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WINE TRAVEL FOOD

GAMBERO ROSSO®

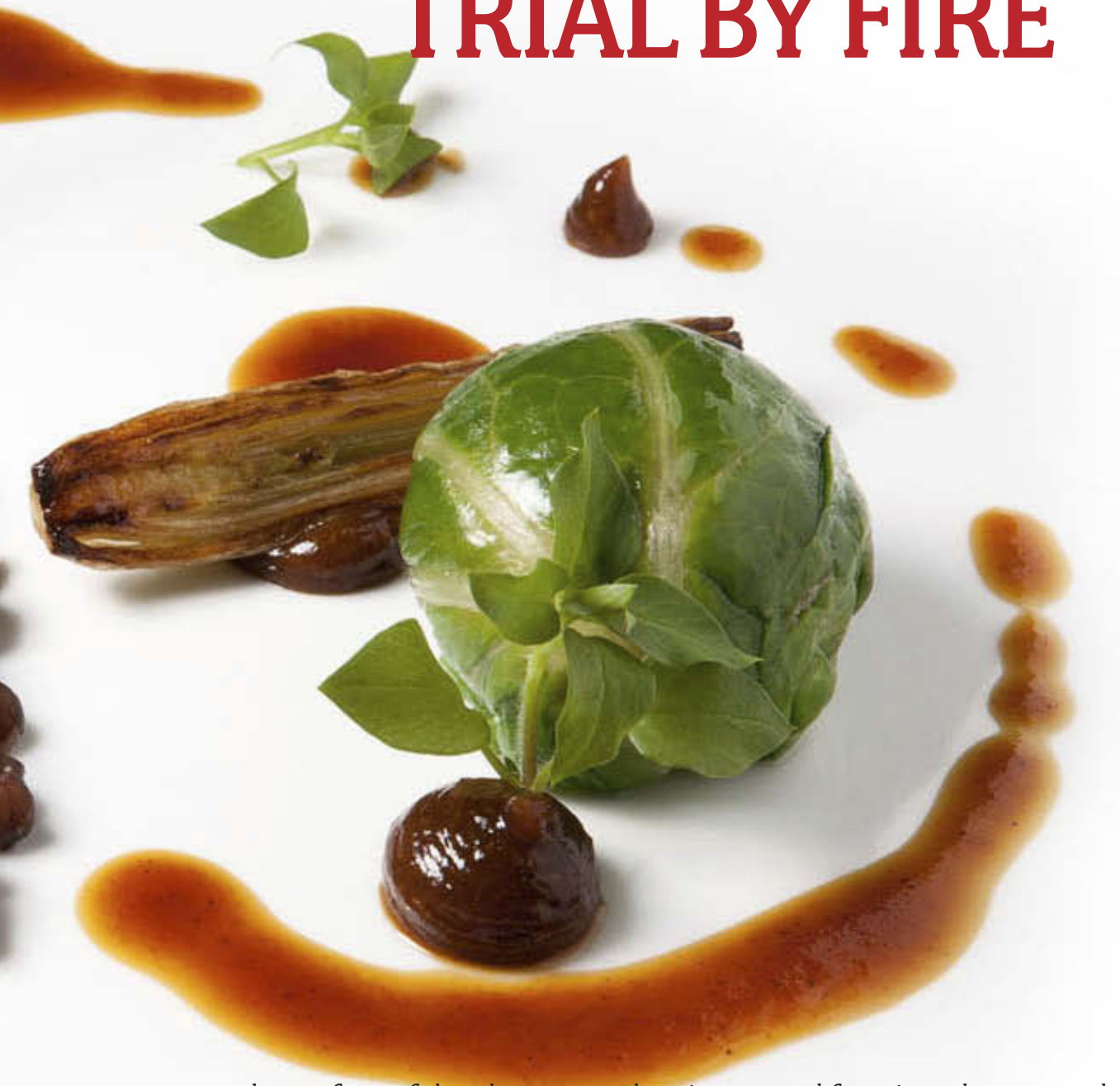
- USA. NUOVA CUCINA ITALIANA
CHINESE D'AUTEUR IN ITALY
- MONTISCI: SARDINIAN WINE ARTIST

Made in Italy



by Lorenzo Ruggeri
and Gerardo Antelmo

USA. CUCINA ITALIANA TRIAL BY FIRE



On the surface of the planet, people migrate and frontiers change. In the kitchen, cultures meet and clash, melting into new aromas and flavors. Over the centuries, cucina italiana has been influenced by the typical culinary habits of lands near and far without being overwhelmed. The experience in the United States is proof.

