

Featured Chef: Marcellino Verzino

Written by Interview by Melissa Larsen

Featured Chef Marcellino Verzino of Marcellino Ristorante.



How did you get your start in the restaurant business?

My interest in cooking began at the age of 11, after my blessed mother, Carmela, passed. My eldest sister, Anna, took over our family's mealtimes and unfortunately wasn't too terrific. So, with the vegetables from our garden, cheese from our goats and cows together with meat and chicken, I began what would eventually become my life's passion. At 22 years of age, after tutelage with one of Rome's premier chefs, Paolo Preo, an opportunity to chef came about at a summer seaside resort in Vasto, Abruzzo. I thought it would be the perfect, lazy summer of swimming and bumming around. From an initial handful of lunches and dinners I was to prepare for those three months, it very suddenly morphed into 2,000 hungry vacationers demanding dishes I had never cooked before. After a few telephone calls to Rome to Chef Preo asking minimal but much-needed advice, I was transformed into the most sought-after chef in the area. I took Chef Preo's phone call advice and began to create dishes astonishing even myself. I guess they liked my cuisine! It was all uphill from that time on.

What is your favorite Valley restaurant, besides your own?

My wife, Sima, and I dined at FnB shortly before opening our Stetson Dr. location and fell in love with their fresh and perfectly executed cuisine.

What is your favorite dish at your restaurant?

Truthfully, I don't have a favorite dish of my cuisine. Each creation has a particular life of its own due to ingredients and marriage of flavors.

What is the most memorable meal you've ever had?

The most memorable meals in my lifetime have been when sharing company with exquisite friends. It is the great joy of beautiful souls that makes the meal.

If you could have anyone visit your restaurant, who would it be?

My one wish since we have been in America (first in New York City, partnering for over 5 years in two great Italian restaurants) and here in Phoenix for seven years is to have my father, Don Giovanni Verzino, to visit with us.

Name three ingredients that you have at home at all times.

I would say the three ingredients we have at our home at all times (as basics) is pure virgin Italian olive oil, chunky sea salt I harvest myself when with my wife in the Mediterranean every summer and fresh herbs, all grown at our home here in Phoenix.

What is your favorite bottle of wine or cocktail?

Ah, the million dollar question: My favorite wine? You have most definitely hit one of my strongest passions! To simplify things, however, I shall say: When I dine on fish, tuna or beef carpaccio or pasta with seafood, a charming white, Falanghina, is my choice. It is grown in the Campania region of Italy, my birthplace. It is very rounded with a fruit forward with mild minerals and is supremely buttery. My (almost) everyday red is Aglianico, also from my region. It is the light, smooth Barolo of southern Italy.

What do you like to do in your free time?

In my free time (which is quite limited), I enjoy my home with my wife, Sima, and two pups, Garibaldi and Shakespeare. We have an enormous garden we cultivated behind our home which backs up onto a scenic preserve in Moon Valley where we tend all the herbs and vegetables used at Marcellino Ristorante. Swimming and tennis are my physical passions and, of course, making love with my wife. You know, I am Italian.

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