

SPECIAL PREMIER ISSUE — SPRING/SUMMER 2011

La Focacceria

TRA DI NOI

magazine

Executive Chef
& Partner

**FRANCESCO
VELASCO** in the
second-story
window of his new
Beverly Hills
restaurant
La Focacceria
Tra di Noi.

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the ITALIAN CAFE

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WELCOME to BEVERLY HILLS

Tra di Noi Ristorante Travels From Sea Level to the Second Story

ALSO INSIDE: 11 Foraging Finds 21 Winemakers who Matter 22 The Lady Behind the Bar

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La Focacceria
TRA DI NOI
magazine

SPRING/SUMMER 2011



TRA DI NOI RISTORANTE

3835 Cross Creek Road #8A
Malibu CA 90265

310-456-0169 • www.tradinomalibu.com

LA FOCACCERIA Tra di Noi

362 North Camden Drive
Beverly Hills CA 90210

310-277-7346 • lafocacceriabh.com

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Publisher | La Focacceria Tra di Noi LLC

Editor | Angela Pettera

Creative Director | Antonio Alessi

Art Director | Crystal Morrissey

Advertising & Marketing | Danilo Terribili

Photography | Matthew Fried,
Eugene Kolkey, Dominick Guillemot

CONTRIBUTORS

Features | Angela Pettera

Foraging Finds | Antonio Alessi

Recipes | Francesco Velasco

Wine | Gabriele Penazzi, Giampaolo Dorigo



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 Barbara 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 La Focacceria Tra di Noi in Beverly Hills—the new restaurant and bakery that 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, with a bit of a split personality. La Focacceria Tra di Noi is Velasco's chance to show what he's made of. He'll be going beyond the menu in Malibu. Velasco will have the chance to stretch his talented fingers and work not only in high-end cuisine (on the Tra di Noi side of the new restaurant) but also in rustic Italian cooking (on the La Focacceria Artisan Bakery side). 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 in La Focacceria, then we can do more complex and sophisticated dishes at Tra di Noi.” He'll do them both at once every day at La Focacceria Tra di Noi in Beverly Hills.

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. **LF**

This OPENING PARTY
is important.
The food has to
reflect chef Velasco's
new vision.





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



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.

The fine-dining side of La Focacceria Tra di Noi

Tra di Noi Ristorante & Bar entered the dining scene in Malibu in 1991. Since then, it's drawn celebrities like Barbara 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. Now that Tra di Noi has expanded into Beverly Hills with La Focacceria Tra di Noi, Velasco has been set free from any menu constraints. 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. In the pages that follow, we'll follow in Velasco's footsteps and discover the people behind the products that he's come to love. **LF**



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

PHOTOS BY MATTHEW FRIED

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



LA FOCACCERIA

Artisan Bread & Bakery Café

Before launching the bakery, Velasco researched focaccia in all its varying forms throughout Italy.

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. **LF**



BARBERA'S COFFEE. ITALIAN FLAVOUR.



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The small, quiet Peruvian baker studies his rising rounds of dough. “When I started baking I loved it immediately. It was very systematic,” says Mauricio Salinas in the kitchen of La Focacceria Artisan Bread & Bakery Café. It’s still early in the morning. The Café is not yet open for business. Salinas, who studied under a Japanese baker in Peru, still carries with him a philosophy learned then: “We assist the bread. When it’s ready to divide, we divide. When it’s ready to shape, we shape. When it’s ready to bake, we bake. We just serve the natural process.”

As soon as the bread says so, Salinas will stretch out the focaccia dough and dimple it with his fingertips. Then he’ll place each round on a sheet of parchment paper and slide them into the searing heat of the pizza oven (750 degrees) that will crisp the crusts and set the soft interiors in just three minutes.

