

# An Italian Feast at Marcellino Ristorante

Written by David M. Brown

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**In celebration of the third-annual Italian Festival, Italian Association of Arizona co-founder, Chef Marcellino Verzino, pairs a festive feast at his beloved Scottsdale restaurant.**

This year, Sima and Chef Marcellino Verzino are celebrating 13 years of Marcellino Ristorante, five-plus of those in Old Town Scottsdale at Southbridge. Their original location opened in Central Phoenix in 2003. Chef Marcellino was born on the family farm in the Campania region of Italy and was raised in the small town of Reino, about 30 kilometers from Benevento. He was successfully running his bar/bistro in the historic center of Rome when the couple first met.

Sima was born on Manhattan's Upper East Side to parents with roots in Eastern Europe, Rome and Venice. Continuing her career as a vocalist, she moved to Rome in the mid-80's where she was signed by an international record label and performed throughout Italy and Europe.

Two years later, the couple moved to New York City, where he was involved with restaurants such as the award-winning Amarone. In 2003, they relocated to the Valley, where they have been feeding grateful guests since.

Let's dine and wine with this 18-year-married couple at Chef's prestigious "island" with its wood-burning oven as they present a signature wine dinner in collaboration with Fontanavecchia Vineyard. Its owner, Libero Rillo, is a childhood friend of Marcellino. "We knew his father and bought their wines for our home in Italy as far back as I can remember," Sima says.

"Family members continue to bring forth their prestigious wines for generations. We are proud to present Fontanavecchia wines in our dining establishment and educate our clients to the miracle of wines," Chef says.

He begins our dinner with an aperitif wine:

- **Aperitivo — Falanghina Sparkling, Nudo Eroico:** "The soft sparkling bubbles open the palate and stimulates the appetite," Chef says. "It pairs nicely with tomato bruschetta or Parmigiano, cured olives and salami. On the nose: perfume of tropical fruit and citrus. On the palate, it is creamy with a nice acidity ending with notes of almonds."
- **Antipasto — Tartare di Salmone** (salmon tartar), paired with **The Falanghina del Taburno DOC:** "Light, straw-yellow in color, displays floral notes on the nose followed by aromas of apple, pear and dried fruits. The palate shows to be soft, offering good structure and acidity. The fresh but acidic character of this wine pairing cuts through the oily textures of 'pesce crudo' (raw fish), while creating a silky feel on the tongue and the perfect pairing on the palate."
- **Antipasto** (may be served in larger portions as an entrée) — **Polenta con Funghi Misti Al Profumo di Tartufo** (creamy polenta with mixed foraged mushrooms and shaved truffles) is paired with **Aglianico del Taburno DOC:** "Sweet red fruit flavors with smooth, fine tannins gives this graceful wine a seamless mouth feel. With its rich, bold flavors, it presents the perfect pairing with the heartiness of mushroom and earthy truffles."
- **Primo — Cavatelli Al Pomodoro e Salsiccia** (hand-crafted pasta with ragù of tomato and sausage), paired with **Vigna Cataratte, Aglianico del Taburno DOC:** "Black cherries, tobacco and vanilla with ripe tannins and a full body. This wine is more structured, rendering a blending of the hearty, bold and full flavors of this dish. The ripe tannins found create perfect balance with the sausage."
- **Secondo — Piccione con Pure di Ceci** (pigeon with chickpea purée), paired with **Grave Mora DOC:** "Chocolate-covered cherry fruit with tasty plum notes and aromas of myrtle and iris. We are building here in structure with a bigger presence of oak. Pigeon, with its strong and sometimes gamier taste, needs a bolder wine of this character. We now have a perfect finish in the mouth."
- **Secondo — Agnello a Rosmarino** (baby lamb chops with rosemary fumé), paired with **Orazio DOC:** "This is one of my favorite full-bodied wines. The nose is intense, showing notes of plum, curry and leather. On the palate, it is dense and pleasantly tannic, warm but balanced with a gentle acidity. A long finish, with layers of spices, leads you to the second glass easily. Aged in French oak for 12 months." He continues: "They are now blending the Aglianico grape with a touch of cabernet sauvignon. Orazio shows bigger notes of fruit but has a softer entrance on the palate, bringing the stronger flavors of the lamb together in a perfect pairing."

Chef Marcellino is also one of the founders of the Italian Association of Arizona. This year, the organization presents its third-annual Italian Festival on Saturday, March 19, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., and Sunday, March 20, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., just outside their restaurant between the Soleri Bridge and the Stetson Drive Canal.

The event features live opera performances, international Brazilian/Italian recording artist Jim Porto, traditional dancers, "A'Ziarella" from Chef's hometown of Reino, and many more exciting musical performances. Attendees will also enjoy food from many Italian restaurants, including Marcellino Ristorante, a wine garden and family activities.

**To Learn More**

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Marcellino Ristorante [marcellinoristorante.com](http://marcellinoristorante.com).