

Business

Orinda's Taverna Pellegrini: A Place to Come Back To

By A.K. Carroll



Petrole sole with lemon caper sauce



Pasta Carbonara



Squash ravioli with butter sage sauce



Scaloppini all Piccata (pork scaloppini with lemon caper sauce)



Spinach cheese ravioli in pesto sauce

Dario Hadjian, owner of Orinda's Taverna Pellegrini that opened for business in mid-September, says he likes to eat and he loves to cook. The statement won't surprise anyone who has smelled the gorgonzola cream sauce that coddles his homemade gnocchi or tasted a steaming slice of his fire-roasted pizza. "My pizza is amazing," Hadjian attests. "As thin as it can be and as light as it can be."

Persian by birth and Italian by heart, Hadjian pronounces "prosciutto" and "mozzarella" as they were meant to be spoken: with elongated vowels and short staccato consonants.

Hadjian fell in love with Rome as a young man, wandering his way through the city's cobblestone streets and among its ancient monuments. During the time that he attended Rome's American University, he got "a new batch of friends" every semester. "Romans are easy-going," said Hadjian, who grew accustomed to showing around foreigners, sharing with them the things he enjoyed most.

Hadjian's love of cooking, eating, and Roman cuisine are the passions that he brought to Piazza Pellegrini, the Italian restaurant he opened in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood over 10 years ago. Prior to getting his own place, Hadjian worked in California's food industry for over a decade, helping to open spots like Café Tiramisu and Caffè Delle Stelle.

"It gave me a good chance to learn a lot about the business," said Hadjian, who also started his own import and export company bottling olive oils and balsamic vinegars.

"Like every person in the

restaurant business, you're stupid enough to want your own place until you have it," Hadjian joked. "[But] if you like people and being with people, you get hooked on this kind of environment, even if it's really hard."

Hadjian, it would seem, is just that kind of person, hence the opening of Taverna Pellegrini, an East Bay outpost of his original establishment. "I'd been looking to expand and having lived in Walnut Creek and Lafayette prior to opening in San Francisco, I wanted to open a place here. I know a lot of people and the environment here in Orinda is really nice."

Hadjian likes the taverna's proximity to BART and the freeway, one that allows him to share staff with his North Beach location. "These guys are my family," he says of his employees. "I take care of them they take care of me."

On the menu at Taverna Pellegrini, you'll see many of the same Roman Italian specialties, from the classic bruschetta made with melted fontina cheese and sautéed mushrooms to mista and arugula salads, an array of wood-fired pizzas and paninis, and no shortage of primis and secondis. The restaurant has a full bar and a generous wine list.

With seating for up to 100 guests, the Tuscan-inspired space is brightly painted and divided into a partially-enclosed front dining room with window seats, a central bar with plenty of stools and two television screens, and a back section of two- and four-top tables. "I liked the space," said Hadjian, who hopes to expand into catering and private events and now has the room to do so. The

taverna is currently open seven days a week for dinner only, with plans for brunch and lunch options in the near future.

Specialties of the house include spinach, meat, crab, squash, and lobster raviolis (each of which is made daily by hand and uniquely colored); wood-fired pizzas, and saltimbocca alla piemontese – a butterflied chicken breast filled with prosciutto and mozzarella and served in a cream sage sauce with steamed vegetables and herbed potatoes. Though it's a calorie-dense dish, the saltimbocca is surprisingly light, the sauce thin and simple, rich in flavor, but not overly heavy. Hadjian's pizza is no pie, but it is flavorful, made with oven-cooked tomato sauce and a simple selection of authentic ingredients, many of which are sourced directly from Italy.

"I work on all the recipes myself," said Hadjian. "I have an extensive knowledge of Italian food and try to keep it as authentic as possible, as fresh as possible, and as simple as possible. That's really

Italian food. We make it really rustic and really simple, but fresh."

Hadjian hopes that his Orinda space will offer both a relaxed atmosphere and a bit of a sports bar, something for families, couples, students and seniors. "That's why I call it a tavern. It's a casual setting, but we make everything from scratch, so it's fine food, good quality food, but very homey and rustic."

Ultimately what Hadjian wants to offer Lamorindans is an eatery they can brag about and one that they return to. "What we hope for is that you as a resident are proud of your local place," said Hadjian, who anticipates loyal return-customers to supplement curious new visitors. "That's what keeps us going. That's the kind of reward that you want. The same faces coming back."

Taverna Pellegrini
65 Moraga Way, Orinda

Lamorinda Weekly business articles are intended to inform the community about local business activities, not to endorse a particular company, product or service.