Generations of Americans have grown up with and loved Italian food and Italian restaurants. At the start of the last century, immigrants, mainly from the south of the country, brought their local dishes with them, and their eastern European neighbors longed for invitations to share a meal with the colorful, gregarious newcomers. The first popular commercial dishes were aimed at the workingman - muffledetta sandwiches for Sicilians in New Orleans, cheese steaks in Philadelphia, cioppino seafood stews for Genoese fisherman in San Francisco. Later, soldiers returning from Italy after World War Two brought memories of foods they had enjoyed, and Italo-Americans learned to satisfy that yen with spaghetti and meatballs, lasagna and pizza. Since the entrepreneurs were often new to the profession, the early Italian post-war restaurants slipped into a comfortable, beloved model, epitomized by the checked tablecloth and straw-covered Chianti bottle. Red sauce was all. Although many Italian-made products were finding their way into specialty shops and supermarkets, so were many imitations, "Italian sounding". It took another genera-

tion before professional Italian chefs from all over the boot began to open restaurants and teach their American clients about the vast range and high quality of Italian dishes and Italian products. Only now is the difference between parmesan and Parmigiano-Reggiano, between mass-produced olive oil and extra-virgin cold pressed estate oil beginning to sink in. Now, all over the world, Italian chefs are surprised and delighted to find new respect and admiration. The chefs in turn are finding excitement and stimulation in their new homes - see our news about Gabriele Bonci and Stefano Calligari in other sections of this issue. The range of Italian eating places, the dishes they offer, the products they draw on, the standards they hold themselves to, is at an all time high. Every year, Gambero Rosso, with wine events involving dozens of producers and hundreds of labels, travels the world. Our teams became aware of the astonishingly high quality of the Italian restaurants and pizzerias found all over the globe. Many could put to shame the eating places in their own hometowns. We are finally putting together our years of experience to offer a guide to the world's Top Italian Restaurants.

Chicago | THE

Spacca Napoli Pizzeria
1769 W Sunnyside Ave. |
tel. +1 773 878 2420 |
www.spaccanapolipizzeria.com

Jonathan Goldsmith, who trained with renowned pizza maestro, Enzo Coccia, has brilliantly brought Neapolitan sunshine into one of the coldest cities in the United States. His entrepreneurial history destined him for success. Each day he gives the Americans in Obama's home town the chance to fully satisfy their palates. In Spacca Napoli, Americanized versions are banned, even when requested, although many lesser pizzaioli turn them out to make ends meet. For Jonathan, pizza is the authentic expression of a Neapolitan art that over the centuries has become hallowed pizzeria know-how. Jonathan's wife is a well-known and respected artist, so artistic responsibility is a family matter. Each brick in the two ovens made by third and fourth generation Neapolitan artisans testifies to Jonathan's dedication to offering the best. Each ingredient is the result of research in Italy carried out from his agriturismo Le Campestre di Castel di Sasso in the province of Caserta. The result is a top quality pizza. His wine list could offer more, but the choice to focus largely on quality wines from Campania is further proof of Jonathan's great love for Naples.



SPAGHETTI WITH CLAMS, RISTORANTE COCO PAZZO



RESTAURANTS

Pizzeria napoletana Forno Rosso |

1048 W Randolph st. |

tel. +1 3122436000 |

www.fornorossopizzeria.com

“With pizza I want to transmit Neapolitan culture, paying attention to detail. Each pizza that comes to the table has to be special.” Salvatore Locascio, a Sicilian from Trabia, near Palermo, is a young pizzaiolo who trained with the greatest masters. In Chicago, another Sicilian, Nicola Nitti, originally from Cefalù, recognized Salvatore’s talent and created Forno Rosso for him. Their success is evident to all who crowd into this busy pizzeria on Randolph, an old industrial neighborhood of the West Loop. An excellent individualized oven from Acunto features a special slab of volcanic stone and the famed ‘biscotti di Sorrento’ tiles. Caputo Blu flour, Ciao sauce made from San Marzano tomatoes, Mozzarella di Bufala Campana DOP, the tiny tomatoes known as pomodori del piennolo rosso e giallo from San Nicola dei Miri di Gragnano - these are perhaps the best possible ingredients for turning out an extraordinary pizza. Americanized versions are banned here. “American clients have to adapt their palates to Italian tastes,” said Nick Nitti. Davide D’Andrea, Gianni Gallucci and Alfredo Pappalardo, fine Italian pizzaioli who take turns in the kitchen, assure constant quality, whatever the day.

Ristorante Coco Pazzo |

300 W Hubbard St. | tel. +1 312 836 0900 |

www.cocopazzochicago.com

Federico Comacchio brought a welcome breeze of innovation to Coco Pazzo. His origins in Lodi, in Lombardy, give him a special feeling for the foods of that region. His mother, he said, was a traditional homemaker with a passion for out of the ordinary foods. A masterful risotto expresses all its potential flavor, but so does cacciucco, a typical Tuscan fish soup, rustic and full-flavored. Each of Federico’s dishes showcases the character of the fresh ingredients at its heart. Both traditional and contemporary, they artfully represent the best of Italian food to the outside world. Bitter and sour, sweet and salty flavors are balanced. Service is impeccable thanks to the professional, well-established staff in the dining room. A good wine list offers selections from all Italy’s regions. Quality/price rapport is good.



