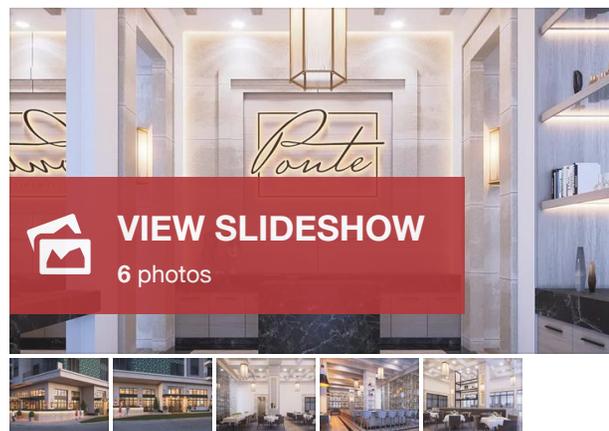




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Commercial Real Estate

# Chef Chris Ponte's new flagship restaurant begins construction in Midtown



By Ashley Gurbal Kritzer – Real Estate Editor, Tampa Bay Business Journal

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Chef [Chris Ponte](#)'s new restaurant in Midtown Tampa was always going to be his flagship – a more modern spin on his longtime Cafe Ponte, where he built a cult following in a nondescript Clearwater shopping center.

But in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the chef feels even more driven to make Ponte Modern American an experiential masterpiece: Think chefs in tall white toques and a guéridon service for tableside caviar and champagne.

"I want to bring back a little bit of old school," Ponte told the Tampa Bay Business Journal. "Maybe we're not doing steak Diane, but that back-and-forth interaction with the guests is important."

Interior construction is officially underway at Ponte Modern American, which has a prime space along West Cypress Street in Midtown. It's 6,774 square feet and will seat around 235. Summit Design Group is the general contractor;

Empad Architecture and Design is the architect on the project. Ponte's wife, Michelle Ponte, and Danice Doganerio are handling the interior design.

All in, it's a multimillion-dollar investment; The Ponte Group, which includes the chef and his wife and sons Andy and JT, has brought on a private investor for the launch of this latest location.

The Ponte Group also owns Olivia, an Italian restaurant in South Tampa. Chris and Michelle Ponte are also partners in On Swann in Hyde Park Village. Cafe Ponte, the family's original namesake restaurant, closed in May 2020 after 18 years.

Ponte New American isn't a steakhouse, but the menu includes some steakhouse-inspired dishes. Cafe Ponte's famed mushroom soup will be on the menu, along with Connecticut-style lobster rolls and New England scallops. The Ponte meatball will be a house specialty: a wagyu

meatball stuffed with short rib, truffles and foie gras and covered in a cognac sauce.

The chef also plans to put his own spin on side dishes, from Japanese sweet potatoes with sesame butter to potato skins stuffed with fonduta, truffles and prosciutto.

The new restaurant is slated to open by November, though Ponte cautions that construction time frames are always changing. In the meantime, he said both Olivia and On Swann are booming with pent-up demand. Olivia had a record sales week last week – not compared to its Covid sales figures, but since its opening date in November 2019.

"People want to go out," Ponte said. "It hasn't let up at all."

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