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TRADITION WITH A TWIST

A new restaurant in Positano features recipes from the past with a touch of modern flair.

Text by
Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli

MEMORIES

When my friends Luigi and Francesca Collina sent me an invitation to the opening of Ohimà in the heart of Positano, I didn't know what to expect. With a name like Ohimà, which means "Hey, Mom" in Neapolitan dialect, I marked my calendar with curious anticipation.

Let me share the story of how this brother and sister team grew up in the hospitality and restaurant scene under the tutelage of their parents, Signor Giuseppe Collina and Signora Concetta De Gennaro. They recently hosted the grand opening of their new restaurant, based on recipes from the past.

Some 40 years ago, Signor Giuseppe, along with his brothers, opened Bar Mulino Verde. The landmark bar served caffè, cappuccino, Prosecco, wine, rustico, meaning salty snacks like rice balls, pizza, pannini and calzones, along with traditional desserts like sfogliatella, crostata, cannoli and torte Caprese. They even sold newspapers.

It was located in Piazza Mulino and named after the town's original mulino, meaning wheat grinder. (Hundreds of years ago, a public wheat grinder and wood-fired oven were located in Piazza Mulino. In times past, each village or town had its own public baking oven and families would drop off their dough in the morning, then pick up their bread later in the afternoon once it was baked.)

After many years of hard work and success, the brothers, who dedicated their lives to pastry making, divided the business amongst their children. Today, Luigi and Francesca head Collina Positano Bakery, the former Bar Mulino Verde. Their latest venture, Ohimà, is located at Via Cristoforo Colombo, 17, next door to their bakery.

On opening night, and with camera and note pad in hand, I am one of the first guests to arrive. I cannot wait to sample the menu created by executive chef Emanuele Mosca, a young emerging chef of Neapolitan origin.

"Benvenuti!" Tall and tanned, Francesca welcomes me in. A waiter arrives carrying chilled Prosecco, while outside guests are starting to file in. The opening celebration has begun.

Signora Concetta, like all good Italian mammas, also welcomes me in and encourages me to try everything.





Top left: Luigi, Signora Concetta and Francesca Collina.
Above: Francesca Collina at the restaurant.

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MEMORIES

Tradition blends with a touch of modernity. Italian waiters in long white bistro aprons serve samples of antipasto: savory fried cannoli shells stuffed with whipped, creamed local white fish and homemade mayonnaise scented with citrus; octopus slow-stewed in a fresh tomato sauce; tartare of beef garnished with dried figs and speck, and a cool summer salad of escarole, steamed fresh tuna, black olives, capers and a gazpacho of fresh tomato.

Primi follow with delectable cream of pumpkin with local pink shrimp; Gragnano pasta with ragù and local squid, and handmade pasta rolled and stuffed with ricotta cheese served in a traditional slow-cooked red tomato sauce.

Main courses tempt with zuppa di mare napoletano—mussels, clams, sea clams and octopus prepared with hot red pepper oil served with toast points; local rombo fish baked in the oven and served with white farmer's beans and crisp spicy red peppers, and beef roasted on an open fire served with a cinnamon-scented Béarnaise sauce, asparagus and black truffles.

The restaurant is brimming with guests and the food and drink are flowing. Francesca and her mom continue to greet guests, while Luigi makes sure everyone's wine glass is full. Signor Guiseppe greets friends old and new.

"Ohimà brasserie's menu is based on local organic fruit and vegetable products, fresh fish and meat selected from the local farms," says Luigi. "We've researched, visited and selected purveyors for their high-quality products. To enhance the flavors of Ohimà's cuisine, biodynamic organic wines and craft beers have been selected for each course," he adds.

"We have a close-knit group of purveyors including artisan cheese makers from Salerno, a very special organic olive oil and wine from San Salvatore in Paestum, to name a few," he says.

"Ohimà's philosophy comes from the passion that we experience for our culinary art," says Francesca. "We have taken careful consideration on the dinner experience with good food and a pleasant atmosphere. We've also carefully selected beautiful ceramic plates from our region. It's not just about cooking, assembling and combining organic ingredients, but also about serving the culinary art. Then, there is the respect we want to pay for the carefully selected ingredients from the best local producers, because at Ohimà, it is an important

fundamental value that the products and ingredients are organic," she says.

