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Osso Buco



Chef Marcellino Verzino with his wife Sima



Lamb Chops



Tortelloni with Seasonal Black Truffles

Highline Living MARCELLINO RISTORANTE: DRIVEN BY EXCELLENCE

by David M. Brown

Cuisine and cars: Chef Marcellino Verzino is passionate at the skillet and at the wheel.

With Sima, his wife of 20 years, chef is celebrating 13 years at Marcellino Ristorante, seven at Southbridge in Old Town Scottsdale. There he was one of the first sponsors of the annual Scottsdale Grand Prix, won by the Marcellino Ristorante team in the inaugural year of 2015.

Chef was born on the family farm in the Campania region of Italy and was raised in the nearby town of Reino, about 30 kilometers from Benevento. He and Sima moved from Rome to the U.S. in 1996, opening restaurants in her home town, New York City, such as the award-winning Amaran. The couple relocated to Phoenix in 2003, when they opened the original Marcellino Ristorante.

"I was driving our tractor at 7 years old, and the first time I drove a car on the farm I was 10," recalls chef, a regular attendee of Arizona Auto Week events. "We'd race anything on wheels. In the Italian culture, the male's love affair with

fast cars is almost part of our DNA."

At Marcellino Ristorante, he combines historic Italian recipes with his insights and the finest and freshest ingredients for his signature dishes. "Sharing his love of his art is his fuel," says Sima, who shares his love for cars.

Among guests' favorites are the Cacio e Pepe: Cacio cheese and crushed black pepper-infused linguine, sautéed with hearty tomato sauce of caramelized red onion and pancetta; Filet Mignon con Tartufo: a thick, aged filet grilled to perfection, surrounded by a Barolo reduction and lightly drizzled with white truffle oil; his famous plump and soft Gnocchi: pillows of soft, potato/pasta orbs and rich tomato; Fegato all'Uva: calves liver sautéed with grapes in a cognac flambé; and the Osso Buco, with saffron risotto.

"The Osso Buco is one dish that everyone has on their waiting list in winter! It takes 48 hours to cook and prepare before serving," chef says. "The meat is very slowly braised in its own juices and the vegetable medley, then reposes a

full 24 hours. Only then has it absorbed all the flavors and is so soft it almost falls off the shank."

Finish off with chef's handcrafted Flourless Chocolate Cake with a hint of espresso to satisfy the most finicky chocolate lover.

Chef's favorite? "Just like when someone asks you which is your favorite child, you could never answer that question," he says. Children have his and her precious gifts that make them special. That is the way I personally feel about my cuisine. I have created each one to represent a special part of my past."

As in Italy, so at Marcellino Ristorante: The recipes are generated based on what is in season, and everything is house prepared: meat, fish, fruit, vegetables to herbs. "All of my pasta is handcrafted every day, as are my stocks, reduction sauces, meats and fresh fish preparations," chef says.

You can enjoy Marcellino Ristorante in a number of ways. Reservations are requested even for the main dining room, which breaks out to two softly lit patios for al fresco dining.

Inspired by the love of family and friends, the Private Dining Room seats up 14 guests with large, comfortable chairs. "One wall has been incorporated with pocket doors, giving

guests views into the main restaurant or the ability to close them to ensure complete privacy if required," says Sima, a professional singer who entertains every Thursday night at the restaurant.

To watch chef work at his wood-fired oven, the Chef's Island is a U-shaped space, accommodating 16, creating four-six-course tasting dinners paired with fine Italian wines. A minimum of 10 can reserve this, and if the space is open, groups of four or more may also enjoy the experience with other diners.

If someone has just purchased his or her dream car at one of the auctions during Arizona Auto Week, chef and Sima suggest celebrating at the Chef's Cove — a private, velvet-draped table for two to enjoy personal service and a multi-course dinner he designs.

During Valentine's Week at Marcellino Ristorante, this becomes the Love Cove — which also reflects chef's commitment to his craft and his clients: "It is my honor," he says, "to have our guests embrace and love who I am and what I create for them."

Marcellino Ristorante, www.marcellinoristorante.com, 480.990.9500