

# Islands

## 5 Mouth-Watering Florida Restaurants You Didn't Know Were Run By Former Top Chef Contestants

By Jenna Kelley Jan. 21, 2026



Florida's culinary scene has just about everything your taste buds crave — and some of the state's most buzzworthy dishes come straight from chefs you first met on television. From the small screen to your dinner table, some former "Top Chef" contestants have traded reality show challenges for real-world kitchens, many of which have seen the likes of locals, tourists, and A-list celebrities stop by for a visit.

Jeremy Ford, John Tesar, Lindsay Autry, Richard Blais, and Fabio Viviani have each become household names thanks to Bravo's hit cooking show. Now, these five stars have smoothed out their aprons and sharpened their knives to curate menus across the Sunshine State, crafting stellar menus in chic settings to deliver award-winning experiences that prove a hit with critics and online reviewers. Whether you're a die-hard "Top Chef" fan, a Florida local looking for your next reservation, or a traveler searching for your next foodie adventure, you'll want to stop by these five wildly different and delicious locations.

### **Tavern Costale by Fabio Viviani**

European-born yet U.S.-made, Fabio Viviani is living the all-American dream. The Italian chef stole viewers' hearts on "Top Chef" Season 5, on which he was voted "Fan Favorite,"

before starring again on the show in Season 8. Viviani has since created a successful hospitality group, written a bestselling cookbook, and opened countless restaurants. His name is written on more than 40 restaurants across the U.S.! However, one in particular, Taverna Costale, is situated in St. Petersburg, Florida.

With a 4.7-star rating on OpenTable, customers seem to love his Italian-inspired curated menu. From pizzas to pastas and freshly spiced fish, the restaurateur brings a taste of the Mediterranean coastline to the Gulf. No surprise that, in 2022, they were nominated for the Best of the Bay "Best New Restaurant" award in the local area. At Taverna Costale, you get to experience not only the labor of a celebrity chef's decades of hard work, but also the heart and soul of Italian cooking brought to the American table. Viviani is a fan favorite on-screen ... and a foodie's dream off-screen.