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WA James Beard finalist closes one restaurant, opens another — and more

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James Beard Award-nominated chef Mike Easton — here pictured in the garden at The Kitchen at Abeja — has announced a trifecta of Walla Walla-area restaurant news. (Colby D. Kuschatka / Courtesy of The Kitchen at Abeja)

By [Bethany Jean Clement](#)

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Washington top chef Mike Easton announced big restaurant news on multiple fronts on Wednesday morning: The four-time James Beard Award nominee has shuttered his renowned Bar Bacetto in Waitsburg. He plans to open [Bacetto’s Detroit Style, his hotly anticipated Walla Walla pizzeria](#), at 5 p.m. today. And he has taken on the role of executive chef role at high-end winery restaurant The Kitchen at Abeja, also in Walla Walla.

Originally renowned in Seattle and beyond for his late, great pasta spot, Il Corvo, and upscale Italian favorite, [Il Nido](#), Easton sold the latter to two staffers and decamped to Eastern Washington in 2022. There, in historic Waitsburg, he and his wife Erin Easton opened [Bar Bacetto](#), and the small-town restaurant housed in an 1884 Oddfellows Hall building quickly gained major acclaim — first landing on local and national lists, then getting [Beard finalist status in the nationwide category of Best New Restaurant](#) this past spring.

Now Easton has put Bar Bacetto on indefinite hiatus. He calls the restaurant “a really beautiful thing that we did out there,” and “a success in many, many ways,” but, he says, “financial longevity is not necessarily one of them.” It’s unlikely, he notes, that the place will return in its original form.

But as Easton closes one door, he opens another — and then some.

Pending a final health inspection, Thursday is planned to be the the debut of his new project, Bacetto’s Detroit Style, located in the de facto Washington wine country capital of Walla Walla. For fans [contemplating a pizza pilgrimage](#), Easton says, “It’s not quite a dive bar, but there are already a good 20 or 30 dollar bills tacked to the ceiling with writings and well wishes on them — that’s kind of the vibe here. It looks a little bit like a 1980s roller rink.” The crust, he notes, will be similar to that of his former Pioneer Square place, Pizzeria Gabbiano, which gained a loyal following but couldn’t get enough overall traction [in that Seattle neighborhood](#), closing in 2016. Erin Easton will be in charge of day-to-day operations at Bacetto’s Detroit Style.

And far from any roller-rink vibe, Easton is set to start as exec chef at Walla Walla’s The Kitchen at Abeja at the beginning of July. He first visited the 38-acre property, which encompasses the Abeja winery and an upscale inn, a decade ago. “It’s beautiful,” he says, “absolutely just a gorgeous place to come to work.” Easton looks forward, he says, to reverse-engineering Tuscan-inspired dishes to match Abeja’s wines for five- and seven-course prix-fixe-only dinners, with his new menu debuting Aug. 1.