PIZZAIOLI - FORNO ROSSO

Ristorante Tocco | 1266 N Milwaukee Ave. |

tel. +1 773-687-8895 |

www.toccochicago.com

Bruno and Melissa Abate wanted to bring Chicago a modern, elegant version of cucina italiana that, while reflecting tradition, could satisfy international palates. Tocco offers sleek contemporary decor and its wine cellar showcases excellent Italian labels from every region. Basic ingredients are exclusively top quality Italian. The cheese selection is varied and interesting. Extra-virgin olive oils are all DOP, from protected geographic zones. Even the flour used is carefully chosen and organic. Tortelli di ricotta, house-made, are enhanced with truffles from Norcia, in Umbria. Risotto 24, made with Parmigiano-Reggiano aged for 24 months, Abruzzese saffron and 24-karat gold, is finished in a silver pot and reflects the maniacal attention to detail of chef Domenico Acampora. Bruno Abate dedicates himself not only to his restaurant but also to his community. For six years he has been teaching Italian cooking and food services in Chicago’s Cook County jail.



RISTORANTE TOCCO - INTERIOR

RISTORANTE COCO PAZZO



San Francisco | THE RESTAURANTS

Acquerello | 1722 Sacramento St. |
tel. +1 4155675432 | www.acquerello.com

Acquerello probably has the most prestigious and up-to-date wine list of any Italian restaurant in the United States. Its modern, curated menu provides incredible emotions even to palates accustomed to great cuisine d'auteur. Suzette Gresham and Giancarlo Paterlini feature stylistically pure cucina italiana - perfect, modern, and delicately influenced by French cooking. Each meal is an elegant and precise dance, stimulating the palate and reaching its peak at dessert time. In every dish you feel the heart and soul of Suzette, the influence of her French grandmother, and the quality of the fruit and vegetables grown in the family garden. Even the most simple and traditional plate brings a special touch with it. The veal tartare with bottarga, Grana Padano and 25-year-old balsamic vinegar is exceptional. Superlative potato-filled ravioli are flavored with goat cheese, smoked guanciale and caramelized onions. Maine lobster is enhanced with saffron and artichokes. Choosing a wine is difficult: there are thousands of labels stored in three exceptional cellars. Prices are in line with the quality offered, but not out of proportion.



CARROT SFORNATO, FERMENTED SHALLOT, MARCONA ALMONDS, PROSCIUTTO - ACQUERELLO



Belotti | 5403 College ave. | Oakland (CA) |
tel. +1 510 788 7890 | belottirb.com

Michele Belotti is one of the rising stars among Italian restaurateurs, and this month's edition features him on the cover. His restaurant in Oakland, a city separated from San Francisco by a very long bridge, is an oasis of Italian flavor. Michele is from Bergamo, his wife, Joyce, is originally from Taiwan. He aims to serve dishes from the great expanse of cucina italiana, attending to every detail with care, but some of his own traditions emerge. After studying with chefs Paolo Frosio, Ugo Alciati and Luca Zecchin, Michele focuses on the seasonality of California's farm produce, but handled in traditional Italian ways. His secret is to use simple, basic ingredients, transforming them into memorable dishes. The battuta di Fassona, a steak tartare, comes from Piedmontese Fassone cattle raised in Montana. The meat is hand-chopped and dressed with exceptional extra-virgin olive oil, Parmigiano cream, quail egg yolk, arugula and black truffle. Pasta is either from renowned Italian manufacturer Mancini or house-made by Tatiana Rizzo. One popular specialty is a filled pasta, casoncelli, topped simply with melted butter and sage. Davide Mancini in the dining room guarantees a warm welcome and advice on wine pairing. The wine list is interesting, with some excellent choices available.



TONY GEMIGNANI



Tony's Pizza Napoletana |
1570 Stockton st. | tel. +1 415 835 9888 |
tonyspizzanapoletana.com

Be prepared to wait in line if you haven't reserved but still want to eat San Francisco's best Neapolitan pizzas. Italo-American Tony Gemignani is known all over the country and is the guru of Neapolitan pizza in San Francisco. He chooses his ingredients personally and has founded a popular pizza school that he directs himself. At forty-three, Tony is a 12-time World Pizza Champion and has created pizzerias in cities around the country, including Las Vegas. The pizza crust is elastic, an indication of perfect leavening, the ingredients are high quality, including the tomato puree he developed to his own specifications. The pizza base is perfectly dried, the measure of ideal cooking and deep know-how. Alongside excellent pizza, Tony's offers other simple, comforting Italian dishes, such as meatballs in sauce. The wine list offers a decent selection of Italian wines for a pizzeria.



