

La Centrale Miami - Hospitality the Italian Way

Tommaso Cartia (March 29, 2018)



Your central station to enjoy the best of Italy's gastronomic tradition has finally landed in Miami at the Brickell City Centre! We had the chance to chat with Jacopo Giustiniani, the notable NYC restaurateur, who opened the premier food hall in collaboration with hospitality guru Matthias Kiehm. Giustiniani guided us through the new realm of Italian dining on the East Coast highlighting his personal concept of "hospitalian" - hospitality the Italian way.

In Ancient Greece, hospitality was a right, with the host being expected to make sure the needs of his guests were met. The Italians' hospitality customs and rituals come directly from that culture and are infused in what is today addressed as "vivere all'italiana", or "la dolce vita", that has become a trend and Italy's trademark, often replicated, but never duplicated.

That rich tradition certainly runs through the veins of [Jacopo Giustiniani](#) [2], a native Italian raised



between his family's winery, the Fattoria Sardi in Lucca (Tuscany), and [Florence](#) [3], his hometown. He first brought his wine expertise to New York in 2007 where he worked as a Wine Director and Buyer for the [SA Hospitality Group](#) [4] that owns some of the classiest Italian restaurants chains in New York such as St. Ambroeus, Casa Lever and Felice Wine Bar that Giustiniani personally opened.

Conceptualizing La Centrale

After a decade spent working in NY at the top of his game, the restaurateur felt ready to take a chance and canalize his idea of hospitality into one of his biggest passions, food halls. The chance to turn that passion into a reality came when he got in touch with [Matthias Kiehm](#) [5].

"In May 2015, I met Matthias Kiehm who shares with me the same passion for food halls, and who has actually worked in some of the biggest ones including [Harrods](#) [6] in London," Giustiniani told us. "We had the dream to open an Italian food hall and we thought that certainly the US was ready for other Italian food halls, even more after Eataly paved the way in such an excellent and successful way. Therefore, we started travelling through the US and Europe to study the different food halls. In Spain, we bumped into one that really reflected what we had in mind for our hall: we wanted to bring to the picture a concept of high design, starting with the materials. Materials that would make the host travel with his imagination to Italy to create a sensorial experience."

"We wanted to come by design and top class hospitality, the way a restaurant would more than a food store, creating a real tour of Italy inside La Centrale," continued the restaurateur. "For example, when you go to have coffee, we will bring you to [Sicily](#) [7] with the Sicilian pastries and the decor of the maiolica and [terra-cotta wares from the city of Caltagirone](#) [8] and a beautiful mural of Mount Etna; when you go to the meat restaurant, we bring you to Tuscany with the [Manetti-Gusmano terra-cotta](#) [9] wine amphoras from the Chianti area while you enjoy the Bistecca alla Fiorentina; when you go to savour fish, you will be immersed in the atmosphere of the [Liguria](#) [10] region."

"We Cook what we Sell and we Sell what we Cook!"

It is like when you are touring the Italian Peninsula, and you feel like buying the exquisite delicacies that you've been eating trying to recreate those dishes when you come back home; in the same way, La Centrale works as a shopping center. It is not a retail business, but you can buy the products that were served to you and that were used to prepare the dishes that you enjoyed. You can bring home the culinary experience you lived, and treasure that memory.

That's how the model of La Centrale came about. It is comprised of 14 different Italian eateries, cafes, and shopping options spanning three levels. The different dining experiences take direct inspiration from the 20 prominent food regions of Italy. Close to the restaurants, you can find over a 1,000 specialty retail items, an extensive Italian winery on the third floor, a gelato shop, cooking studio and posh cocktail bars. All the dishes that you taste come with handy complimentary recipe cards and shopping lists of the ingredients to purchase in order to recreate the magic of an Italian meal at home. "We cook what we sell and we sell what we cook!," is in fact La Centrale's motto.

"We have amazing Italian brands that we use in our kitchen and that the shopper can buy," Giustiniani explained further. "We have [Caffè Lavazza](#) [11]; [Venchi](#) [12], [Mulino Bianco](#) [13] products, [Loacker](#) [14] [Acqua Smeraldina](#) [15] and many others. We want to educate our customers on how to eat Italian, so if you have fish, you should pair it with an oil from Liguria; if you have meat, you might need a greener oil. We also make handmade pasta and granita. Another venue that falls into our educational mission is La Cucina, a space where we will provide Italian cooking classes in a fun way. You learn how to make pasta, for example, enjoying a nice glass of wine in a relaxed and fun environment. This is my idea of 'hospitalian'."

The Chefs

For Executive Chef of La Centrale, Giustiniani wanted a name that would guarantee class and top notch expertise. He found it in Chef [Vincenzo Scarmiglia](#) [16], a native of Orbetello in Tuscany, who



brought to the food hall his 30 years of experience in the dining business. He was nominated as one of the best Italian chefs in Vegas and worked for some of the most upscale restaurants, such as the former Valentino at the Venetian Hotel, GIADA's Restaurant, The Cromwell, but also at the Osteria Del Circo at the Bellagio Resort and Casino.

Giustiniani is enthusiastic about Scarmiglia joining La Centrale and about the entire cooking team: "I tried to bring to La Centrale different chefs from different regional culinary traditions of Italy. That's why alongside with the talent of our Executive Chef Vincenzo Scarmiglia, I called other unique talents like the one of Chef Vincenzo Boriello who will take care of the pasta and Neapolitan pizza section. We also have foreign cooks trained in Italian cooking who will bring their individuality to the cooking and propose something that is always fresh. We have 80 cooks total and 12 chefs."

#MiamiGoesItalian

This hashtag, used as an ad to promote the food hall, effectively encapsulates La Centrale's mission. Miami is a city that is rapidly changing, a city that wants to become a world benchmark of excellence. The Sunshine City is of course well known for its beaches and the tourism concentrated around the ocean.

"But the land part of the city is becoming increasingly similar to a city like New York," explains Giustiniani, and this growth is affecting Made in Italy and the Italian community as well: "The perception of the Made in Italy in Miami is seeing a new spring. I can compare it to what New York was like 10 years ago. The city is full of Italians and the Brickell City Centre, for example where La Centrale stands, is filled with at least 30 Italian stores like Valentino, Acqua di Parma, Armani, Sundek. When you walk through the mall, you can hear everybody speaking Italian."

The Italian community in Miami is also graced by the presence of important institutions such as the [Consulate General of Italy](#) [17] and the [Dante Alighieri Society of Miami](#) [18]. It will be interesting to see how these institutions will interact with La Centrale that aims to become another fundamental landmark for the Italian culture in the city.

We asked Giustiniani about it: "We welcome all of the institutions with open arms. We chose not to involve them right away because before asking for collaborations, we wanted to demonstrate our value and what La Centrale is and what potential it has. If the institutions appreciate the work that we do and they would like to collaborate with us, it would be an honor. But in the last years, we focused more on the process of contextualizing our brand making it recognizable and competitive in the market."

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- [7] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sicily>
- [8] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caltagirone>
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- [10] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liguria>
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