

Dining Out Special: Northern Italian Cuisine in New York

N. L. (April 14, 2016)



If someone were to say there is no such thing as Italian cuisine--that instead there are Italian cuisines--they would be perfectly right. As in architecture and history, Italy's great eno-gastronomical asset is its diversity. Which brings us to this small selection of restaurants in New York dedicated to Northern Italian cuisine and its variety of rich flavors. From polenta to farinata, braised meat to pesto, risotto Milanese to liver alla veneziana: there are so many interpretations of these dishes that take us back to the ambience of that part of Italy underneath the Alps. And don't forget the wines...

A brief disclaimer before we move on: our suggestions might not always lead you to dishes that wholly conform to traditional Italian fare. Yet you will find interesting variations, even experiments in fusion cuisine, which we found pleasantly surprising and believe ought to be tried. Cooking is becoming globalized too, and it's normal for even the most local recipes to change things up when they cross an ocean, while at the same time many prestigious American chefs have found inspiration in Italian cuisine. As long as innovation is coherent and, most importantly, the results are good! Buon



appetito.

MIDTOWN

[Casa Lever](#) [2]

390 Park Avenue (at 53rd St)

(212) 888-2700

cuisine traditional

ambience elegant

price \$\$\$

Casa Lever is located inside the landmark Gordon Bunshafts Lever House Building, an iconic masterpiece of modernism built in 1951, where guests can dine among one of the largest collections of Andy Warhol's work, including portraits of Rudolf Nureyev, Aretha Franklin, Alfred Hitchcock, Judy Garland, Ernesto Esposito and Gabrielle Navarra. It is an extremely special place that weds Milanese hospitality and New York cool. Chef Alessandro Caporale and sommelier Gaetano Muscatello will help guide your dining experience on the spot and the timeless architecture will make you feel like you're in a modern day dolce vita. The menu is vast, with traditional antipasti, pasta and risotto dishes, fresh-caught hamachi, ahi tuna and Santa Barbara sea urchin at the raw bar, and main courses like the famous veal milanese and vitello tonnato. We suggest indulging in dessert, too, such as millefoglie layers, vanilla Chantilly cream, granite, sorbet or gianduja. We would be remiss not to mention Rebecca Applebaum, the head mixologist & bar manager, whose cocktails will blow your mind. And if you want to learn to make them yourself, Casa Lever organizes a series of cocktail classes taught by Ms. Applebaum. And don't forget—even if it's still winter—that from May through October they also have an outdoor bar that includes a Milanese menu of small plates like fried calamari, crocchette di baccala' and fontina-stuffed olives.

[Armani](#) [3]

717 5th Avenue

(212) 207-1902

cuisine contemporary

ambience stylish

price \$\$\$

Immerse yourself in Giorgio Armani's philosophy. Balance, harmony and carefully considered combinations are not only hallmarks of the furnishings but of the dishes here; the ingredients are meticulously—almost obsessively selected. "Contemporaneity for me starts with the classical," the Milanese stylist has said, "it doesn't rock the boat yet still aspires to experimentation and innovation." The venue stands out for its clean and sheer lines, its minimalist décor with touches of red and black in a large dining room surrounded by windows with views of beautiful 5th Avenue.

The menu reflects those same principles, so that Armani's restaurant really gives you an experience that affects all the senses. And that experience just happens to bear Armani's stamp. If you're



looking for a gateway into fashionable Milan from the far reaches of New York, look no further. Chef Sandro Romano makes splendid dishes including a Treviso radicchio salad, gnocchetti with red mullet and prized Ligurian Taggiasche olives, tagliolini with shrimp, risotto milanese, T-bone Fiorentina, and a chocolate mousse trio for dessert. But Armani/ Ristorante will suit your needs if you just want an appetizer or some excellent zucchini chips at their long bar area. The Armani Martini is exquisite. One thing Italians always lament about American restaurants is the poor quality or complete absence of bread served with meals. That certainly isn't the case at Armani. The breadbaskets they bring are exceptional and include various types of bread and breadsticks you won't soon forget.