In an hour or so—at 7 a.m.—the front doors will open, admitting a slow but steady stream of business men and women in search of their caffeine fixes. The ones of European descent will give themselves away by eschewing the bakery’s tables and chairs in favor of leaning against the long granite bar. “Italian men love that whole macho thing of going to the espresso bar in Italy in the morning,” admits Antonio Alessi, owner of La Focacceria Tra di Noi in Beverly Hills. He counts himself as one of those habitués. “It’s in our blood.” And it’s why he created this space with the Faema E61 espresso machine hissing steam, and the racks of freshly baked breads and pastries “It’s a simple pleasure.”

From 7-11 a.m. Salinas keeps La Focacceria stocked with cinnamon brioche, sweet focaccia pastries topped with fruit, and coronettes filled with chocolate. The bartender is a master of espresso—“the most delicious essence of coffee and flavor” as Alessi calls it. And there are no stools at the counter. Because for a few precious hours every morning, this is for some that perfect macho espresso bar somewhere in Italy. **LF**

ABOVE LEFT | Barbera cappuccino with pistachio biscotti

ABOVE RIGHT | sweet focaccia tarts topped with macerated fruit

MIDDLE | Francesco Velasco enjoying an espresso

BOTTOM | Baker Mauricio Salinas inspecting his sweet focaccia tarts

PHOTOS BY MATTHEW FRIED



“Italian men love that whole macho thing of going to the espresso bar in the morning. It’s a simple pleasure.”





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Chef Francesco Velasco has been learning the art of foraging LA County for wild produce from La Focacceria Tra di Noi owner and partner Antonio Alessi. Back home in his native Sicily, Alessi foraged for some of the very same things he finds growing wild all over the hillsides of southern California: prickly pear cactus fruit, rosemary bushes, walnuts on trees, and fennel plants. Now Alessi and Velasco will share their finds with you, beginning with

fennel

FORAGING

Fennel

Common Name: fennel
Botanical Name: *foeniculum vulgare*

Description and Culinary Uses:

The fennel plant is a tall, erect perennial herb with hollow stems and a bluish-green appearance. A member of the parsley family, this plant produces a variety of edible parts including:

- the white bulblike stem base (found on Florentine fennel) sometimes shaved and used in salads
- the feathery fronds that resemble dill and are used in much the same way with eggs and potatoes
- the dark brown, grooved seeds (sometimes confused with anise) chewed as an after-meal mint and used to season sausages

Origin: native to southern Europe and the Mediterranean

Location: an invasive species, fennel grows wild along southern California's hillsides and roadways **LF**



FINDS

TOP | Alessi forages for fennel in Malibu with his son Julio.

RIGHT | Chef Francesco Velasco can't wait to serve this fresh green herb at La Focacceria Tra di Noi.

PHOTOS BY
DOMINICK GUILLEMOT



“We really enjoy these animals. I feel good about what we’re doing.”

Novy Ranches



“I’ve been in the cattle business forever,” asserts Dr. Lowell Novy. “You don’t even want to know how long. My dad was a professional cattle broker. I’ve never been out of the cattle business.” This is not normal for a veterinarian, much less for one with a thriving practice in Simi Valley, California. Despite the demands of caring for people’s pets, Dr. Novy maintains a herd of about 1,000 head of cattle on 7,000 acres of land in the Shasta Valley area of northern California. “These cattle are pampered from the time they’re conceived. We really enjoy these animals.” He lets them graze on pesticide-free, fertilizer-free pastureland, the way God intended.

Dr. Novy is no fan of corn-fed beef or the feedlot system because of its potential cruelty to the animals and the requisite feeding of antibiotics. Plus, he

says, “Grass-fed beef just does not taste like corn-fed. It has omega-3s instead of saturated fat. It’s natural, the way beef once was.” Being a veterinarian has its advantages in the ranching game. It allows Dr. Novy the freedom to use vaccines very sparingly and to nip any illnesses (which he can readily identify) in the bud.

