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SHARING SPACE with Tra di Noi Ristorante & Bar on Camden Drive in Beverly Hills, La Focacceria Artisan Bread & Bakery Café specializes in rustic Italian cuisine. Executive Chef-Owner Francesco Velasco wants to use La Focacceria to demonstrate his soulful side, creating comfort food like roasted chicken, braised short ribs, pizza, sandwiches, and pastries.

Before launching the bakery, Velasco researched focaccia in all its varying forms throughout Italy. What most Americans think of as focaccia—a spongy, hole-filled, one-inch thick bread flavored with olive oil and topped with rosemary and onions—is from Genoa. Velasco doesn't like the woody texture of roasted rosemary, so to avoid it, he infuses that herb in the olive oil used to make the dough. He also prefers to cut the onions vertically to get the best texture possible on the top of the focaccia. "The onions release too much water if they are cut horizontally," he insists. For this

Genoese-style of focaccia, often strewn with roasted vegetables, Velasco will change the toppings seasonally.

Another kind of focaccia is served in the region of Liguria. This Roman focaccia is paper-thin and crispy, usually presented without any toppings at all. Velasco likes to layer Taleggio cheese between these thin sheets and create a sort of focaccia tart that resembles a pizza with an amazing amount of flavor. In Italy it's known as Focaccia di Recco. Instead of Taleggio, he might spread a mixture of braised leeks, mortadella, and a Parmesan cheese sauce between the focaccia sheets, also to excellent effect.

Of course Velasco uses his focaccia bread to make sandwiches. "A sandwich is like a building," he says. "We start with the bread, consider its structure, and then decide on the amount and type of filling." That filling might take advantage of the wide selection of Italian cured meats called *salumi* flown in from

BELOW | three pizzas on the patio

BOTTOM | Genoese focaccia cooking at 750 degrees for 3 minutes.

PHOTOS BY MATTHEW FRIED



Chef-Owner

FRANCESCO VELASCO

Shows His Rustic Side

NOW OPEN!

362 North Camden Drive
in Beverly Hills, California 90210
www.tradinorestaurants.com
310-277-7346

Tra di Noi
Ristorante



LA FOCACCERIA

Artisan Bread & Bakery Café

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New York from Salumeria Rosi. Or the many artisan cheeses on display behind the bakery counter. Or Velasco's house-cured pickles and spreads. He assembles everything from a simple prosciutto-and-butter sandwich to a New-Orleans-style muffaletta on ciabatta bread.

For the pastries, Velasco again looked all over Italy for inspiration. The coronetto is a horn-shaped pastry similar to a croissant,

and he fills his with fruit jams, custards, sweet ricotta, and even nutella. One of his favorite pastries is the lemon brioche with sweet ricotta cheese. The bread is infused with orange-blossom water and the ricotta is studded with lemon peel. It's the perfect accompaniment to a strong cup of espresso, and a sweet way to celebrate an afternoon break.



LEFT TOP | Ligurian Focaccia di Recco

LEFT MIDDLE | Genoese-style focaccia, strewn with roasted vegetables

LEFT BOTTOM | Baker Mauricio Salinas checking the temperature of the pizza oven

ABOVE TOP | Chef-Owner Francesco Velasco, with freshly sliced, imported prosciutto

ABOVE | brioche and coronettes just out of the oven

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