The goal, she adds, is to ensure that diners have a good experience in a relaxed atmosphere.

"The cuisine is traditional Mediterranean served in a slow and relaxing way, and it's essential not only to fully enjoy, but also to rediscover the pleasure of dining together," she adds.

"Ohimà means mom in Neapolitan dialect?" I ask.

"It actually means, 'Hey, Mom.' My brother and I chose this name with the intention of paying tribute to our mother who worked in this exact space, which was her former fashion boutique. It's a reminder to us every day to do better. We want to offer our guests an experience that is characterized by care and attention—the way a mother dedicates herself to preparing a meal for her children," Francesca says.

In the kitchen is executive chef Emanuele Mosca. He's busy cooking, plating and commanding. We exchange brief greetings while he continues cooking and plating.

He's known to use fresh raw materials, especially from the Campania region. One of his most popular creations is the

pezzogna cannolo—a twist on the Sicilian sweet cannoli. His version consists of thin sheets of savory bread dough that have been flash-fried, then stuffed with creamed white fish. They're not only a work of art, they're incredibly delicious.

Other desserts include sfogliatella Santa Rosa—cream-filled flaky pastry garnished with a cherry; an open-faced mini lemon pie, and a dark chocolate mousse with salted caramel, all wonderful ways to end a meal.

Ohimà consists of two levels with a terrace and bar where you can dine, sip and swirl wine while watching the world go by. An open Mediterranean tile kitchen lets you watch Chef Emanuele work his magic. Cool clean tables in the dining room and a simplistic décor are inviting. All of the olive oils, wine, beer and condiments on display are for sale.

Signora Concetta sits outside on the terrace welcoming in guests. If you pass by, just say "Ohimà!"

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Caponata

This version of the popular recipe is made without eggplant. Spread it on crispy bread or taralli, a traditional Italian snack which is similar in texture to a pretzel or breadstick.

- 1 curly endive
- 1 spring onion, thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup black olives
- 1 tablespoon capers
- 6 ounces tuna in olive oil
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes
- 2 tablespoons anchovy extract
- 4 slices double-baked whole wheat bread or taralli
- 4 basil leaves

Wash and chop the curly endive, put in a bowl. Add the onion, olives, capers, tuna and cherry tomatoes. Drizzle with anchovy extract and serve on the double-baked bread or taralli. Garnish with basil leaves.

Makes 4 servings.

Hunter-Style Chicken

- 3 pounds chicken, bone-in, cut into pieces
- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Rosemary, to taste
- 1/2 cup red wine
- 15 cherry tomatoes, quartered
- Chile pepper, if desired
- 1 cup hot water
- Fresh parsley or basil, to garnish

In a large pan, heat the olive oil and sauté the pieces of chicken and brown on both sides.

Add onion, carrots, celery and garlic and sauté together for a moment. Add salt, pepper and rosemary, to taste. Add red wine and once it has evaporated, add cherry tomatoes and chile pepper. Add hot water, a ladle at a time, stirring as you go.

Reduce heat to lowest setting and simmer about 1 hour, stirring occasionally. (Add additional water if needed, so it doesn't dry out.)

Serve hot with fresh parsley or basil for garnish, if desired.

Makes 6 servings.

Pasta with Squid

This recipe calls for flying squid, but you can use regular squid, too.

- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- 2/3 pound totani, flying squid, cleaned and cut into strips
- 1/2 cup white wine
- 1 cup San Marzano cherry tomatoes
- 4/5 pound spaghetti
- 1 bunch parsley, finely chopped
- Salt and pepper, to taste

In a large pan, heat olive oil with garlic. Add totani and sauté for about a minute on medium heat, stirring constantly to avoid sticking. Add white wine and let cook until evaporated. Add the tomatoes to the pan. Lower heat and cook covered for 1 1/2 hours.

Meanwhile, cook the spaghetti in boiling salted water until al dente. Drain pasta, saving some of the pasta water. Add the spaghetti to the pan with the totani along with a little pasta water. Cook a few seconds to allow the flavors to join together.

Just before serving, add parsley and stir well. Serve immediately. Season with salt and pepper, to taste.

Makes 2 servings.



**Luigi and
Francesca Collina**

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