MICHELE BELOTTI



BATTUTA DI FASSONA - BELOTTI

New York | THE RESTAURANTS

Pizzeria Ribalta | 48 E 12th St. |
tel. +1 212 777 7781 |
www.ribaltapizzarestaurant.com

This is the Pantheon of pizza in the United States, the headquarters of the creative culinary culture of Naples exported abroad. While respecting tradition and authenticity, every dish turned out by Pasquale Cozzolino offers creativity and the effervescent hospitality of Rosario Procino. Rosario greets each Italian and Neapolitan as family. The pizzeria's success is certainly linked to the scrupulous choice of ingredients, from the excellent Mozzarella di Bufala Campana DOP, to the piennolo tomato puree and the newly-pressed Sicilian extra-virgin olive oil. What you don't expect in a pizzeria is the incredible spaghettoni from Pastificio dei Campi di Gragnano, not easy to match anywhere else in New York. The wine list is constantly up-dated by Tania, the young, talented sommelier, and features some small wineries you wouldn't expect to find outside Italy.



BABBO - STAFF

Babbo | 110 Waverly Pl |
tel. +1 212-777-0303 | www.babbonyc.com

One of the best wine lists specialized in Italian labels is in New York, and it is certainly the most impressive of its kind in the city. Babbo is up-to-date in its choices, with bottles ranging from the little-known orange wines of the Carso zone in Friuli to the greatest world-famous names, from small artisans to the grandest estates. The choice of vintage years is precise and impeccable, a matchless undertaking begun by Jeff Porter and today carried on by General Manager Michael Acheson. Clients can choose a friendly quartino – the classic of Italian trattorias – but also a magical superstar in a glass, thanks to an efficient use of the Coravin bottle-sealing system. We would have a hard time in Rome finding such a lively and available range of Italian wines. Besides the wine list, Babbo offers authentic, traditional dishes based on quality DOP products of certified origin, and that includes cheeses, balsamic vinegar and cured meats. Some dishes do show the influence of the American contest, but without losing their authenticity. Mario Batali and Joe Bastianich opened this restaurant in 1998, and have known how to stay in the forefront. Don't overlook Vintage Babbo evenings, always on Mondays, which feature the greatest vintage years matched with hard-to-find dishes.

PIZZERIA RIBALTA



PIZZA MARINARA - PIZZERIA RIBALTA

Il Gattopardo | 13-15 W 54th st. |
tel. + 1 212 246 0412 |
www.ilgattopardonyc.com

When Bill Clinton was president, he chose to celebrate his sixtieth birthday at Il Gattopardo. The restaurant, described as a 'luxury trattoria', often has celebrity guests. Owner Gianfranco Sorrentino is a Neapolitan with a passion for Mediterranean cucina shared with his wife Paula. Every detail matters to them. Their careers began with a restaurant inside MOMA almost twenty years ago, which opened the way to success for this family of enlightened restaurateurs who hold high the standards of cucina italiana in New York. Il Gattopardo is the most prestigious of the family's restaurants. Chef Vito Gnazzo is known for having refused to Americanize his dishes, while managing to adapt his own vision of Mediterranean cooking to modern palates. Il Gattopardo is located in the Rockefeller Townhouse, the Rockefeller residence until 1959. It was built in 1897 by architect Henry Hardenberg, known for having designed both the Plaza Hotel and the Dakota, where John Lennon lived. The townhouse is near MOMA and is Landmark protected. Paccheri alla genovese is memorable. Spaghetti with grey mullet bottarga is a striking example of balanced flavor thanks to masterful handling of the basic ingredients. Flavor fusion is perfection. The wine list is structured well and adds an extra dimension to the dining experience.



GIANFRANCO SORRENTINO AND CHEF VITO GNAZZO - IL GATTOPARDO



CASA LEVER



IL GATTOPARDO

Casa Lever | 390 Park ave |
tel. +1 212 8882 700 |
www.casalever.com

A fine and up-date wine list plus a menu of exemplary Italian dishes make Casa Lever a benchmark restaurant in New York. Dishes are elegant with interesting creative touches. The setting is a tribute to art, with a fantastic collection of Andy Warhol silk screen portraits. Domenico Natale has unfurled his entire creative personality here, staying loyal to authentic themes while running the kitchen of the city's most visible representative of Italy. The cucina is of the highest level, and although prices are also very high, they are justified by the quality. We enjoyed an amazing flounder, pasta with sea urchins, and grilled calamari on a bed of broccoli mousse. In the white truffle season, every dish is a taste experience. The wine list is well designed by the sommeliers curating it, and offers labels from all the great Italian wine territories.

DOMENICO NATALE - CASA LEVER

