

marinij.com

Cuisine Scene: Pasta moves over, pizza moves in

Leslie Harlib

Article Launched: 02/26/2008 10:48:25 PM PST



Pomodoro's executive chef Edmondo Sarti (left) and owner and chef Adriano Paganini are introducing new Italian wines to their menu. (11 photo/Robert Tonn)

Pasta Pomodoro, the privately owned Bay Area restaurant chain with three units in Mill Valley, San Rafael and Novato, is splurging on myriad changes.

First there's the name. The new one is, simply, Pomodoro.

"I got tired of people thinking we only served pasta, which is what we did at the beginning and for the first three or four years," owner/founder Adriano Paganini says. "A lot of people still don't know that. And the other is just to show that things are changing. What's better than a name change?"

Paganini, a trained chef, and his vice president of operations, San Rafael resident and chef Edmondo Sarti, were in their Novato Vintage Oaks Pomodoro

restaurant two weeks ago to talk about their restaurants' renaissance.

Both Italian-born men seem as vivacious as prosecco is sparkling. They play off each other like Bob Hope and Bing Crosby in the "Road" pictures. They speak in Italian accents thicker than polenta. Call it a cliché, but their robust patois makes what they're doing - expanding menus, experimenting with pizza, creating a new wine program - seem that much more authentic.

Since he founded Pasta Pomodoro in 1994, Paganini has gone on to create 43 restaurants: 25 in the Bay Area and another 18 more near Sacramento, in Southern California and in Arizona.

Why all the changes? As Paganini says, "We're getting the restaurants ready to be great restaurants over the next 10 years. If you think about it, what was great 10 years ago might be only OK today. We are asking ourselves, what do we have to do to go the next level and be successful for the next 10 years?"

The Novato Pomodoro is the first in the chain to get a pizza oven; it was installed six weeks ago as a prototype.

Ingredients are being sourced differently. Chickens are now organic from Fulton Valley. Vegetables and fruits are organic when possible, and the plan is to use more seasonal, local produce.

Half portions of pasta and risotto have become available on most menus; they're "a big hit here in Marin," says Sarti.

A new wine program features boutique vintages from Italy along with quartinos - little carafes that hold approximately 1½ glasses of wine.

Advertisement

marinij.com

(800) 492-6845

8-wk daily delivery offer includes
FREE 3' x 5' American Flag kit.

www.marinij.com/subscribe



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

marinij.com

Pomodoro's infrastructure is evolving as well. The restaurants are slowly going green, with composting programs, new bamboo flooring installed when floors need to be replaced and retrofitting all lighting systems to become energy-efficient.

For more information, go to www.pastapomodoro.com.

Speaking of Italian cuisine, my new idea of a great breakfast is piping hot, handmade crisp-crustured pizzas just out of a wood-burning pizza oven.

Or, to put it another way, hot pizzas that fell off the back of a truck.

You can get these 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sundays and Thursdays from Pizza Politano at the Marin Farmers Market at the Marin Civic Center.

Pizza Politano is a year-old portable pizza company owned and operated by Petaluma caterer and professionally trained chef Joel Baecker, 31, and his wife, Naomi Crawford, a trained pastry chef-turned general manager. They started selling their pies last year at the seasonal Novato Farmers Market.

The couple had a truck customized to be able to hold and haul an imported Neopolitan 3,500-pound fire-brick pizza oven, complete with a cute little chimney.

"We love pizza and we love working together," says Baecker. "We thought it would be great to sell these at farmers markets and rent our truck out for parties."

Baecker's pizzas, which start at \$8, are made

with organic Giusto's bread flour, an organic Napa Valley olive oil, dried yeast, salt and water. The rich, tangy marinara sauce is created from crushed San Marzano tomatoes. Top your pie with a choice of Belfiore mozzarella, San Daniele prosciutto or an egg.

Because the oven burns at 750 degrees, pizzas go from a ball of raw dough under Baecker's fast-moving fingers, to a finished, blistered, smoking 8-inch pie in less than three minutes.

"We're planning to expand our menu," Baecker says. "As the season develops, I want to do a seasonal market calzone, where I'll walk around the market, buy fresh produce and showcase it by wrapping it in dough and baking it right there."

For more information, call 238-3291 go to www.joelbaeckercatering.com.

Leslie Harlib writes about food and restaurants on Wednesdays. You can call her at 382-7340, send a fax to 884-1478, an e-mail to lharlib@marinij.com, or write to her c/o of the IJ, P.O. Box 6150, Novato 94948-6150.

Advertisement

marinij.com

(800) 492-6845

**8-wk daily delivery offer includes
FREE 3' x 5' American Flag kit.**

www.marinij.com/subscribe



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™