Cultural Daily

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Caffe Delfini: Old World Meets New Standards

Evie Sullivan · Wednesday, June 20th, 2018

Caffe Delfini, tucked into the out-of-the-way West Channel Road just off Pacific Coast Highway in Santa Monica, is not your regular Italian "ristorante" but an experience. The moment I pushed open the azure blue door, I was transported into a different world. The subtle smell of Italian food, the pictures of Italian scenes and faces on the walls, the genuine Italian ambience and the totally relaxed atmosphere instantly played its magic on me.

The friendly co-owner of Caffe Delfini, Gianpietro Silardi, welcomed me by offering different table choices. I wanted to sit next to the window to watch the guests arriving. Maybe I'd spot a familiar face? "We don't allow paparazzi here," he joked when he saw a camera dangling around my neck. "We have many well-known patrons who like to come here, breath out the stress of their important lives, sit in our comfortable chairs, and say: 'Ahhhhh'. That's what they all say, 'Ahhhhh.' We don't allow any disturbance of their peace!" Signore Silardi didn't notice that, I too, said "Ahhhhh" underneath my breath.

Upstairs Dining Room

The ocean breeze that blew in my direction every time the azure door opened, pulled me out of my reverie and reminded me that I was actually here to experience Caffe Delfini for the readers of *Cultural Weekly*. When I asked Gianpietro, who goes by the abbreviation GP, to sit down with me for a little chat, he took fifteen minutes of his very busy preparation time for the evening seating to tell me the history and secrets of "Caffe Delfini."

The restaurant was founded in 1990 by Gianpietro Silardi and Alessandro Ercoli, two childhood friends from Pomezia, a poor suburb of Rome. They didn't just play soccer when they were kids, they also shared a passion for food. In 1986 they went on a trip following the sun, going West around the globe. "Our first stop of this world tour was London where we took among many other photographs a shot of a boy grasping a dolphin's tail," GP told me. "This photo accidentally fell into our hands on the day when we wracked our brains for a name of the Italian restaurant we're about to open in Los Angeles, our last stop of the trip. We named it Caffe Delfini and it had been in the same location ever since!"

The restaurant became really popular in the early nineties and was written up in every newspaper and trendy magazine. Today, over thirty years later, the two friends' partnership is still intact. "It's almost like a marriage but we're both married to the mothers of our kids," GP laughs.

The look and feel of Caffe Delfini hasn't changed, and the waiters resemble a young GP and Alessandro. They seem to have been ordered directly from the cover of the Italian *GQ*.

Downstairs Dining and Banquette Room

Besides being unique and innovative, what does it take to succeed in the highly competitive food world? "I think food has to taste good and be consistent in its quality," GP Silardi answers. "If you eat a dish today and order it again a year from now, it should taste the same!"

GP and Alessandro have managed to keep Caffe Delfini relevant year after year in an ever-changing restaurant environment where it is not enough to serve organic, fresh and tasty Italian food. The food must go with the times without losing its authenticity or changing the structure.

"Lately, we added a signature dish that's still typical Italian but gluten-free that we call 'Zinguine,'" GP said. His distinguished Italian face lit up with pride. "'Zinguine' is Caffe Delfini's trademark. It is pasta made of zucchini only and it comes with Bologna sauce and artichoke sauce. It is a big runner in the gluten-free category. The other gluten-free pastas on the menu, rice flour, quinoa flour and lentil flour pasta, almost pale in comparison."

Mr. Silardi serves me a portion of both 'Zinguine' dishes and I love them. Maybe the artichoke 'Zinguine' a bit better.

How does Caffe Delfini keep up with food trends that change frequently? Who is creating the new dishes? "Alessandro and I discuss every aspect of a new item on the menu," GP said. "I have to like it first before I can give it value and price. For us, the key is simplicity. One dish, one flavor, not a conglomerate of different sauces and spices. When we make whitefish, our "Branzino Mediterraneo," a striped bass, baked with white wine, a touch of rosemary and garlic, you experience the fish and nothing else. That is our recipe for good cuisine!"

Signore Silardi gets up, winks at me and says: "You have to stay for the 'Branzino Mediterraneo', but I have to go and take care of business."

Branzino Mediterraneo

As with everything else at Caffe Delfini, the whitefish was wonderfully good and reminded me of delicious meals I've had in Italy. Caffe Delfini succeeds on all accounts; transporting their clients into a sane world of healthy, tasty and distinctive Italian food which should ensure them at least another thirty years in business.

Caffe Delfini
147 West Channel Road
Santa Monica, CA 90402
Tel. 310-459-882
Mon-Sat 5:30 pm to 10 pm
Sundays: 5:00 pm to 9:30 pm
Reservations required (telephone or website caffedelfini.com)

Parties are welcome, beautiful downstairs dining room provides the perfect location
Valet Parking and Handicap Access

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