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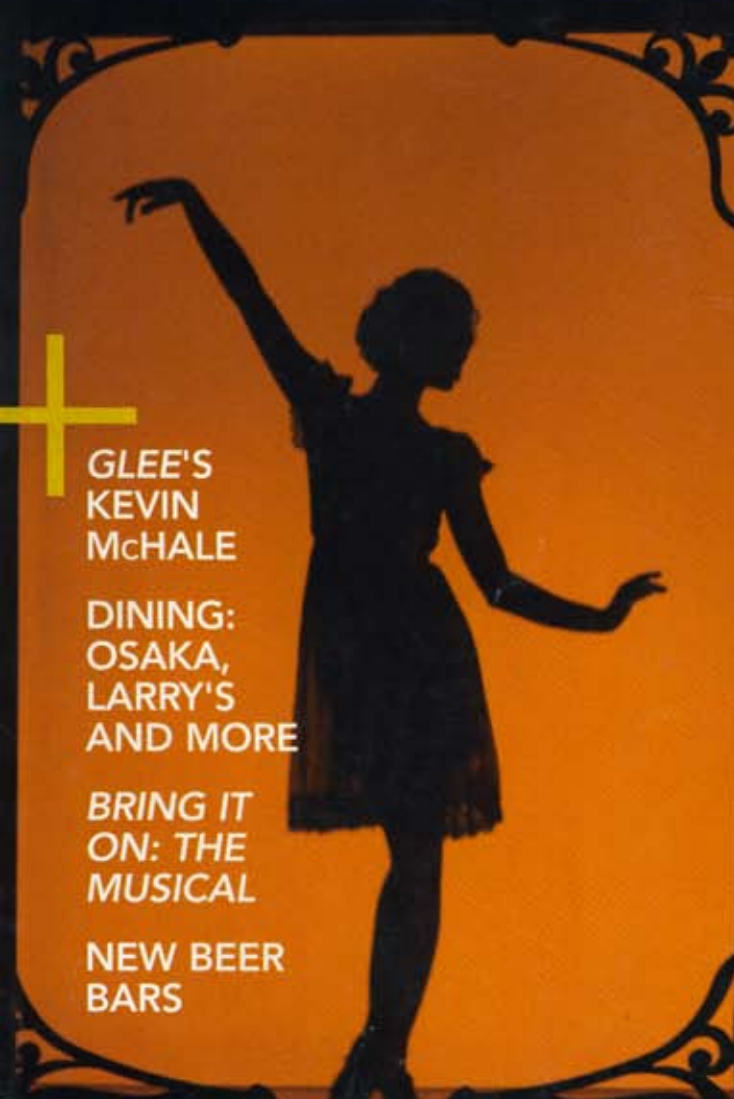
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Executive Chef & Partner FRANCESCO VELASCO in the second-story window of his new Beverly Hills restaurant.

welcome

# to Beverly Hills

From *Sea Level* to the *Second Story*

Francesco Velasco is sipping espresso on a bench in the tiny park just steps away from Tra di Noi Ristorante where he is a partner and the Executive Chef. It's a cool, dewy morning in Malibu. A marine layer had kept the fog on the ground for a few hours after dawn, but now the sun has broken through and is shining a spotlight on the young chef as he sits planning next week's star-studded party. Celebrity celebrations are nothing new to Velasco. If he isn't creating a menu for Barbra Streisand's birthday party, he's serving someone like Maria Shriver and hundreds of her guests at a fundraising gala.

This party is different. This upcoming bash will mark the opening of Tra di Noi in Beverly Hills—the new restaurant Velasco has created with partners Tarcisio Mosconi and Antonio Alessi. Many of Velasco's powerful clients are invited: Steven Spielberg and wife Kate Capshaw, Cindy Crawford and husband Rande Gerber, John Travolta and his family, Becks and Posh a.k.a. David and Victoria Beckham, and former Paramount and MGM CEO Frank Mancuso, Sr. Velasco wants to show them the new two-story space at the same time that he wants to introduce Beverly Hills to the magic that is Tra di Noi. "Tra di Noi—it can't be replicated," says Velasco shaking his head. "It was very difficult to decide to open a second one."