[Remi](#) [4]

145 W 53rd Street % (212) 581-4242

cuisine northern italian

ambience elegant

price \$\$\$

This scenic spot was designed in the 1980s by Adam Tihany, the renowned Romanian-born, Milan-trained hospitality designer who also co-owned it at the time. The trendsetter designer who famously stated he views restaurants "not just places to eat but as theaters" also hired a French artist, Paulin Pâris, to paint the massive 120-foot mural representing—in Tihany's words—"fun Venice, not real Venice." The Venetian-inspired theatrical experience at Remi is indeed stunning, with the main dining room (called the Grand Canal) sporting glass chandeliers, Gothic style arches and nautical-striped seating. Add a smaller private room (the Rialto Room) and another called the Chef's Table located downstairs in the wine cellar, a glass-roofed, all weather outdoor seating atrium garden and a more casual café (Remi to Go)—and herein lies the magic. When the new proprietor Roberto Delledonne took over in 2005, making it the domain of Executive Chef Giovanni Pinato (now replaced by Mirco Delvecchio), he kept the sumptuous style of this landmark restaurant and built upon its peculiar mix of Venetian atmosphere, architecture, and cuisine: a perfect spot for Italy-loving Americans.

The menu offers culinary specialties from Veneto and Northern Italy — keep an eye out for Remi's signature dishes such as ravioli Marco Polo (ravioli filled with fresh tuna in a light tomato sauce with shaved pecorino cheese) or fegato alla veneziana (Venetian-style calf liver sautéed with onions and served on polenta). Don't forget that you can have a multi-regional Italian experience at Remi, with bucatini all'amatriciana (from Rome), cavatelli alla pugliese (from Puglia), and tonnarelli scie scie alla moda napoletana (from Naples).

MIDTOWN WEST

[Sant Ambroeu](#) [5]

1000 Madison Avenue

(212) 570-2211

cuisine traditional/milanese

ambience elegant



price \$\$\$\$

A classic neighborhood meeting place serving an uptown clientele, Saint Ambroeus is the American version of a Milanese pasticceria. Ambroeus is Milanese dialect for Sant’Ambrogio, the early medieval patron saint and bishop of Milan. To this day, the Milanese often refer to themselves as “Ambrosiani” in his honor. The original location in Milan is just a stone’s throw away from La Scala theater, at the heart of the city, where artists and businessmen and politicians all rub shoulders. It later became a restaurant and to this day is a landmark for Milan’s tastemakers. The restaurant occupies several locations in New York that, despite differences in ambience, all have quality in common. There are countless dishes we’d recommend, but one that we particularly love is an authentic Milanese dessert that you can dine on at the restaurant or take home with you. Gianduia cake has layers of moist hazelnut dacquoise, crisp hazelnut feuilletine and heavenly gianduia mousse surrounding a center of hazelnut cream. Besides the location on Madison Avenue, we recommend stopping by one of their other locations:

- Sant Ambroeus West Village (259 West, 4th Street): The contemporary café-style area of the restaurant has a great selection of wines with the contemporary feeling of an Italian enoteca.
- Sant Ambroeus SoHo (265 Lafayette Street): A contemporary interpretation of traditional Milanese cuisine and hospitality set in a chic and vibrant atmosphere.
- Sant Ambroeus Coffee Bar at Loews Regency Hotel (540 Park Avenue): The best in Italian traditions, creatively translated for modern diners.
- Coffee Bar at Sotheby’s (1334 York Avenue): Situated within the Sotheby’s World Headquarters in Manhattan, Coffee Bar offers patrons a quintessentially Italian café experience.
- Sant Ambroeus, Southampton (30 Main Street): Whenever you are in Southampton, pay a visit to this spot, which originally opened in 1992 and has recently been restyled by designer Robert McKinley.

[Barbetta](#) [6]

321 west. 46th Street

(212) 246-9171

cuisine traditional/piemontese

ambience elegant

price \$\$\$

Established in 1906, Barbetta is the oldest Italian restaurant in New York City and the only restaurant in America to have been named an “Historic Establishment” by the Italian association Locali Storici d’Italia. In 1962, its spectacular interior was refurbished by Laura Maioglio, daughter of founder Sebastiano and now its owner, with Piedmontese antiques. This made it the first elegant Italian restaurant in town—which, as its website states, “represented a radical departure from the prevailing but erroneous notion... that Italian restaurants are invariably ‘rustic’ and that Italian food must be similarly ‘rustic’.” But even rustic meals can be reinterpreted in an elegant way. This is the



case with typically Piemontese Bagna Cauda, a gregarious “country” dish where guests around the table dip raw vegetables into a simmering pot of an anchovy -flavored olive oil sauce. Pair it with Barbera d’Asti 2013 Cascina Castlèt—one of 1,700 different labels on a legendary wine list. If you are in the mood for a white, order Ceretto’s Arneis Blangè 2013 with Veal Tonnè in a classic Piemontese pairing.