It also aids him in breeding cattle for selective traits. He understands things like intra-muscular fat. “That’s where the taste and the omega-3 oils are deposited. Unless you have cattle that are excellent in putting in intra-muscular fat—and that’s a genetic trait—you’re not going to get the flavor.” So he hauls an ultrasound machine out to the bulls to decide which ones are best suited for breeding. “We choose the top ten out of forty. It’s very demanding.” Keeping close breeding records and not allowing any strange cattle into the herd are also necessary. “It’s not an easy game,” he admits. “It takes that kind of work to get special cattle.” Despite the challenges, the results are rewarding for the 70-something-year-old. “I feel good about what we’re doing.”

WHEN CHEF VELASCO gets his hands on Novy Ranches short ribs, he serves the special *Costolette al Chianti* with a potato and leek purée.

So does chef Francesco Velasco. He loves the flavor of Novy Ranches Angus beef. He regularly purchases the ground beef but specialty cuts like short ribs are in short supply. Preference for the relatively small amount of beef the ranch produces is given to farmers’ market customers but chefs and restaurants do get a chance at the very tasty, very special beef. When Velasco gets his hands on Novy Ranches short ribs, he braises them until meltingly tender in Chianti wine. Then he serves the special *Costolette al Chianti* with a potato and leek purée.

BELOW | Veterinarian Lowell Novy on his ranch in northern California with some of his closed herd.

PHOTOS BY NOVY RANCHES



“IT’S NATURAL,
the way beef once was.”



PHOTOS BY EUGENE KOLKEY

"Life the way it's supposed to be." Thorne Family Farm



Olivia, Laurel, and Larry Thorne

Farmer Larry Thorne walks through his strawberry fields in Malibu at least twice a day when they're in season, checking on their progress. Strawberries ripen over a period of hours, not days, so he likes to be on top of them. "One thing you learn from farming," muses Thorne, "is that there's a time for everything and then after that, it's too late." Even in the winter months Thorne Family Farm is growing a huge variety of produce: wild arugula, beefsteak tomatoes, golden beets, winter peas, rapini, mustard greens, fava beans, Mars onions (a sweet, red onion with a flavor like the Walla Walla), and string beans. Throughout the year, oranges, Meyer lemons, blueberries and even Turkish figs are grown on the seven-acre farm nestled in Zuma Canyon near Zuma Beach.

Thorne's wife Laurel and their children, Grant and Olivia, all help out on the farm when Larry needs them. He says, "That's why I call it Thorne Family Farm. It's a happy moment when all four of us are out here working together. It makes me feel that life is the way it's supposed to be."

Because it's such a labor of love for Thorne, he keeps his following small.

"I want to try to create a clientele who appreciate exactly what I'm growing. I'm trying to match what I grow with my customer base," says Thorne. He dedicates 20-30% of his farmland to growing produce exclusively for Tra Di Noi Ristorante in Malibu and La Focacceria Tra di Noi in Beverly Hills. Earlier in the year, Thorne sat down with chef Francesco Velasco and together they worked their way through an Italian seed catalog. Because of that, says Thorne, "I'm growing things now that I would never have heard of otherwise. Velasco, too, is grateful for this farmer-chef relationship: "We saw this great opportunity to grow whatever we want for our customers. Our customers can go to the farm and buy the same produce that I serve here at the restaurant.

"One of the best things he grows for us are the strawberries," says Velasco. He thinly slices those beautifully ripe strawberries and lays them on a blanket of pastry cream which is spread over a thin crostata crust. Thorne and his wife tasted that strawberry crostata for dessert one evening in Malibu. "It is so good, it makes me want to grow more strawberries," enthuses Thorne, "and that's hard work!" Every time Thorne visits the restaurant with his family, he's amazed at the masterpieces Velasco creates with Thorne Family Farm's produce. "He fixes sweet corn in ways I've never heard of. I don't know what he puts on the tomatoes, but God they're good. He's incredible." **LF**



Malibu's
New
Celebrity

malibufamilywines.com





THE SEMLERS live on nearly 1,000 acres in Malibu surrounded by Saddle Rock, Turtle Rock, and Castle Rock natural rock formations. Eight varietals of grape are grown on Saddlerock Ranch: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, Syrah, Malbec, Grenache, Mourvèdre, and Viognier.



