

An Italian Trattoria: A Bis of Pasta and the Perfect Wine

Paola Aurisicchio (June 03, 2016)



The concept of the trattoria fuels famed restaurateur Joe Bastianich's new restaurant, which recently opened a stone's throw from the Meatpacking District in Chelsea. In this elegant and cozy locale, Bastianich—now a TV icon in Italy for his participation as a judge on the cooking show 'Master Chef Italia'—is teaching Americans how to "share" food, thanks to another Italian dining import: the bis of pastas.

"I've introduced Americans to everything from the enoteca, the pizzeria, the osteria to the most classic Italian restaurant," said restaurateur Joe Bastianich. "Now I'm trying to teach them what it means to dine in a trattoria."

His new Manhattan restaurant is all about simple, authentic food that revisits the concept of a trattoria in a modern and elegant key. If trattorie in Italy are small, family-run affairs connected to



popular culture and good local cuisine, the entrepreneur's new venture on 9th Avenue between 16th and 17th Street is an updated version aimed at contemporary diners that still preserves the warm ambience of its Italian counterpart.

It's called La Sirena. The new 400-seater was opened by the famed entrepreneur in collaboration with Chef Mario Batali, the established restaurateur and expert in the history and culture of Italian cooking.

La Sirena is located on the top floor of The Maritime Hotel, an enormous space not far from the Meatpacking District, with lots of natural light and a 40-foot marble bar that divides the patio and connects the two dining rooms. "I couldn't turn down a venue in what, for me, is one of the most beautiful corners of New York," continues Bastianich, "why did I call it La Sirena? Because I liked the idea of a 50s style retro name," he says, sitting on a couch in one of the restaurant's two rooms, sporting a blue blazer and a white shirt.

The young entrepreneur, who already owns numerous restaurants in the city, including Del Posto and Babbo, is also the co-proprietor of over thirty restaurants scattered across the globe, alongside his mother, celebrity chef and writer Lidia Bastianich, and Mario Batali.

Educating Americans

With La Sirena, however, Bastianich is also driven to educate Americans. Besides championing certain ingredients, he is becoming a spokesperson for another idiosyncrasy of Italian dining: family-style eating. So chef Joseph Laurano is offering a bis of pastas, i.e., the option to order two different kinds of pasta dishes to taste with your dining companions.

"I recommend the bucatini with spicy octopus and San Marzano tomatoes as well as duck mezzelune," says Bastianich. For the meat course, he suggests branzino, orata or else a steak for two paired with the perfect Italian wines. "I know Americans aren't programmed to share," he goes on, "but La Sirena is founded on the concept of the bis, and I'm happy that the idea is thriving. Besides," he adds, "Americans love pasta."

A tough critic

Bastianich spends a lot of time in Italy, the country where he became famous in part for his participation as a judge on the cooking show Master Chef Italia, along with Bruno Barbieri, Carlo Cracco, and Antonio Canavacciuolo. The show is the Olympics of Italian cuisine.

And he is a tough critic! He gets angry, throws dishes and is known for his litany of Italian bloopers, "Vuoi che muore?" ("Are you trying me to kill this") he says when a plate isn't to his liking, rather than the correct "Vuoi che muoio?" ("Are you trying to kill me") in Italian. "But I'm even tougher on my own restaurants. I dish it out ten times worse," he says, clearly enjoying himself.

"But not when I go out to dinner. Then I try to relax. Usually I prefer to eat Korean and Japanese in New York. Rarely Italian." Bastianich has also been a judge for five seasons of Master Chef USA, yet the restaurateur notes, "There's an enormous difference between the shows. Master Chef USA is show business," he says, "while Master Chef Italia is the story of people whose life can be changed by cooking."

So what dish could Bastianich never refuse? "Chicken with potatoes, sweet red onions, and rosemary made by my grandmother in the iron pan she's used for fifty years," he responds. As for Americans,



they should learn how to cook meatballs. "Because they're simple," he says. "You can keep them in a fridge and both adults and kids like them. Call it multipurpose food."

[La Sirena](#) [2]

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