

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Gelato in LA

Elisa Leonelli · Monday, July 14th, 2025

Having been born and raised in Modena, Italy, after moving to Los Angeles in 1973, I was always searching for authentic Italian [gelato](#) (the word means frozen), which is not the same as ice-cream.



Sorbetto-Capri Gelato

I saw numerous “gelaterie” open and close through the years, such as [Grom](#) in Malibu. So I decided to research and locate some of these establishments today, and ended up focusing on just two “gelatai.” Feel free to add your favorites in comments.

My first stop was the artisanal gelato shop [Dolcenero](#) at 2400 Main Street in Ocean Park, where I met the owner, Simone Acciai. We had a friendly chat in Italian, when I noticed his Tuscan accent from Florence, different than mine from Emilia-Romagna. His city is relevant because the art of making gelato was perfected in the 16th century by a Florentine artist, Bernardo Buontalenti. In 2011 Simone had come to study English at UCLA for 6 months, but he instantly fell in love with this metropolis by the ocean, that he calls “the most beautiful place in the world,” and decided to stay. As most of us immigrants know, it’s difficult to gain legal status in the US. One of the ways is to start a business, so that’s what Simone did. The name he chose for his gelato shop (dolce=sweet, nero=black) refers to the dark sweetness of “cioccolato,” chocolate.



Simone © Elisa Leonelli

I have fond memories of strolling down the main street of Italian beach towns after dinner, to shop and people watch, while licking an ice-cream cone. It's more difficult to enjoy this favorite pastime of "la passeggiata" in a sprawling city like Los Angeles where nobody walks. That is why Simone chose a neighborhood that offered a similar environment, and where the rent was not as expensive as the Third Street Promenade, also in Santa Monica.

When I ask about the basic differences, Simone explains that ice-cream is made with cream (panna), and incorporates from 40 to 50% of air, while his gelato is made with milk, so it has a lower fat content, and only 20 to 30% of air, so it's heavier and the flavors pop out more intensely. That is not why the consistency of gelato is softer than the harder ice-cream, but it's because the display case is kept at a lower temperature of 14 degrees Fahrenheit. To cater to the vegan community, Dolcenero also makes gelato with coconut milk, oatmilk and soymilk. Their trademark flavor is "ricotta e fichi," fresh ricotta cheese with fig jam.



Bacio di Latte © Elisa Leonelli

There is a chain of gelato shops, [Bacio di Latte](#) (Kiss of Milk), with several locations in Los Angeles, founded by two brothers from Milano, Edoardo and Luigi. I was touched when I saw a “Cinquecento,” a FIAT 500, in their window because that was my first car. Even Simone admires them, calling them “bravi,” and their product tastes authentic, but it’s delivered already made to their stores.



Bacio di Latte SM © Elisa Leonelli

I remember that a couple of times [Angelini Osteria](#) on Beverly Blvd catered the holiday parties of the Hollywood Foreign Press at our offices in West Hollywood, when we had an Italian president, and they struggled to carry the heavy refrigerated gelato cart up the stairs. They make their gelato in-house. [Gino Angelini](#) is from the town of San Clemente in Emilia Romagna.

I was intrigued by [Capri Gelato](#) at 4222 Lincoln Blvd in Marina del Rey, because they had provided the gelato for the Amazon party at the 2019 and 2020 Golden Globes. So I went to speak with the founder, Robert, who was extremely passionate while describing in great detail his original recipes crafted with a scientific approach. He took classes from Maria Coassin, who opened [Gelatiamo](#) in Seattle in 1996. He's an American from Southern California, but with his wife Mary, an expert in coffee, they are lovers of Italy, and earlier this year they attended the international food fair [SIGEP](#) in Rimini, Emilia-Romagna.



Robert © Elisa Leonelli

Like Simone, Robert tells me that the most expensive flavor is pistacchio (spelled with two Cs in Italian and pronounced with a hard K sound, as indicated by the H after the C), because the best paste, the consistency of a nut butter, has to be imported from Sicily. He also imports hazelnut paste from the Italian region of Piedmont to make his “nocciola” flavor.

He does not make gelato with non-dairy milk to cater to vegans, but points out, as Simone does, that [sorbetto](#) (sherbet) is water based, with the addition of local seasonal fruits. Their custard flavors, such as Tiramisu, include eggs.



Affogato © Elisa Leonelli

I ask this expert to explain what is “affogato,” a delicious treat that most Americans are unfamiliar with. Robert replies simply: “It’s a cup of gelato drowned in espresso.” Italian restaurants such as [Pasta Sisters](#) in Culver City have it on their menu. At Capri, they serve it in four variations named after Italian regions, like Sicilian and Venetian. They also offer coffee and tea drinks, conceived by Mary, and named after the car brands Ferrari, Maserati and Lamborghini. That pleased me because all three car factories are located around my hometown of Modena. Read article “[Enzo Ferrari and Me.](#)”



Pistacchio © Elisa Leonelli

My personal gelato favorites are pistacchio and cappuccino, that I buy at Sprouts, and I drown in liqueurs: Pistacchio Cream (recently discovered at [Eataly](#)) and Irish Cream. California eateries are not allowed to serve alcohol without a special license, in Italian restaurants it's common to savor limoncello gelato drowned in vodka.

I do miss the type of gelato called [semifreddo](#), which is regularly offered in Italy at every gelateria. It has the consistency of whipped cream and flavors such as coffee and [zabaglione](#). Unfortunately, I was never able to find this delicious treat in the US.

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