Malibu Family WINES

Ron and Lisa Semler are musing over whether to commission bronze statues of their grandchildren. The Semlers live on nearly 1,000 acres in Malibu surrounded by Saddle Rock, Turtle Rock, and Castle Rock natural rock formations. Their ranch, Saddlerock, is dotted with bronze statues of their children Tami, Tabitha, Devin, Shane, Ashley, Dakota, twins Madison and Micah, and little 10-year-old Ronit. Perhaps it's time to honor the grandchildren with another round of sculptures, they think. Anyone who has visited the working ranch and vineyard with its steep hills, exotic animals, and collection of vintage cars and trailers would urge them to add more bronzes. They're such a beautiful symbol of the family behind Malibu Family Wines.

As Ron points out antique car artfully placed around his property, he laughs, "I like old cars and new women." Lisa, his second wife, mother to six of his children, and 17 years his junior chimes in with, "And I like new cars and old men." The two make a successful team, having built a vineyard from scratch that recently won its own American Viticultural Area Designation: the Saddlerock-Malibu AVA. "You have to prove your borders are different in soil and climate," Lisa explains about the complicated process for getting a new designation. Eight varietals of grape are grown on Saddlerock Ranch:



Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, Syrah, Malbec, Grenache, Mourvèdre, and Viognier. Wines produced from these grapes get the Semler label. "It's all estate-grown," says Ron. "We'll produce about 12,500 cases per year." (The Saddlerock label produces Chardonnay, Rose, Blanc de Blanc, Orange Muscat, Pinot Noir, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Petite Syrah wines using grapes sourced from further north in California where the climate is cooler.)

Late in the harvest, some Viognier and Sauvignon Blanc grapes are used to make a type of ice wine. The grapes are picked early in the morning when the vines are still cool, and then rushed over to Oxnard to be flash frozen. The freezing concentrates the sugars in the grapes. What results is a sweet, delicious dessert wine. Very few cases of the Semler Dessert Wine are produced, so only a handful of customers are given the privilege of buying it. La Focacceria Tra di Noi is one of the lucky few. Kevin Bening, the Western Regional Sales Manager for Malibu Family Wines, describes chef Francesco Velasco as a special client because he takes the time to sit down and taste the new vintages. Of the ice wine, Velasco says, "It is intense. Its sweetness is balanced by a bracing acidity that keeps the wine from becoming cloying."

Chef Velasco likes to serve it with his duck confit salad that contains dried nectarines, hazelnuts, and pickled cippolini onions. He also recommends it with his

ABOVE LEFT | Ronit Semler with her bronze statue

ABOVE RIGHT | Ron and Lisa Semler with their twin sons Micah and Madison, and daughter Ronit

BELOW | Lisa Semler inspecting grapes grown on her property

PHOTOS BY EUGENE KOLKEY

duck ravioli in a pecan and sage brown-butter sauce. And of course he suggests drinking the ice wine with dessert, maybe his *Mascarpone Cremoso*—a fluffy, gelato-like confection made with mascarpone cheese and served with pumpkin fudge. Beams Velasco, "I feel very proud to have a dessert wine that is from our own back yard." **LF**



Chef Velasco:
"I feel very proud to have a dessert wine that is from our own back yard."

UNIVERSAL *Seafood*



“Chilean sea bass is absolutely not a sea bass and it doesn’t come from Chile,” insists Eric Crespel, a fisherman and the owner, with his wife Gina, of Universal Seafood in North Hollywood. It’s really a Patagonian toothfish. He goes on to say that branzino actually *is* a sea bass. So is Loup de Mer. Both of these fish are favorites with chefs. Crespel knows this because his boutique seafood distribution company (universalseafoodinc.com) procures European fish for restaurants and hotels like the Regency Club in LA, the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, and Pelican Hill Resort in Newport Coast.