CHELSEA

[Le Zie 2000](#) [7]

172 7th Ave (btw 20th & 21st st)

(212) 206-8686

cuisine traditional/venetian ambience friendly

price \$S

There’s a new joint in trendy Chelsea, a small trattoria with a friendly atmosphere where you can nibble on classic Venetian dishes, like Venetian Style Calf Liver, Sautéed Onion, Polenta and Venetian-Style Bean Soup. The dishes at Le Zie 2000 don’t disappoint. In Italian le zie means “aunts.” The word brings to mind those middle aged women at the markets in Venice’s rioni scouring for fresh foodstuffs, especially fish, to throw into some delicious supper. No surprise then that you’ll find an assortment of fresh fish at Le Zie, even if you’re just having a quick drink or sharing an appetizer. Contemporary artworks from Le Zie’s private collection are always on display. Despite being small, the restaurant has a number of different areas: La Galleria overlooking a garden is an intimate space which is also available for private parties. On the top floor there is a function room for the Chef’s Table that can seat up to 30 people and has the feel of a wine cellar. You can also meet your friends for drinks and appetizers in the lounge. Finally, if you’re feeling romantic, you’ll find the perfect space for a date that will set you dreaming of Venice while sharing an order of tiramisu’ big enough for two!

[Mulino a Vino](#) [8]

337 West 14th Street (855) 343-4513

cuisine innovative

ambience cozy

price \$\$\$

NYC’s first Italian wine restaurant features over 100 Italian wines by the glass! All wines are complimented by extraordinary Italian cuisine initially created by the chef and owner of the two-star Michelin restaurant Combal.Zero in Rivoli, in the province of Torino. Launched by Davide Scabin, Mulino a Vino serves up classic cuisine with a contemporary twist. No wonder. Its local chef is 22-year old Massimiliano Eandi, Scabin’s assistant. Massimiliano’s enthusiasm for cooking began at the early age of 14. By the age of 16 he was already working by Scabin’s side at Combal.Zero.

The dishes come in three sizes (small, medium and large) and you can also order many small tasting dishes, making for a very personalized menu. While the menu includes a number of standards, it also changes depending on the season. Yet no matter the season, you’ll find yourself treated to a new dining experience, even if Mulino hasn’t totally done away with traditional Italian cooking. Some of our favorites include gnocchi monzese by the glass, hibiscus risotto, octopus bobagnese and the simple pasta al pomodoro. Wine plays a fundamental role here. Prices range from \$13 up to \$500.



The list was selected by owner Paolo Menegalli, who has chosen the best Italian wines, from household names to the obscure. We suggest you order your wine before your food. All wine can be ordered by the glass. In fact, nowadays it's possible to pour wine by the glass without removing the cork.

countries' cuisines use simple, good ingredients is very similar. Well, all we can say is that All'Onda is a place to give things a shot; even the most conventional Venetian diners should open themselves up to new tastes once and a while. The industrial- rustic atmosphere is very pleasant and reflects the dual-nature of the food. The Japanese ingredients tend to smooth out the flavors and often— though not always—go well with their Venetian counterparts. The restaurant's real specialty is fish: polpetti alla veneziana, spaghetti alle vongole and Venetian tuna salad are among the standouts. Naturally, the bar serves fine wines, good cocktails and sake.

[Felidia](#) [9]

243 E 58th Street

(212) 758-1479

Cuisine Lidia's!

ambience elegant/classy

price \$\$\$\$

If you're a fan of food icon Lidia Bastianich, chances are you watch her regularly on TV and have at least one of her many cookbooks at home. You might also meet her in person greeting guests at Felidia—her flagship restaurant established 35 years ago in Manhattan. Day-to-day operations at this "classy gem" (Zagat) are in the hands of Fortunato Nicotra, a starred chef who has been working with Lidia for 20 years. Bastianich and Nicotra have made Felidia famous not only for food but also for wine. Don't miss Villa Bucci's Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi paired with Spaghetti alla Chitarra (bacon, caramelized onion, tomato sauce, and peperoncino.) And if you like calf's liver (fegato), order it sautéed (and served a farro based polenta) accompanied by a 2010 Castell'in Villa Chianti Classico.