Ultimately he did decide to do that, but it's Tra di Noi in a new form. Velasco will have the chance to stretch his talented fingers and work not only in high-end cuisine but also in rustic Italian cooking. Velasco believes every chef should master the basics before experimenting with new avant-garde techniques like molecular gastronomy. He's done just that. And he wants to prove to his audience that he can shine in both worlds. "That's why we're going back to rustic cooking and eating. Once we demonstrate the soulful, comforting foods like polpettini, brasato, and roasted chicken, then we can do more complex and sophisticated dishes."

So this opening party is important. The food has to reflect his new vision. He could make hundreds of shots of rich, creamy ricotta soup, a rustic dish for which he whips up an emulsion that will suspend the whey-based cheese. He might turn out 30 or 40 focaccia tarts to demonstrate his baking skills. Perhaps small servings of a Sardinian salad with calamari, tomato sauce, and fregola—a toasted, squiggly-shaped, pasta that resembles large breadcrumbs. Maybe he'll even simmer handmade tagliatelle in Barolo wine until the pasta turns pink and tender. Most people have never tried it this way. He could sauce the noodles with a pancetta-parsnip-Parmesan combination that complements the flavor of the wine. For dessert, maybe he'll serve Cassata Siciliana—layers of sponge cake, ricotta filling, pistachios and chunks of chocolate. And there must be espresso. Lots of good espresso.



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**NOW OPEN**

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LEFT | Chilean seabass with Martini & Rossi sauce over a bed of escarole

BELOW | Ribeye with ramp pesto over roasted carrots, parsnips, and celery root

BOTTOM | Melon geleé with prosciutto foam

PHOTOS BY MATTHEW FRIED



## Tra di Noi RISTORANTE & BAR



Tra di Noi Ristorante & Bar entered the dining scene in Malibu in 1991. Since then, it's drawn celebrities like Barbra Streisand who celebrates her birthday parties there and Jeremy Piven who never even opens the menu before ordering his favorite dish. Founded by restaurateur Antonio Alessi 20 years ago, Tra di Noi has firmly established itself as a legend alongside Nobu in the Malibu Country Mart. Alessi's impeccably dressed partner Tarcisio Mosconi has been welcoming patrons there for over 15 years, making sure they enjoy their alfresco lunch on the patio or intimate dinner inside the paparazzi-free dining room.

Mosconi discovered Executive Chef and partner Francesco Velasco while dining at Il Grano in West L.A. Many visits to Il Grano and many impressive meals later, Mosconi talked Velasco into coming to Malibu to work his magic on the Italian menu that had changed little since its founding. Velasco tread lightly on the recipes that the regulars had come to love. But at the same time he introduced

a new, more sophisticated style of Italian cooking to the fiercely loyal clientele. Through menu special after menu special, Velasco won their hearts and impressed their palates. In the gorgeous new Beverly Hills restaurant, Velasco is turning out what he calls *alta cucina*: sophisticated, complicated, elegant Italian food that's beautiful to look at and a joy to eat.

Velasco creates crudo, the Italian version of sushi, and serves it over organic microgreens grown in Malibu. He rolls out handmade pasta sheets and layers them between eggplant and veal ragout for a free-form lasagna. He shaves black truffles over thin-crust pizza smeared with fine olive oil and crushed Italian tomatoes. Obsessing over every detail of each dish, Velasco visits nearby farms, vineyards, fish markets, and olive-oil producers. He researches each product he uses whether it's squash blossoms, wine, John Dory, or extra-virgin olive oil. He's a man obsessed with excellent ingredients and will go to great lengths to find the best products for his meals.

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