Today both Eric and Gina are chatting with Francesco Velasco of La Focacceria Tra di Noi. He’s come to Universal Seafood to chat about what fish they have in season now and what they can supply him with at his new restaurant. They’re discussing turbot, a flat speckled fish with both eyes on one side of its body. Crespel flies in wild turbot from the coast of France and he also sources farm-raised turbot from Chile. “The turbot from Chile is land-farmed,” he notes appreciatively. “It doesn’t go into the Pacific.” This is important because farm-raised salmon in the Pacific

Northwest have been mixing with wild salmon there, bringing their unwanted genes and parasites into the protected wild populations. Nobody wants that.

That’s why Eric and Gina will only bring in salmon from Scotland or the Shetland Islands. “It’s an Atlantic salmon that’s indigenous to the area,” explains Eric. The Crespels have taken the time to know their salmon supplier as well as a fishing family in Norway from whom they get their fresh and salted cod. Velasco uses the cod in his *Baccala’ Mantecato* appetizer. He rinses the salt cod in water and soaks it in milk to re-hydrate it. Then he boils it with potatoes and bay leaf until tender. After it cools, it gets whipped with garlic and olive oil until creamy. Spread on toast, its strong flavor is wonderful.

“I’m planning to have a seafood tower at La Focacceria Tra di Noi,” Velasco tells the couple. They talk oysters and the deep-water shrimp known in Spanish as *langostino moruno*. “We’re lucky to have them,” says Eric. “Not everyone can get that *moruno* shrimp.” Velasco calls them *gambero rosso* in his native Italian tongue. They are long, dark-red animals that the

Spanish prize for their flavor. On the way out with his wrapped pink snapper from Greece that he’ll use in *crudo*—the Italian version of sashimi—Velasco passes the live lobster tank. Inside, the big red crustaceans are clambering about in the circulating cold water which mimics their Maine environment. Their claws taped, they’re ready to go with Velasco to become part of that beautiful seafood tower. **LF**

ABOVE LEFT | Francesco holding wild turbot from France

ABOVE RIGHT | Gina Crespel, Francesco Velasco, Eric Crespel

ABOVE MIDDLE | Velasco examines salt cod, imported from Norway by the Crespels

BELOW | *Baccala’ Mantecato* appetizer

PHOTOS BY MATTHEW FRIED





GIUSEPPE ARIOLA imports his family's olive oil, La Valle cherry tomatoes, and two different candele pastas from Italy.



“If we can’t get it next door, we’ll get it fresh via next-day air from Italy.”

ARIOLA Imports

Tarcisio Mosconi and Antonio Alessi, owners of La Focacceria Tra di Noi, love to source fresh produce and fine wine from the farms and vineyards surrounding their restaurants in Beverly Hills and Malibu. But no one in L.A. County is currently curing prosciutto or making fresh mozzarella cheese from buffalo milk. “So,” Alessi declares, “if we can’t get it next door, we’ll get it fresh via next-day air from Italy.” Enter Giuseppe Ariola of Ariola Imports. The restaurateurs won’t trust anyone else to bring in high-end products like prosciutto San Daniele that’s been aged 18 months, *mozzarella di bufala* from Campania, and white truffles. Ariola’s family has been producing olive oil in Italy since 1850. Giuseppe came to America at his father’s bidding to check on restaurant accounts here. Eventually that, and a serendipitous purchase of a \$400 van, led Ariola to create his own importing company. Ariola relies on longtime relationships with food producers in Italy, including his father and that special extra-virgin olive oil. For every product he brings in, Ariola says, “I know the manufacturers. I come from Napoli where they make the buffalo mozzarella. My friend produces the San Marzano tomatoes. I’m famous for these tomatoes in Los Angeles.”