Photos A.K. Carroll

business briefs

If you have a business brief to share, please contact **Sophie Braccini** at sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

Walgreens Opens in Lafayette
3614 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette. (925) 385-2385



Walgreens grand opening Photo Sophie Braccini

The new Walgreens pharmacy and convenience store opened Oct. 9 on Mt. Diablo Boulevard, in the former Citibank and Mountain Mike's Pizza building across from Diablo Foods. Jay Lifson, the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce executive director, welcomed Cindy Ma, the district manager for Walgreens, at the opening. The store is open every day from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., the pharmacy is open from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. during the week and 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. on weekends.

Shop Orinda Campaign: Win a \$100 Gift Certificate



The Orinda Chamber of Commerce has put together a fun way to entice people to visit businesses on both sides of Orinda, with the Shop Orinda Campaign. "Just go to the 10 participating businesses and have them stamp your card," explains Chamber of Commerce president Sylvia Jorgensen. There is no obligation to purchase anything as you visit Echo Grove, McDonnell Nursery, Hello Tiara, Morrison's, Parker Thatch, Hilton House, Orinda Cleaners, Orinda Designer Shoes, Republic of Cake and Orinda Motor. "You just have to visit," adds Jorgensen. Each of the 10 participat-

ing businesses have contributed \$100, and 10 winning \$100 gift cards will be drawn from the completed cards collected. "This is just a way to get people to know the Orinda businesses better," adds Jorgensen. The completed cards must be dropped at the Chamber of Commerce office, 26 Orinda Way, by Nov. 28.

Sustainability and Green Building Award Winners

Sustainable Contra Costa hosted its 7th annual Sustainability & Green Building Awards gala Sept. 23 at the Concord Hilton. Moraga-based nonprofit, 4CL, which stands for Contra Costa County Climate Leaders, took home an award for its work with policymakers to find solutions to local, environmental issues. Environmental advocate and teacher Sheila Hill received an award for her ongoing work in the Sustainable Schools program, the Wellness City Challenge, Generation Green, and Parents for a Safer Environment. Three outstanding Green Building projects were recognized this year: Woodbury, Lafayette's newest eco-friendly residential complex, the Milovic residence in Lafayette, and Orinda's Old Yellow House.

Moraga Employee of the Month for September

Ariela Araquistain, a popular waitress and cashier at The Golden Palace restaurant, has been named the Moraga Employee of the Month for September.



From left: Roger Gregory, Jay Lie, Ariela Araquistain and Kevin Rneau Photo provided

She often stays late after her shift to assist in other restaurant duties. The Moraga Rotary and Chamber of Commerce awarded Araquistain gift cards to Safeway and the Home Goods store in Moraga at an Oct. 6 Moraga Rotary meeting.

John Gillham Starts Fitness Coaching Practice
3385 Mt Diablo Blvd., Lafayette, john@marathonjohn.com
www.marathonjohn.com

"I specialize in fostering freedom through FUNCTIONAL fitness," says John Gillham, a former ultra-marathon runner. "I coach and guide my clients to find their strength and do things with their bodies they only dreamed of before." Most of Gillham's clients are individuals who let their health become a lower priority than their job or children. He guides them back to where they once were and beyond through personal strength training. Gillham is a NASM certified personal trainer, CHEK Exercise Coach as well as an Underground Strength Coach. He guides clients with diet and lifestyle and trains in a variety of modalities ranging from kettlebells to powerlifting and gymnastics. Gillham operates JG Fitness within BeFit Exercise studio, offering a free training session for new clients.



John Gillham Photo provided

News from the Three Chambers of Commerce

Lafayette
Lafayette Reservoir Run at 8 a.m. Sunday, Oct. 25. The run is a family event, with optional costumes. To register, visit lafayettechamber.org.

October Mixer at Bradley School of Music from 5:30 to 7 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 28 at 1042 Brown Avenue.

Moraga
Business meeting open to members and interested parties at 8 a.m. Friday, Oct. 30 at in the Hacienda de las Flores Fireside Room, 2100 Donald Drive. Speaker Stephanie Shaterian, owner of fLO Content Marketing, will discuss how to create marketing videos.

Orinda
Fall into Oktoberfest Mixer at Landhome Financial from 5:30 to 7 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 22 at 2 Theater Square, #146, Orinda. Complementary brews and nibbles will be served.

Celebrating an Anniversary?
If your business is celebrating a significant anniversary (5, 10, 20 years or more ...) send us a photo of your business, the owner(s) or the staff with specific information about your business and what you're celebrating, and we'll include it in an upcoming issue.



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