, combine salad ingredients; toss gently. Set aside.

**FOUR:** Place squid on grill and cook on medium-high heat, turning, for 4 to 5 minutes per side, until whitish-purple and lightly charred. Set aside and cover to keep warm.

**FIVE:** Mist each side of baguette slices with cooking spray. Transfer to grill and cook, turning, for 2 minutes per side, until toasted.

**SIX:** Place tomato salad on a serving dish and drizzle with vinaigrette. Place calamari in center of dish and serve with baguette slices.

**Nutrients per serving (4 oz calamari, ½ cup salad, 1½ tsp vinaigrette):** Calories: 416, Total Fat: 16.5 g, Sat. Fat: 3 g, Monounsaturated Fat: 10 g, Polyunsaturated Fat: 2 g, Carbs: 43 g, Fiber: 5 g, Sugars: 6 g, Protein: 20 g, Sodium: 546 mg, Cholesterol: 264 mg 