Cured meats like *Guanciale Baciato* (cured pig cheek), *Felino Salame* (soft salami),

and aged cheeses like Pecorino Toscano, Parmigiano Reggiano, and Ricotta Salata are delivered to Rome by their makers. Then they’re flown on an Alitalia plane to LAX. Ariola explains, “We pick it up at the airport and start delivering it the minute we receive it. Wednesday morning it leaves Italy; Wednesday night it’s in the restaurant.” Less-perishable goods like dried pasta, olive oil, canned tomatoes, wine, and artisan beer come over on containers every 10 days.

Chef Francesco Velasco is like a kid in a candy store when visiting the Ariola Imports warehouse in Duarte. His eyes light up when he talks about getting Italian products fresh from their source.

“Once you know the real thing” he begins dreamily and then can’t even finish the thought before he spies some dried pasta and begins detailing what he does with it in the restaurant. “There’s pasta—candele—artisanal pasta from Naples: We cook the pasta in a really big pot, stuff it, and then cut it.” The candele are very long tubes, not as wide as cannelloni rolls but slightly bigger than ziti. Velasco stuffs the candele with a ricotta-basil mixture. Then he creates a sauce using Ariola’s tomatoes and *guanciale* along with sweet onions. This dish, topped with breadcrumbs and olive oil, is called *Maccheroni Ripieni* and it’s a gift from Italy. **LF**

BELOW | Francesco Velasco, Tarcisio Mosconi, and Giuseppe Ariola

PHOTO BY EUGENE KOLKEY





Chef's recipe Maccheroni Ripieni

Stuffed candele pasta in a tomato-guanciale sauce

ENTRÉE
PHOTO BY MATTHEW FRIED

BEVERAGE PAIRING

Villa Donoratico
from Tenuta
Argentiera Bolgheri
—a large complex
wine full of red fruit
on the nose. It's
slightly spicy and
leaves an end note
of licorice.

Chef Francesco Velasco takes long tubes of candele pasta imported from Italy and cooks them in a very large pot of salted, boiling water. He drains them and then stuffs them with a mixture of fresh basil leaves and ricotta cheese. Using scissors, he cuts the stuffed pasta (or “*maccheroni ripiene*” in Italian) into two-inch lengths and stands them upright inside a round metal ring mold spread with butter and lined with breadcrumbs. He pops the ring mold into the oven so the cheese filling can warm and melt. While it's doing that, Velasco whips up a sauce using sweet onions, tomatoes and *guanciale* (cured pig cheeks similar to pancetta). Once the pasta is warmed through, he unmolds it onto a sauced plate and grates Pecorino cheese over the top. **LF**

Can't make it to the restaurant? Try Chef Velasco's recipes at home!
www.lafocacceriabh.com





Chef's recipe **Fregola Sarda**

Toasted fregola pasta with baby octopus and arugula

This is a dish that's somewhat common in Sardinia where they make fregola—a squiggly, small pasta that gets toasted for a nutty undertone. Chef Francesco Velasco imports his fregola from Italy and serves it with tomato sauce in the traditional way. But instead of adding steamed clams to the dish like they would in Italy, he uses a combination of calamari and baby octopus that's been simmered in a white-wine broth until tender. He tosses in fresh arugula leaves just before plating for a snappy finish. **LF**

ENTRÉE
PHOTO BY MATTHEW FRIED

BEVERAGE PAIRING

Barbera Da Vine wine made with barbera grapes grown in Piedmont, Italy. These grapes make a lively red wine with minerally, spicy qualities and a snap of acidity.



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WINEMAKERS

who matter



with **Giampaolo Dorigo**

We asked **GIAMPAOLO DORIGO**, the Italian Wine Specialist of Young's Market Company which winemakers have caught his attention recently. Dorigo has been studying winemakers in Italy for the last 20 years and bringing their products to high-end restaurants and specialty stores in Los Angeles, Costa Mesa, Santa Barbara and Paso Robles.