UNION SQUARE

[All'Onda](#) [10]

22 E 13th Street

(212) 231-2236

cuisine venetian/fusion

ambience rustic-industrial

price \$\$\$

● Chris Jaeckle and Chris Cannon, two alumni of Michael White's, opened All'Onda, a restaurant housed in a warm, two-floor space on 13th Street where Chef Jaeckle whips up experimental fusion dishes with hints of traditional Northern Italian cooking as well as Japanese cuisine, a nod to the long-term influence the Orient has had on the Lagoon. Despite their long history of commercial ties, Japanese-Venetian cuisine is pretty new and pretty daring. "I believe that Japan and Italy have a



great deal in common,” says Jaeckle. According to the chef, the way in which both

LOWER EAST SIDE

[Bacaro](#) [11]

136 Division Street

(212) 941-5060

cuisine venetian

ambience rustic/romantic

price \$\$\$

“Don’t judge a restaurant by the outside — says one review of Bacaro on Yelp — because once you go in, it’s an intimate yet bustling setting for a romantic dinner.” This is indeed the perfect introduction (although we’d add, don’t judge by their website either!) to this little Venetian gem that chef-owner Frank DeCarlo manages with his wife Dulcinea Benson. Reviews will also tell you that Bacaro is located “on the eastern fringe” of Chinatown, others say Lower East Side, but to DeCarlo that’s the old neighborhood of Little Italy, where he has lived and worked all his life and where he opened his other successful Italian-inspired eatery, Peasant, in what is now known as Nolita. Housed in the premises of a former aquarium, Bacaro Wine Bar and Osteria (a “bacaro” in Venice is a workingman’s pub) has two levels, with walls and vaults of exposed bricks that create the look and feel of an old Italian tavern (a grotto-like private dining room is even located under the sidewalk). By experts’ consensus the food may not be as great as in DeCarlo’s other brainchild restaurants (Peasant and Apizz, on not-so-far Eldridge St.) but still it’s more than enjoyable— and Bacaro’s reasonable prices and romantic atmosphere do the rest. The menu offers plenty of Venetian specialties such as ostriche alla vene- ziana (fried oysters), risi e bisi (fried rice balls) and lots of “cichetti”, or Ve- netian-style small plates, paired with wines from Northern Italian regions selected by partner Kamy Geary. Don’t miss their spaghetti al nero di seppia (cuttlefish ink) paired with Ligurian white Pigato, Colle dei Bardellini.

BROOKLYN

Park slope

[Aldilà](#) [12]

248 5th Avenue

(718) 783-4565

cuisine venetian

ambience rustic + an elegant touch

price \$\$\$

Beyond—that’s what al di là means in Italian. In this case, the word evokes co-founder Emiliano Coppa’s TransAtlantic journey from Venice to New York, as well as “the other side of Italian cuisine” that he and his wife/ partner Anna Klinger, the restaurant’s chef, set out to teach Brooklynites when



they settled in Park Slope in the late 1990s. Their immediate neighborhood success then extended city-wide in the mid-2000s when The New York Times food critic Frank Bruni finally accepted his friends' suggestions and visited the place, awarding them two stars (very good): "I hereby ... sing the praises of Al di Là, sung so many times before, because it deserves the music," Bruni wrote. Actually everything at Al di Là is a little "beyond": the ancient Murano glass chandelier hanging from the ceiling comes straight from Emiliano's grandmother's place on the Grand Canal in Venice, the mismatched and sometimes chipped food plates have mostly been collected from flea markets, and the dining tables are made from reclaimed barn wood (Emiliano made them himself). The same goes for their North-Eastern-Italian inspired cuisine, approached with a not-so-common eye on sourcing the ingredients from local farmers "who work in a sustainable manner," according to their website, which proudly announces the trattoria has been awarded the Slow Food Snail of Approval "for its commitment to responsible sourcing." Try delicacies such as malfatti (dumplings made from ricotta, spinach and parmesan) casunziei (half moon shaped filled fresh pasta) and braised rabbit. You'll be spoiled by the choice of wines, seeing as next door is a full-fledged wine bar called Al di là Vino!

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