FANTINEL

Hotelier and restaurateur Mario Fantinel founded this winery, which the Fantinel family still owns, in 1969 in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region of Italy. Mario Fantinel's children and grandchildren have continued to expand the winery and are now producing four million bottles of wine per year.



CERETTO

For more than 80 years, the Ceretto family has been making wine in the Piedmont region of Italy and has set the benchmark for quality among Barolo and Barbaresco producers. The family is most well known for producing coveted single-vineyard Nebbiolo wines and introducing high-quality Arneis and Moscato. Today, the Ceretto name is synonymous with estate-grown, carefully produced wines, each expressing purity and elegance.



MASI

The Boscaini family, led by President Sandro Boscaini, has owned and operated the Masi Company for six generations. In the late 18th century, the Boscaini family purchased a little valley called "Vaio dei Masi," around Verona in the Venetian area. Masi specializes in the production of Amarones and Reciotos, using the historic technique of *appassimento* or "grape drying" which the ancient Romans employed. Masi has also rediscovered and refined the technique of double fermentation using those semi-dried grapes. The results are designed to emphasize the personality of each single product while maintaining a recognizable Venetian style.



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY WINERIES



& WINES *to watch*

PANORAMA PHOTO | Tenuta Argentiera Winery
www.argentiera.com

Expert picks on what to drink now

with **Gabriele Penazzi**

a Focacceria Tra di Noi sommelier and general manager **GABRIELE PENAZZI** is in the middle of creating the wine list for the new restaurant. "It's a beautiful array of different types of grapes from the north of Italy to the island of Sicily. Sixty percent of the list is Italian wines; forty percent is Californian." Here are his tasting notes on three of the Italian wines on his list.

Prosecco Fantinel

This prosecco is very light and fun to drink all by itself. In Italian we describe it as "*vivace*" which means it gives a sensation of joy and happiness when you drink it.

Ceretto 2009 Blangè Arneis, Langhe

Arneis is one of the most unique grapes in the world. When made in this style, the grapes are fresh and a little bit sparkling. It's a great wine to drink with appetizers like *crudo*.

Masi Costasera Amarone Classico 2006

I still consider Amarone the best-kept secret in Italy. It has an incredible fullness in structure and complexity. But it's almost too easy to drink because it's so round and balanced. That's the magic behind this wine. It's a winemaker's wine.





PHOTOS BY MATTHEW FRIED



da Ejikeme has a very welcoming smile. It beckons you to come forward, lean on the granite-topped bar, and order up a cocktail. She knows a thing or two about cocktails. “I’ve been mixing drinks for eight years,” says Ejikeme, a New-York transplant. She last poured drinks at Tasca Wine Bar on Third Street in Los Angeles under female sommelier Caitlin Stansbury. Tasca was awarded Angeleno Magazine’s Wine Bar of the Year for 2007. Back in New York, Ejikeme helped open Hudson River Cafe, an ode to pan-Latin cuisine. She mixed up classic mojitos with Don Q Cristal rum, sugar and mint leaves. And then she added fresh fruits to them like blueberries, strawberries, and pineapple. “Every fruit you can think of, we made mojitos out of.”

Fresh herbs like basil and thyme found their way into her cocktail shaker also. The Harlem Spice cocktail started with muddled jalapeño, lime, and orange to which she added tequila, orange liqueur and sour mix. She’s even made non-alcoholic, fresh-fruit-based cocktails, something a Beverly Hills lunch crowd can appreciate. Of the La Focacceria Tra di Noi bar, Ejikeme says, “I’m looking forward to figuring out what we can create here.” So are we. **LF**



THE LADY

Behind the Bar

“I’M LOOKING FORWARD to figuring out what we can create here.”



"My name is Vitalie.
My legacy is Taittinger.
My passion is Champagne."

- VITALIE TAITTINGER



VITALIE TAITTINGER IS AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE FAMILY CHAMPAGNE HOUSE.

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